

BOOK OF TOMORROW

JULY 2001



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BOOK OF TOMORROW

The EDPT's Earthdawn Fanzine

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Deadline for issue four:

August 30, 2001

Coming in Issue 3:

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- **Accents of Barsaive**
Add flavor to your in-character dialog with this game aid
- **Blood Duels**
This optional rule allows players to engage in dramatic duels
- **The Town of Farram**
This setting is more than it seems on the surface
- **Lest ye...**
A tale of revenge—and reflection
- **Veins of Throat** (see preview, p. 40)
An exploitable weakness revealed



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The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of their respective authors and are not necessarily those of the EDPT. The **Book of Tomorrow** shall be kept scrupulously and faithfully open to expression of all viewpoints of interest and concern to the Earthdawn community and interpretive comment shall be encouraged.

CORRECTION

Inge Vermeylen's name was misspelled on page 2 of our last issue. The EDPT regrets the error and has made a corrected version available.

NOTICE

Some of the illustrations in this issue come from copyright-free collections.

Your choice of two

There is a well known joke in the publishing industry, one that I think is particularly apt at the publication (several months behind schedule) of our second issue:

You can have it **CHEAP**

You can have it **GOOD**

You can have it **FAST**

(Pick any combination of two)

The joke here, of course, is that it is not possible to publish a product that is all of those three things at once. Inexpensive publications that are published in a hurry are rarely good; high quality publications that are published in a hurry are never inexpensive; and high quality, inexpensive publications are not very fast.

As a free publication, one of our variables is already fixed—"cheap" has already been selected. We at the Earthdawn Publishing Trust would like to think that the **Book of Tomorrow** is also good, which means that it may not always be fast.

Does this mean that the **Book of Tomorrow** will become an annual publication? We strongly doubt it. Our production process is still being fine tuned and new people are being trained to handle different aspects of the job. With the production of Issue 2, our staff welcomed two new faces: Shane Hyde, who will be our new production manager, and Eleanor Fischer, who will be our second Associate Editor. Chris Zarnosky has also volunteered to join our editorial staff, starting with Issue 4. So, as you might expect, our production schedule will become more manageable as we distribute the workload among the members of our growing production staff.

There will no doubt be some who will say that our release of Issue 2 is too little, too late. Indeed, much of the content in this issue has been online for some time. What we would like these people to remember, however, is that we are trying to do more than simply produce a fanzine. We are attempting to build a system that will allow fans to take an active role the game's development in ways never before possible—and, of course, we are trying to do it in our spare time. We do hope that fans will be patient if we fall behind schedule (and not simply assume that EDPT has quietly died). Once we get our production process standardized, it won't happen often.

We do recognize, however, that people do not want to wait for months before the material they contribute is published (and that people need some sign that their contributions will see the light of day if they are going to continue to contribute). With these things in mind, we have been streamlining our editorial process with an eye on decreasing the turnaround time on contributions.

It is for these reasons (and also to give our production staff more time to synchronize our systems) that we have decided to extend the deadline for submissions for our fourth issue. The new deadline is **August 30, 2001**.

Contribute and win—Simon did it, you can too!

Although it has taken us a while to announce the results, our first contest was very successful. So successful, in fact, that we decided to divide the entries and produce not one but *two* issues! Given such great results, we have decided to award a copy of the most recently released Earthdawn product to the individual or group that contributes the best article (as determined by our editors) for *each issue*. Given that each issue is made up of work from a handful of authors (usually between five and seven), your chances of winning a prize are pretty good.

EDPT would like to extend its congratulations to Simon Withers, who won a copy of **Barsaive at War** for his contribution to this issue. Check out his mini-adventure, **Turnabout is Fair Play**, on page 6.

4 | LEGAL INFORMATION (and Earthdawn Abbreviations)

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Adopted on October 29, 1999

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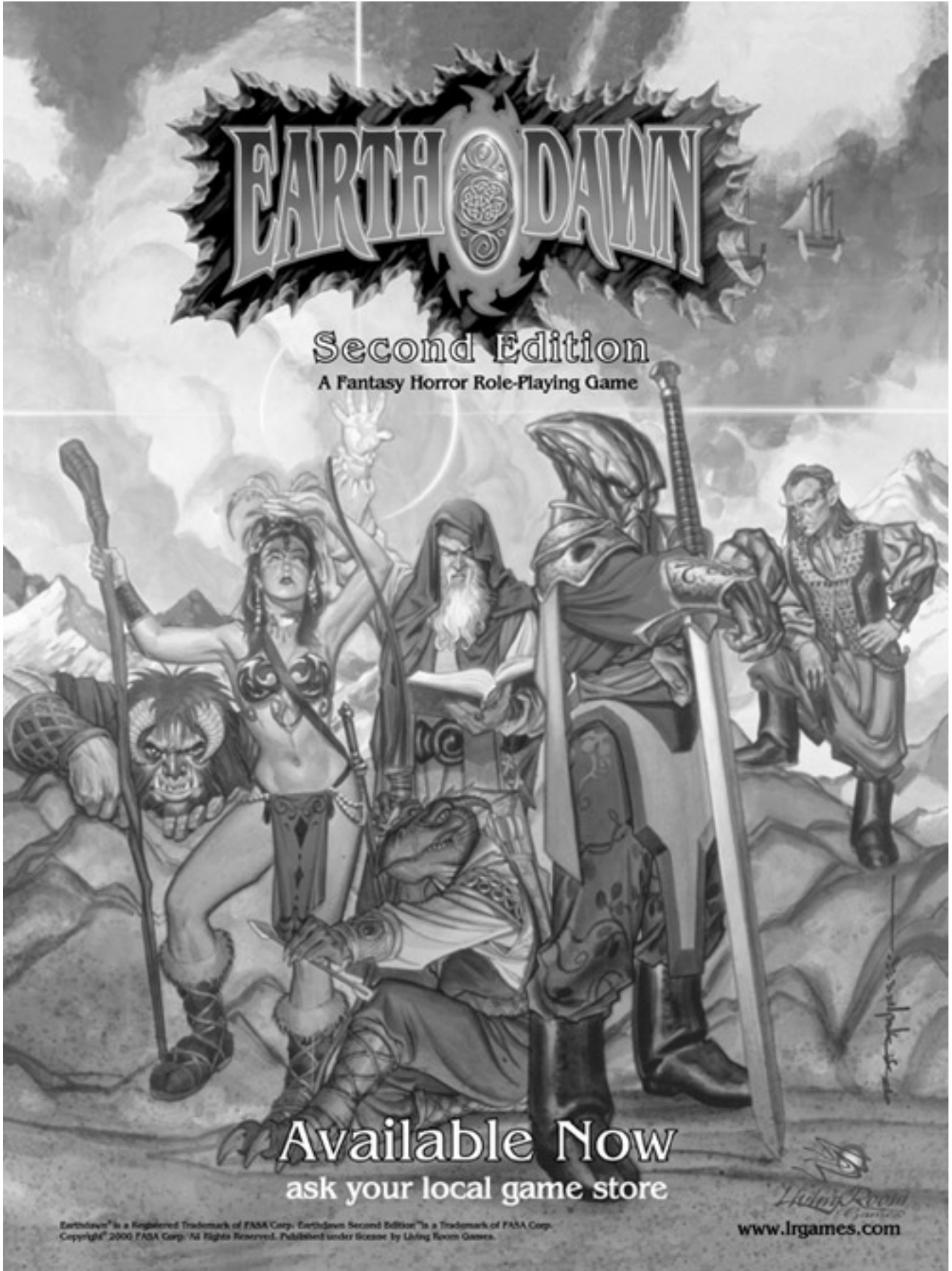
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EARTHDAWN ABBREVIATED

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

ED	Earthdawn
EDC	Earthdawn Companion
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
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



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TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

His days here are numbered, my friend. He has made mistakes, and we know it. The only questions left are where does he place his allegiance now, and how deep does his betrayal run?

—Telba Shiresa

Turnabout is Fair Play takes place in a large town or a city somewhere in Barsaive. The characters play the role of detectives uncovering a plot far larger than the initial hire indicates. The adventure is well suited for groups of three to five characters of either First or Second Circle. Social abilities, while helpful, are not necessary. Groups including an adept with the Tracking talent will have an easier time with this adventure than adepts without tracking, but again, the talent is not required.

Turnabout is Fair Play starts with a linear approach, but as the plot advances, the range of choices available to the players expands. The most probable outcomes have been accounted for, but the gamemaster should be able to improvise. Because of this, **Turnabout is Fair Play** may not be suitable for an inexperienced gamemaster.

As written, **Turnabout is Fair Play** pits the players against agents of Thera. However, it is not important to the plot of the adventure that the antagonists are Therans. All that matters is that they represent some power for which the players have no love.

THE PLOT

Kartarsis is a t'skrang with a problem. Thera Spymistress Telba Shiresa has learned that he has betrayed her by falsifying portions of the reports that he has been sending her. Concerned that Kartarsis may be working with another agency, or that the rot that he represents may run deeper than just him, Shiresa has decided to take apart Kartarsis' life in order to see where he runs.

In addition to being one of the primary spice sellers in town, Kartarsis acts as a middleman for trade in exotic spices across Barsaive. The first blow that Shiresa strikes against Kartarsis is to have her henchman, Naskatal, destroy Kartarsis' business. Naskatal breaks into Kartarsis' storeroom, and destroys all the spices he finds stored there, leaving Kartarsis with no way of making up his promised shipments. At this point Kartarsis makes his request to the adventurers.

Shiresa plans to have Kartarsis' house burned to the ground, and finally, unless she learns something to change the situation, she intends to have Kartarsis killed. Kartarsis does not know for sure that Shiresa is behind the flooding of his basement, but he suspects as much. He is, however, keenly aware that he would be in an awful lot of trouble if his Thera connections were to come to light. Not wanting to shoot himself in the foot by either confronting Shiresa directly, or by going to the authorities, he hires the adventurers to investigate. Kartarsis expects that his heroes will be so much trouble for Shiresa that she will be forced to tip her hand, revealing how much she knows, and giving Kartarsis the opportunity to escape her trap. If possible, he would like to do all of this while preventing a public discovery of his own wrongdoing.

The Action

Much of action in this adventure takes place in bars, taverns and restaurants. The three chief locations are described in the pages that follow.

This intriguing mini-adventure pits the players against a Thera spy and her sadistic double-agent. Will your players be able to turn the tables before they themselves fall victim to foul play?

by Simon Withers

The Gilded T'skrang Inn

The Gilded T'skrang Inn is a classy restaurant in a classy part of town. It is where the adventurers will interact with Kartarsis most often. The staff all dress in somber colors and tend to hover over their patrons, especially ones as underdressed as most adventuring groups tend to be. The Gilded T'skrang does not require formal attire. The heroes should feel underdressed, however, if they don't make an effort to make themselves presentable. The restaurant consists of a rooftop bar and patio and, Kartarsis' preference, a ground floor restaurant.

The Library

The Library is a dirty, dingy bar, frequented by the rougher members of the underworld. Bar fights occur frequently, and it is not uncommon for a few fights to spring up at once, ensuing in a full-scale brawl. Stale beer, ale and liquor make the floor of The Library a dangerous place for those with fine clothes. Plates are wooden, and cups metal to reduce the risk of having to replace them on a constant basis. The tables are scarred with blows from weapons, and the chairs all look to be in a sad state of repair.

The Willow and the Windling

The Willow and the Windling is an extraordinary outdoor restaurant. The Willow and the Windling and an adjoining hotel rest on the outskirts of town. The restaurant area resembles a hedge maze more than anything else, with passages connecting private dining squares to the entrance. There are armed guards who patrol the outside of the compound and stand watch at the front gates. Entrance is only permitted to those who have booked a reservation, who have taken out rooms at the hotel, or who have been invited by another patron of the restaurant.

INNOCENT BEGINNINGS

Good Sirs, the tragedy that has befallen me is of unbelievable consequence. My life, my livelihood, both are ruined. It is with tears in my eyes that request this boon. Help me, I beg you.

—Kartarsis

Overview

In **Innocent Beginnings**, the adventurers are approached by the t'skrang spice merchant Kartarsis, who hopes to hire them to investigate the destruction of his spice stores.

Setting the Stage

The day starts as many others days seem to—a light rainfall in the early morning, following a glorious sunrise, a large breakfast, and the anticipation of a long relaxing day. Nothing out of the ordinary, though the itch warning of adventure is starting to tingle.

Late morning, after polishing off breakfast, a young dwarf child runs into the inn and up to the inn keeper, who points her your way. "A message for you," she calls as she approaches, "Master Kartarsis, the spice seller, has need of your services. Do you need a guide?" The girl bows and holds out her hand in expectation of coin.

If the adventurers agree to the meeting, read the following:

"Follow me, it's only a few blocks." The girl runs out of the inn, and alternately running ahead, and standing in wait, takes you to 'The Gilded T'skrang Inn', a classier tavern frequented by the more prosperous t'skrang merchants. "In here—the fellow in the yellow jacket..." she tells you, pointing out a plump t'skrang dressed in yellow and orange. The t'skrang tosses her a coin, and she vanishes into the street.

The t'skrang introduces himself as Kartarsis, and describes his business to you. "As I suppose the girl has informed you, my name is Kartarsis, and I am a spice seller. Thus far in life, I have done rather well for myself. I have grown from being a simple spice seller; now I deal in the more expensive and sought-after spices, ones from the far side of the Aras Sea, and the far reaches of the Tberan Empire. These delicacies I provide to the local market as well as to merchants in other cities. Or at least, I used to."

"You see..." Kartarsis pauses, draws a deep breath and looks down at his wine glass before continuing. "My business has been destroyed. Not three days ago, I received a shipment of very, very expensive spices. Not only for myself, you understand. They were to be delivered far and wide across Barsaive. As you can expect,

receiving such a shipment has cost me dearly, requiring that I borrow a very large sum of money that I can no longer repay."

Again, Kartarsis pauses. "I have been sabotaged. Last night some vile creature crept into my storeroom and destroyed all the stock that I had received. I am ruined. I cannot meet my debts, and I cannot meet the agreements of sale that I had arranged." Kartarsis finishes his glass, and calls for another. "You are heroes, you can help me. The spices are lost, but at least knowing for sure who did this, and why, would ease my soul, if not my pocket book. Surely, I can rely on you to discover the perpetrator of the disaster that has befallen me?"

Kartarsis continues to explain that because of this disaster, he cannot really afford to pay much for this investigation. Kartarsis' final offer should be a little low in terms of the kind of payment that the heroes might expect.

Kartarsis will suggest that they meet at The Gilded T'skrang for dinner this night, and each subsequent night until the investigation is complete.

Themes and Images

This encounter should play to the adventurers' better natures. Kartarsis can't offer the heroes any payment for their services unless he somehow is reimbursed for the damages he has suffered, so he will compliment the adventurers on their previous exploits, trying to appeal to their heroic sensibilities. Use this encounter to give the players a sense that they are beginning to build a legend for themselves. Have Kartarsis express amazement at one of the group's recent exploits that it is perhaps "impossible" for anyone to know about.

Behind the Scenes

Kartarsis suspects that his contact in the Theran spy organization, Telba Shiresa, is responsible for the destruction of his spices, but he is unsure why she chose to strike at him in such a manner, nor is he completely sure that she is responsible. As outlined in the **Plot Synopsis**, Kartarsis is hoping that by having the adventurers poking their noses into this affair Shiresa will be tricked

into making a mistake and revealing her hand.

Unfortunately for Kartarsis, Shiresa is a step ahead of him, and is fully expecting him to do something (though she is not sure what). To that end, Naskatal, the culprit of the crime against Kartarsis, has been tailing the merchant, and spends the entire meeting between the heroes and Kartarsis on a tavern patio across the street from the Gilded T'skrang Inn.

Kartarsis has a few ideas regarding how the heroes should begin their investigation. First, the adventurers can examine the storeroom where the spices were destroyed. Second, the adventurers can do a little leg work, and ask about the incident on the street and in bars and taverns, in case someone knows something about the attack.

Once the adventurers have agreed to help Kartarsis, they will likely follow one of the lines of investigation that Kartarsis offered. If they decide to search the storeroom, go to **Following the Clues**. If they opt to talk to the locals, go to **Word on the Street**.

Troubleshooting

Not much can go wrong here. The players may decide to spurn Kartarsis and not take the job. Should this happen, a few options are open to continue the adventure. Kartarsis could be coaxed out of more money—be sure not have him offer an enormous sum of money. He is, after all, supposed to be on the brink of financial ruin. In addition, Kartarsis can offer a greater payment should the heroes' actions allow him to rebuild his business. If the players refuse for reasons other than money, or Kartarsis can't make them an offer they will accept, the adventure jumps forward to **A Round on the House**, with Naskatal introducing himself to the adventurers under the mistaken impression that Kartarsis has successfully hired them.

FOLLOWING THE CLUES

A footprint! Passions! Tell a poor t'skrang that his hopes are realized. You must give chase

at once. This miscreant must be brought to justice.

—Kartarsis

Overview

Following the Clues begins with the investigation of Kartarsis' storeroom and takes the characters along the trail of Naskatal.

Setting the Stage

Kartarsis takes you from the Gilded T'skrang Inn. Following after him, he takes you to his store just a few blocks away. The street itself is home to many merchants, most of whom seem to be responsible for the heavy traffic on the street. Many small eateries do booming business along the street center. From the outside, Kartarsis' shop is nothing remarkable—a wide glass window, a solid oak door, attached on either side to similar looking shops. Kartarsis unlocks the door and beckons you in.

Looking around Kartarsis' shop, you clearly see the results of the attack. The counter at which business is conducted appears unbarred, but the rest of the store is in disarray. Shelves of broken spice jars hang from the walls, their contents scattered around the floor, mixed beyond repair. At the back of the room sits a small table with a dagger speared through a pile of ashes. Beside the table, a trap door in the floor lies open.

What follows is a description of the storeroom underneath Kartarsis' shop:

Kartarsis lights a lantern, then leads you down the trap door into the basement storeroom. Stacked high on all sides of the room are wooden crates, so encrusted with mud and slime they appear as though they were rescued from the bottom of a river. Pools of water collect on the stone floor around the base of the stacked crates—a stark contrast to the air, which is so dry as to be almost impossible to breathe. "Here", Kartarsis points. "My most valuable possessions."

Themes and Images

Kartarsis' shop is a busy one. Any prolonged investigation of the main floor of the shop should be interrupted by cus-

tomers, usually servants of the wealthy, who will look with scorn at dingy adventurers. Kartarsis will bemoan his luck to his customers and beg them to return in the near future. The basement is dark and dry.

Behind the Scenes

There are three clues to be found, in addition to any the gamemaster wishes to invent to better assist the players.

The first clue is the faint outline of a muddy footprint, found on the floor of Kartarsis' storeroom. The footprint is from Naskatal. Characters may use the Tracking talent to follow Naskatal. The test is made against Naskatal's Spell Defense (10), as the footprint was made eight hours earlier. The footprint can be noticed by any character who scores a suitably high Perception Test result, or who explicitly states that they are looking for footprints.

The second clue is the dagger. Naskatal is an accomplished engraver of weapons, and this dagger is no exception. On one side of the blade, he has etched a rose, the stem entwined about the skull of a t'skrang. The other side depicts the same scene, but the rose is clearly dead. In **Word on the Street**, if they show the dagger in bars that Naskatal has frequented, his artistic style will be remembered, and the players can be directed to him.

The third clue is of less immediate use. The crates which contained the spices were drenched by use of a variant of the Nethermancer spell Dry and Wet. This probably isn't an overly useful clue, but characters who insist on making something out of it could possibly research the spell, and learn of Naskatal.

Naskatal's Trail

After leaving Kartarsis' storeroom, the door to which he left open, Naskatal returned to the inn where he was staying, went to the bar for a drink, then up to his room, grabbed his belongings, and left. He spent the remainder of the night drinking at another tavern. In the morning he moved on to a street corner

near Kartarsis' store, where he waited for Kartarsis. When Kartarsis discovered the deed, and sought help, Naskatal followed him to the Gilded T'skrang Inn and observed Kartarsis' meeting with the players from a patio across the street. After the meeting, Naskatal retired to rest and drink at the tavern in **A Round for the House**. The adventurers will come across him there.

Troubleshooting

It is quite possible that the players are coming up empty-handed in their investigations. If they have not yet been through **Word on the Street**, they find nothing. If the heroes have been through **Word on the Street** and managed to find nothing, then they will probably need a bit of help getting beyond this point, even more so if none of the characters have the Tracking talent. If this is the case, you may need to invent a clue or two for them, or have them stumble across Naskatal as outlined in **A Round for the House**.

WORD ON THE STREET

My most loyal subjects, I thank you for these gifts. Indeed, they are a bounty worth the coffers of any kingdom. I must repay you for your generosity. It would ill become someone of my stature to let this opportunity pass without suitable reward for my children.

—Varulus the Beggar

Overview

Word on the Street presents encounters during which the adventurers investigate leads on the street and in bars and taverns. **Word on the Street** also includes a violent encounter, in which the adventurers are ambushed by a band of thugs.

Themes and Images

In **Word on the Street**, the players are seeking help from people they don't know. This scene takes a great deal of game master creativity, as the players can potentially encounter many Name-givers with whom they will only interact for a

short time. The gamemaster should have a few archetypes in mind for tavern keepers, street hoodlums, beggars, spice sellers, and others whom the heroes are likely to interview.

Make sure that the players exercise their role-playing abilities in trying to coax information from their sources. Do not just rely on dice rolls and interaction tests alone—make sure that the players themselves try to interact!

Behind the Scenes

Characters may go in search of rumors that can help them, or they may try to find a witness. **Rumors** lists rumors and tidbits of information that the heroes may uncover during their investigation. If they go looking for a witness, there are two townsfolk who may help them. Both are described below, along with a possible introduction suitable for a tavern keeper (other gamemaster character) to help the players on their way. At some point during the investigation, the gamemaster should have the dwarf thugs in **Ambushed** surprise the adventurers.

Varulus the Beggar

"There's this dwarf. A beggar, mind you, and not in his right mind at that. He spends his nights wandering the streets, telling tales for coins. I don't know how, but he always seems to know what's going on in town. Most days, you can find him on sleeping on the patio at Koza's Lodge."

Varulus the Beggar has taken on a strange madness. He is utterly convinced that he is the king of Throal, and that the streets are his court. During the daytime, he can be found sleeping on the patio at his cousin Koza's tea house. If the players treat him with respect, especially if they offer to help him in any way, perhaps food or ale, he will thank them and answer any questions that they have. On the night that the deed was done, he saw a t'skrang, one he often sees prowling the streets, break into Kartarsis' spice shop. This t'skrang, he recalls, inhabits The Library.

Crazy Kej

"Crazy. That's who you should be

chatting with. She's half-retired these days—not fully retired, if you take my meaning, just half-retired. In her time, she was the fastest, meanest, smartest, and definitely the most flat-out daring thief this side of Kratas. Now, if what I hear is right, she pulls the strings. For a small fee, I can make an introduction..."

Crazy Kej is a retired human thief. She maintains many of her contacts from her earlier days, and tends to know a great deal about what is going on in town. True to what many people think, she is still a major player in running the local underworld, though she takes great offense if others assume this. As it happens, she and Naskatal have a long history, both as adversaries and as partners. In this case, she knows Naskatal, and knows that he wants the heroes to track him down. Unless the adventurers are extremely obnoxious, she will send them off to meet with Naskatal as described in **A Round for the House**.

Rumors

There is a great deal of information the players can uncover, depending on the questions they think to ask. Below various lines of enquiry are outlined, with some of the information that can be gleaned. Remember that not all gamemaster characters will have all the details, some will have differing opinions, and some could even have incorrect information. The gamemaster may also wish to introduce a few red herrings to send the players down the wrong track.

Kartarsis and the Spice Trade

There are quite a few spice merchants in town. Kartarsis is probably the most important and, without a doubt, the most prosperous. There's some question about where Kartarsis' money comes from. It does not seem possible that his wealth is based on the spice trade alone. A dingy looking t'skrang (Naskatal) was asking about Kartarsis' business just the other day.

Mysterious Goings On

Naskatal is back in town. Word on the street is that whenever he's around, people start to disappear. There is some

kind of shakedown happening in the underworld—there are some ork gangs that appear to be trying to move in on Kej’s turf.

Strangers in Town

Telba Shiresa, the scholar, has wandered back into town. There are also a lot more orks about than usual.

AMBUSHED

Ambushed is a bit of an interlude, and a chance for the players who need to bash something to take a break from talking and negotiating. The players are beset by a band of dwarf thugs. Depending on the timing of the attack, the thugs can be sending a warning to the players about poking their noses into the town’s underworld, or simply looking for some loot. In either case, the thugs should jump them in an out-of-the-way place, catching the players by surprise. The thugs are not brave. If they look like they are going to get beaten by the players, especially if one or more of their number has been slain, they will flee. The players should face at least one thug each.

See the statistics on p. 13 for the dwarf thugs. Should the gamemaster desire, the statistics can be adjusted according to the Racial Modifiers Table (ED, p. 50) for thugs of other races.

Troubleshooting

If the players are coming up empty, and they have not yet investigated at Kartarsis’ shop, have Kartarsis come across the footprint in his storeroom, or an alternate clue provided by the gamemaster, to get them back on track. If they have been through **Following the Clues** to no avail, drop them into Naskatal’s lap in **A Round for the House**, using the options for heroes who have lost their way.

Problems could also arise if the thugs seriously injure or kill the heroes. The gamemaster may want to fudge rolls in the players’ favor during the fight, as the combat is somewhat incidental to the plot. Alternatively, the adventurers could be rescued by the town watch

A ROUND FOR THE HOUSE

There’s always work to be had in this town. All you need are the contacts and the will to do it. What do you say, can I introduce you to your next employer? Or should I just buy you a drink and leave you to rot?

—Naskatal

Overview

In **A Round for the House**, the adventurers meet up with Naskatal, and discover his dangerous nature. **A Round for the House** should follow after either **Word on the Street** or **Following the Clues**. **A Round for the House** can also be played out if the players get lost and don’t seem to know what to do next.

Setting the Stage

Should the heroes locate Naskatal as described in Word on the Street or Following the Clues, read the following aloud:

You arrive at what has got to be one of the seedier taverns in town. As you walk in, the stench of stale beer fills your nostrils and the tough, rowdy-looking crowd gives you a long, hard stare. Your quarry sits at a central table, feet kicked back across a pair of chairs, a large mug, half full, sitting in front of him.

Should the heroes be lost and need to be dropped back on track, read the following aloud:

Not being sure where to find clues, you’ve settled into a tavern for a pint and round of hard thought—not the usual tavern, just the first that appeared in your path. Definitely not a nice one. Your nostrils are assailed by the stench of stale beer. Your feet stick to the floor as you walk in. The patrons give you the impression that, offered a choice between bearing a troubadour spin a tale of adventure, and cracking skulls in a brawl, the latter would be preferred. As you sit and drink, you watch the crowd with wary eyes, and are somewhat worried when one of the drinkers, a horribly dirty t’skerang, picks up his drink and joins you at your table.

Naskatal

One look at him tells you that he is the adventuring type, and not one to bother with the

particulars of hygiene. He is dressed in weather-beaten furs and leathers, and you doubt if they have ever been cleaned. At his side, through a loop in his belt, hangs a broadsword, on which intricate patterns have been etched.

Behind the Scenes

Should any of the adventurers annoy Naskatal, he will glare at them, slowly drum his fingers on the table for dramatic effect, and then cast either Pain or Death’s Head, targeting the character who has annoyed him. The round after the spell takes effect, he will end it—his purpose is to teach a small lesson, not to incapacitate the character. This should also serve to warn the players that he is dangerous, and will need to be dealt with carefully and intelligently.

Naskatal wants to find out what the group knows, what they suspect. Furthermore, he sees great irony in using them as the agents of Kartarsis’ destruction, as Kartarsis hired them to escape the trap Shiresa has set.

“You look like a tough bunch. In town working, or are you on a vacation?”

“Interested in some work? I’ve got connections who are always on the lookout for adepts willing to take on the tougher tasks.”

“What kind of work? You know, whatever needs doing...”

Should the adventurers seem interested in his offer, Naskatal tells them to meet with Telba Shiresa next morning at The Willow and the Windling, a restaurant on the outskirts of town, at which she in the habit of taking her breakfast.

Should the heroes demand more information about the attack on Kartarsis, Naskatal will tell them that the action was nothing personal, that he was hired to do it, and the job is done. From his perspective there is nothing more to it. He is quite willing to divulge that Shiresa contracted him to do the job, and will use that as an opening to urge the heroes to pay her a visit.

Once conversation between Naskatal and the heroes dies, he will call for a celebration, in honor of meeting new friends. He will jump up on the table, pull two gold coins from his pocket, toss them to the bartender, and shout, “A round for

the house! No! Make that two rounds for the house! Drink up—I've new companions now." With that, he steps off the table, knocks into a chair, and falls backwards into another patron. The resulting domino effect of patrons stumbling into one another, while others rush the bar for free drinks, causes more than a few fist fights to break out, which in moments become a full-scale bar brawl.

Naskatal gathers himself, and stands up from the floor. He steps back, surveys the situation, pulls his sword, steps up behind an ork and plunges his blade through the ork's neck. He then wipes his blade on the ork's back, sheathes it and walks out. Should the characters try to stop him he will try to shake them off. Should they ask him what he's up to, he answers, telling them that it was "business." Naskatal will not divulge it, but the ork's name was Grel Fasthand, an out-of-towner who came to town as part of a move against Crazy Kej.

Troubleshooting

There are a number of points where this encounter could go wrong. The heroes could refuse to talk to Naskatal, in which case he could follow them and insist that they meet with Telba Shiresa, or the heroes could follow Naskatal back to her. Either allows the adventure to continue without much disruption.

They could get into a fight with Naskatal, in which case he will fight back, but will use a Nightflyers Cloak (*AMB*, p. 31) to escape, should his victory be in doubt. If the players have heard what he has to say, they know of Telba Shiresa's location. If they have not heard him out, then one of the above mentioned devices will be needed to get them back on track.

If the heroes manage to stop Naskatal from killing the ork, it is not a problem. The act is there to demonstrate the kind of work that he is inviting them to do, and is totally incidental to the plot of the adventure.

If the heroes stick around in the bar after Naskatal leaves, play out the brawl, and end it with the town watch breaking in, cracking some heads, and demanding answers. The bar patrons all tell different

stories, none of which the watch seem to believe. The watch will round up a few of the drinkers for a night in lockup. They will then single out the biggest, toughest player character, giving him a warning that this kind of behavior is totally out of line, and he will be watched.

A DOUBLE DEAL

Why did I order it done? You must understand, were I to divulge that information to you, I would be betraying the most sacred of confidences.

—Telba Shiresa

Overview

A Double Deal introduces the adventurers to Telba Shiresa, who will try to hire the heroes to assassinate both Naskatal and Kartarsis.

Setting the Stage

The Willow and the Windling is quite possibly the classiest restaurant in town. The adventurers will be held off by the staff at the gates, unless they inform the staff that they are there to meet Telba Shiresa. Once they get past the gates, they are escorted through a maze of passageways, walled with thick hedges, to a clearing in which an elf, meeting Naskatal's description of Shiresa, is sipping a drink from a goblet made of glass, a substance very rare in Barsaive. The staff then withdraws, leaving the heroes alone with Telba Shiresa.

Themes and Images

The players should probably come out of this encounter a little bit confused. They definitely should have the feeling that there is something going on here, something a lot deeper and more sinister than they were initially lead to believe.

Behind the Scenes

"So, Naskatal sent you here. Do you like him? Didn't think so. He's a nasty piece of work."

"He's insubordinate. He's working for too

many sides, and is now a liability to me."

"When I take a person into my employ, I expect simple loyalty—decency, if you will. I'm not asking for devotion or exclusivity. I just expect that I won't be implicated in my charges' ... misadventures."

Telba Shiresa wants a few things from the heroes. She wants to know how much they know about her activities, she wants to make sure that they don't interfere with her plans, and she wants to be certain that Kartarsis isn't going to be in any position to speak against her and reveal her Theran connections. In addition, she is growing impatient with Naskatal and his moonlighting as an assassin for other parties. She is willing to offer 500 silver for each assassination.

To her thinking, the heroes will respond in one of two ways to her request to assassinate Kartarsis. Either they do, in which case she comes out of the deal with a group of operatives who, unlike Naskatal, don't know about her Theran connections. More likely they will go to Kartarsis with this information and try to determine from him what is going on. It is her hope that, with Naskatal spying on such a meeting, she will learn the extent of Kartarsis' treachery.

The request to assassinate Naskatal is a blind to throw the heroes off, a test to determine if they are worthy of working for her, and a warning to Naskatal that he is walking on slippery ground.

Troubleshooting

There isn't all that much that can go wrong here. Besides extreme behavior, such as assaulting Shiresa, and like activities which would get the heroes on the wrong side of the law, the worst the players can do is walk away without hearing what she has to say. Should they do that, they will be at a dead end, and the next encounter can proceed when (and if) they return to Kartarsis to discuss things.

TWO T'SKRANG DOWN

Overview

Naskatal has infiltrated Kartarsis' home, and has convinced him that his

only remaining option is suicide. The encounter covers the players' discovery of Kartarsis' death, followed by Naskatal's ambush of the heroes.

Behind the Scenes

During the night, after the heroes' first encounter with Naskatal, and before their morning meeting with Telba Shiresa, Naskatal paid a visit to Kartarsis. Naskatal bound Kartarsis to a chair, and proceeded to torture him with his spells, while working out a confession regarding what was done to the documents that Kartarsis modified en route to Shiresa. Once Naskatal had Kartarsis' confession, he continued to work Kartarsis over, until the merchant eventually killed himself, slashing his wrists with one of Naskatal's daggers.

This event begins when the heroes next attempt to meet with Kartarsis. He does not make his scheduled appearance at The Gilded T'skrang, nor has anyone seen him that day. Asking about him will prompt a patron to give them directions to his home, which is locked up, with the curtains drawn. The heroes will need to break in if they want to get inside.

Once inside the house, the players will find Kartarsis' corpse tied to a fine chair in the middle of the front foyer. Kartarsis' wrists have been slashed, and arcane symbols have been cut into his chest. An intricately carved dagger lies bloodied in his lap. Any character who saw the dagger in Kartarsis' shop, or who looked at the blade of Naskatal's broadsword, will instantly recognize the patterns on the dagger as being the work of Naskatal.

Should the heroes search Kartarsis' house, they should find the trappings of a wealthy merchant. There are paintings on the walls, fine furniture, possibly valuable ornaments, and so on. The actual value of what unscrupulous adventurers steal is up to the gamemaster, but it should be kept in mind that stealing from the dead is not the act of a hero. Of possible interest to the adventurers are notes concealed in a false bottom of a drawer in the desk in Kartarsis' study. These notes reveal Kartarsis' position as a spy working

for Thera, and contain a variety of documents, all of which seem to be essentially the same, but with progressive changes from one copy to the next.

Once the adventurers leave Kartarsis' house, they will run into Naskatal's ambush. Exactly where and how Naskatal ambushes the heroes is up to the gamemaster, but a few alternatives are presented here. Naskatal could stalk the heroes through the streets. They realize that he is following him, but cannot shake him off their path. He strikes when the heroes are most unnerved by his presence.

Alternatively, he could be waiting for them back at their own inn, or just strike at them from ambush as they pass by his hiding spot. Another option is to ambush them in Kartarsis' home, in which case he can try and pick them off one by one if they separate to search the house, or he can attack them as a group when they discover Kartarsis' body.

The gamemaster should take care to have Naskatal fight in an intelligent manner. Since the fight is at a time and place of his choosing, he will be sure to have his spells at the ready. He will have Shield Mist active, and in a matrix. He will have his best combat spells in matrices as well, and should he know that there is a Nethermancer in the group, he will have Dispel Nethermancy in a matrix as well.

Troubleshooting

This event may need to be altered by the gamemaster if the heroes are unwilling to break into Kartarsis' house. If this is the case, it is possible that Naskatal is still in the house, and the heroes spot him fleeing the scene. Alternatively, Naskatal could spring his ambush without waiting for them to visit Kartarsis.

This is the climax of the adventure, so the gamemaster should not pull any punches in the fight with Naskatal. He should be a tough opponent, and should at the very least leave a couple of characters unconscious. He could very well kill a hero in battle. Also, the gamemaster may want to consider keeping Naskatal around—especially if he is beating

the characters badly. He could very easily beat them to the brink of death, and then wander off, only to show up as either friend or foe in a later adventure.

THE DEED IS DONE

Both? So quickly? I congratulate you. I did not believe that you had such determination within you. I am pleased. Very much so.

—Telba Shiresa

Overview

The Deed is Done finishes the adventure. Kartarsis and Naskatal are dead, and the heroes have evidence of Kartarsis' associations with the Therans. All that remains is to determine Telba Shiresa's role.

Behind the Scenes

The players will presumably return to Telba Shiresa for the payment that she offered them for the killing of Naskatal and Kartarsis. Should they not return, allow some time to pass, after which Shiresa summons them to The Willow and the Windling.

Shiresa thanks them for their services, and gives them the promised amount. She tells them that she hasn't any further work at the moment, but that there's sure to be something soon. Should the players confront her with the documents that reveal Kartarsis as a spy, the perceptive will notice that her face pales momentarily before she reveals that his role as a Theran spy was exactly why she was after him. The adventure either ends here, or if the players are still curious, they can try to investigate Telba Shiresa.

Shiresa is staying at a small inn near The Willow and the Windling. It is relatively easy to follow her from the restaurant to the inn. However, the players will need to move quickly, as she plans to leave town the next day. She fears that all the dead bodies may result in an investigation by the authorities. Shiresa will spend the remainder of the day either in her room or in the common room. Searching her rooms will require either

sneaking past her in the common room, or acting quickly to prevent her from calling for help, should the heroes break in while she is there. Her room contains a few changes of clothes; a book, which contains stories and tales that she has gathered in her travels; and a chest, in which papers can be found incriminating her as an Theran agent—papers outlining information her agents have uncovered, as well as the Names of some who report to her.

LOOSE ENDS

Possible Outcomes

Kartarsis' and Shiresa's papers are given to town or Throalic authorities.

Throalic authorities will be very interested in the documents Kartarsis and Shiresa had in their possession. They are willing to pay, but the amount should be determined by the gamemaster. In addition, turning the papers over to Throalic authorities will bring the heroes to the attention of the Eye of Throal, who may be interested in recruiting the group.

Shiresa herself is turned over to Throalic authorities.

Likewise, turning Telba Shiresa in to Throalic authorities, as long as the adventurers have evidence to incriminate her, will bring rewards similar to those above. If the heroes try to turn her in without any evidence, they should be reprimanded by the authorities. In this case, if the adventurers are convincing, a watch may be put on Shiresa, which may or may not uncover her work as a spy.

Players don't uncover any of the gory details

If the heroes don't uncover any of the truth about Kartarsis and Telba Shiresa, she will leave town as described in **The Deed is Done**. It is possible that the heroes encounter her again in the future, in which case she may well try to hire them to do some task for her. She will try to keep her Theran associations hidden from the heroes, and will go so far as to imply that she is working for Throal or a power she thinks the heroes would support.

Awarding Legend Points

Award Legend Points for this adventure at the end of every session. Specific awards are described below. The Adventure Award is 350 Legend Points for each character.

Roleplaying and Heroics

Award each character Legend Points for any of the following actions:

Agreeing to assist Kartarsis	75
Locating Naskatal	75
Attempting to prevent Naskatal from killing the ork in A Round for the House	75
Finding Kartarsis' Notes	75
Breaking into Shiresa's rooms and getting her notes.	75
Turning Shiresa in to the appropriate authorities.	75

In addition, the gamemaster should award characters extra roleplaying awards as he or she sees fit, up to an extra Legend Award per session, as **Turnabout is Fair Play** is a heavily roleplaying-oriented adventure.

Total

Assuming a group of four players, each player character should earn a minimum of 1350 and a maximum of 1650 Legend Points, depending largely on the speed at which the players complete the adventure, and the level of their roleplaying.

Treasure

Upon Naskatal's death, the dagger that Kartarsis used to slash his wrists becomes a thread item, and treasure worth 500 Legend Points.

NASKATAL'S DAGGER

Maximum Threads: 2

Spell Defense: 11

This is a simple dagger with a leather wrapped hilt, made remarkable by the engraving on the blade. On one side, the blade depicts a t'skrang lying in a flower bed; on the other, a t'skrang, neck broken, in a bed of skulls.

Thread Ranks

Rank 1 Cost: 300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name and Discipline of the dagger's first owner.

Effect: The wielder gains +1 to his Social Defense.

Rank 2 Cost: 500

Effect: The wielder gains +2 to his Social Defense.

Rank 3 Cost: 800

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the first victim the dagger was used to kill as well as the circumstances surrounding the victim's death.

Effect: The wielder gains +1 to his Charisma Step.

Defeating Opponents

The gamemaster should award Legend Points for defeating opponents as follows:

Opponents	3 Players	4 Players	5 Players
Thugs (1 per player)	300	400	500
Naskatal	1,200	1,200	1,200
Total	1,500	1,600	1,700
Per Player	500	400	340

Rank 4 **Cost:** 1,300
Effect: The wielder gains +3 to his Social Defense.

CAMPAIGN IDEAS

The plot runs deeper—tracking down those who gave information to Kartarsis

If the gamemaster chooses, the heroes could, either as their own personal quest, or at the behest of Throal or other interested group, track down the informants who passed information to Kartarsis.

Naskatal wants revenge

Should Naskatal survive his final encounter with the player characters, there is a good chance that he will want revenge, in which case the gamemaster may want to bring him back as a recurring opponent. The gamemaster may want to award Naskatal Legend Points periodically to keep him a few steps ahead of the players in terms of strength, and allow him to continue to be a challenge.

Telba Shiresa

Telba Shiresa is a wanderer who travels the length and breadth of Barsaive. She uses her guise as a traveling scholar and a seeker of arcane knowledge to cover her activities as a Theran spy. Shiresa is the superior to whom Kartarsis reports, and has recently arrived in town to pick up the documents that Kartarsis has compiled for her. Unfortunately for Kartarsis, she has learned about his treason, and is watching him carefully as she throws his life into chaos, trying to see where he jumps. If statistics are required, use the Guard Veteran (**ED**, p. 297) without the lucky charm, Armor Rating, and equipment, making alterations as appropriate.

Kartarsis

Kartarsis has lived in town all his life. He is a t'skrang spice merchant who has been spying for the Therans for the past ten years. He receives reports from other Theran agents, compiles them, and passes them on to his superior, Telba Shiresa. Recently, Kartarsis has soured on the

NASKATAL

DEX: 5 **STR:** 5 **TOU:** 6
PER: 8 **WIL:** 7 **CHA:** 5

Initiative: 3 **Physical Defense:** 7
Number of Attacks: 1 **Spell Defense:** 10
Attack: 7 / 9 (Surprise Strike) **Social Defense:** 6
 Damage: 13 / 20 **Armor:** 4
Number of Spells: (1) **Mystic Armor:** 7
Spellcasting: 13 **Knockdown:** 5
 Effect: See **Spells**, below **Recovery Tests:** 3

Death Rating: 52 **Combat Movement:** 27
Wound Threshold: 10 **Full Movement:** 54
Uncon. Rating: 39

Karma Points: 17 **Karma Steps:** 5

Spells: Astral Spear, Bone Dance, Command Nightflyer, Death's Head (Matrix), Dispel Nethermancy, Nightflyer's Cloak (Matrix), Pain (Matrix), Pocket Guardian (Active), Shield Mist (Matrix), Spirit Dart, Spirit Grip.

Legend Points: 1,200

Equipment: Crystal ringlet armor woven underneath and into rough traveling leathers, forged +2 broadsword, 2 absorb blow charms, a small grimoire made from bone (the spells are written in ink made from insect blood), numerous daggers, engraving tools and other mundane possessions.

Loot: 25 silver

DWARF THUGS

DEX: 6 **STR:** 7 **TOU:** 6
PER: 4 **WIL:** 6 **CHA:** 5

Initiative: 4 **Physical Defense:** 8
Number of Attacks: 1 **Spell Defense:** 6
Attack: 10 **Social Defense:** 6
 Damage: 12 **Armor:** 6
Spellcasting: NA **Mystic Armor:** 2
 Knockdown: 9

Death Rating: 38 **Combat Movement:** 30
Wound Threshold: 10 **Full Movement:** 65
Uncon. Rating: 29

Legend Points: 100

Equipment: Broadsword, ring mail, dagger

Loot: 1D8 silver each

The Little Judge and the Most Wise

Therans, and has started to alter and distort the reports that he receives, in an attempt to disrupt Theran machinations.

Naskatal, Fourth Circle Nethermancer

Naskatal is a t'skrang Nethermancer, a mercenary and tough guy. He is presently in the employ of Shiresa, with whom he has worked frequently in the past, as he enjoys the pay and the action that her assignments provide. Naskatal enjoys killing, both with magic and with his blade, and rarely considers moral or ethical issues in completing his assignments.

Editor's Note

I am a little leery of the dagger becoming a thread item after so insignificant an act. Sure, suicide is bad, but I'm sure hundreds of Barsaivians commit suicide every year, some of them under similar circumstances, and items related to the act don't become threaded. If this were the 101st suicide committed with the dagger, that might do it, but the text explicitly states that this was not the case; nor was there any indication that Naskatal should perform a dying oath if the adepts kill him. Also, I think the resulting Thread Ranks would be a little more sinister in nature, maybe giving some benefits, but causing the owner to eventually commit suicide himself, or drive him to kill others. Evil is not solely the province of Horrors, after all.

—KEC

WRITING TIP

Scattered throughout this issue, you will find tips from our editors on how to improve your Earthdawn writing. Many of these will be included in the EDPT's forthcoming **Earthdawn Style Guide**, but you can read them here first.

Matters of Style

Until we publish our own style guide, we highly recommend **The Chicago Manual of Style**. In many respects our style guide will serve as an Earthdawn-specific supplement to **CMoS**. Other style guides, such as the **AP Stylebook and Libel Manual**, are also very valuable resources for the Earthdawn writer. Of course, published Earthdawn products can be gleaned for FASA's style.

I finally saved up enough coin on my own to revisit the Cathayan enclave in Urupa. They were more than happy to welcome me into another game of casting sticks. However, I think they also knew I had another agenda, because they again gathered the children and told them another tale about the Little Judge. I present it here, for your enjoyment.

Nossirkaj ("Kaj") Tran Troubadour of Jerris

In the earliest days of the rule of the Most Wise, the Little Judge heard his first case. A man was brought before him, a slave¹ from the home of the Most Wise. The man said his family was sick. He needed to return home.

The Little Judge did not know what to do. Surely the Most Wise would be greatly angered if He heard this. Still, the man insisted on having the Five Judges hear his case. The Little Judge thought, hard.

He went to the Judges' library, to find the parchment² on the man. He had stolen some things, and his punishment was to be a slave.

He looked at it carefully, over and over again. The Little Judge fell asleep on the parchment. One of the other Judges visited him during the night. She saw that he was cold, and placed her robe over him.

A sound in the night wakened the Little Judge. He looked, and saw the Most Wise standing before him! The Little Judge was sorely afraid of the Most Wise's anger. The Most Wise just smiled, and extended a hand.

"I have heard of you, Little Judge. You will solve this case. I know it." With those words, the Most Wise turned with a swirl of his cape, and disappeared.

The Little Judge was amazed. He was also happy. He looked at the man's parchment over and over again, until he fell asleep.

The cock crowed, and the Little Judge woke up. He returned the robe to his fellow Judge, and thanked her for her kind thoughts. Then, he took his place with the other Judges, and waited for the man's case to begin.

"I would like to ask you some things," the Little Judge said to the man. "When you were given your punishment, were you brought to the home of the Most Wise by force?"

The man nodded.³

"Were you mistreated in any way while in the home of the Most Wise?"

Another nod came.

"I am sorry, but I cannot give you back your freedom." The man looked

shocked. The Little Judge smiled. "It was never mine to give. You gave it up on your own. You must decide if it is time to take it back."

The Most Wise suddenly appeared, and looked at the man. Everyone fell back, crowd and Judges alike—all except for the Little Judge. "Is it time for you to take back your freedom?" the Most Wise asked.

The man swallowed, drew himself up, and shook his head.

The Most Wise looked at him, then vanished again. The Little Judge looked at something that had fallen in his lap. It was shiny, red, and hard—one of the scales of the Most Wise!

The eldest Judge looked at the gift. "The Most Wise has shown you great favor, Little Judge."

And here the tale ended. Again, I was out of coin, having spent more of

my attention on the story than on the game. I think this was quite deliberate, but as long as they provide me with tales while they divest me of funds, I will think kindly of them.

1 Apparently, the Most Wise keeps slaves. The Cathayans did not seem to think this practice barbaric, although the populace itself does not engage in it.

2 'Parchment' is another word used in substitution. The Cathayans use something like parchment to write on, but it is made of wood, ground down and glued together somehow, instead of stretched sheep or goatskin. It is on this curious substance that they keep records of their court cases, among other things.

3 In Cathay, a nod of the head means no, and a shake means yes. Keep that in mind when haggling with them. I wish I had.

Peril Erkart and the Halls of Death

May the Passions smile on you, friend.

One of the greatest debates of our time amongst scholars of magic is the nature of Death. Is it the thirteenth Passion? Perhaps it is simply the greatest of all Spirits, or perhaps not even an entity unto itself.

Once there was a Nethermancer.

He was an obsidiman, but a small one, weighing no more than a heavy troll does. For thirty years he lived with a small ork scorcher tribe, the Flaming Teeth, that plied their trade in the plains north of old Ustrect. With the fleeting generations of the orks, the Scourge had already become legend rather than memory, and these fierce, happy people danced, sang, and raided wealthy caravans with zest that made the Nethermancer's heart glad.

One day the scouts discovered a rich caravan moving south, no more than a day's ride away. Like ants preparing to feast on a fat caterpillar, the horsemen of the Flaming Teeth scurried to ready themselves for a massive raid. Over 200 good orks took to the saddle, including Peril Erkart, a powerful Calvarywoman and the chief of the tribe. The obsidiman stayed behind, because speed was the order of the day, and there were no steeds that could bear his bulk. With the old, the young, and those with children, he cheered the departing raiders until the last helm disappeared in the grass, then got roaring drunk. The revelry lasted into the night, with the children dispensing drinks. The reason for this celebration was the warrior's victory, which was assumed to be underway. The Flaming Teeth believed that a lack of faith in the home tents could be a sure omen of disaster. Unfortunately, there were no omens, no warnings.

At mid-morning, the camp was awakened by the sound of iron chains. Less than fifty raiders marched through the camp in the morning light, driven by Theran whips. A large detachment of Theran troops surrounded the tribe, much amused by their dismay and hangovers. The entire caravan had been a stratagem by the Theran army to obtain

slaves. As the raiders rushed down at the wagons, soldiers had surrounded them, cut them off, and slaughtered those who would not surrender. The only prisoners they obtained on the battlefield were those who had been knocked unconscious by the fighting. Certainly all that were in chains sported grievous injuries. Peril Erkart was not among them.

The Nethermancer strove to convince the orks to stage an uprising, but without the leadership of Erkart, they thought any attempt useless. Their broken spirit was a tragedy to him. It wasn't within the power of the Nethermancer to simply slay all of the Therans, but even if it had been, the Flaming Teeth's ferocious spirit would be a long time in recovering. Accordingly, he set out to consult the dead chief, and if possible, return with her for a short while.

He began his journey in the night, on the dark of the new moon, the gateway moon. Though he and all the prisoners slept in chains, he summoned a powerful Named spirit who was in his debt to draw him into the Astral Plane. The spirit sheltered the form of the Nethermancer within the folds of his amorphous astral presence and flew with him over the astral plains, following the astral spoor of Erkart. Tongues of magical energy licked at their fleeting forms. Meanwhile, the obsidiman's stone body slumped in the great steel manacles with which soldiers had thought to imprison him.

They came to rest at the Gates of Death. In the Astral Realms, Death's Sea is the form of a massive fiery donjon, set in a paved courtyard that would easily contain all of Throal. A steady stream of Name-giver spirits flowed in from all over the world, entering through a knothole in one of the great doors. Some of them would halt in their flight towards Death, and turn back towards life, called by powerful resurrection magics. Others simply decided they wanted to explore the Astral Realms, as they perhaps did the Material Realms in life. The Nethermancer knew that the loss of every one of those that stopped at the Gates was deeply resented by Death. This Nethermancer knew that it was his task to convince that jealous monarch to part, even

briefly, with one of his hard-won subjects, because Erkart's trail led clearly into the knothole. The Spirit agreed to wait until morning touched the plains, and escort him back, if possible.

The obsidiman crossed almost a dozen paving stones, each as large as two thunder beasts standing nose to nose, to get to the doors, for his spirit friend would come no closer. The seven-foot Name-giver walked through the crevice under the doors upright without cracking his head. The antechamber was swirling with spirit artisans, all hard at work creating beautiful cabinets, furniture, bridges, stairs and paintings. From wall to wall, from the floor to the ceiling some sixty feet overhead, Death's subjects labored gladly to beautify his residence. The Nethermancer still stood staring when a dozen spirit guards surrounded him.

"What is your business in the land of the dead?" demanded one.

"Sowing dissent?" asked another.

"Spreading tales?"

"Spying?"

"Most likely! To our Liege for judgment!"

They hustled him through hallways cramped and grand, up and down stairs. Once they crossed a bridge barely wide enough to allow the obsidiman passage, seemingly less than a handspan thick and lacking rails, over an enormous vat of bubbling hot stone. "The Key," one of them muttered. Another shushed him, and they all looked nervous until they left the bridge. Finally they came to a wooden door, small enough that they all had to duck to enter. Inside was Death. They all fell to their knees.

Death sat quietly on an iron throne, reading over what looked like a ledger. Physically he resembled a windling, but so tall that the Nethermancer came only to the bottom of his knees. He glanced at the Name-giver.

Though the room was much larger and more lavish than the antechamber, the eyes of Death made it seem plain and small. "Why are you here? You are not on the list. Anxious, perhaps? Overeager?" It was sometime before the Name-giver could answer. They spoke of many things dark and beautiful. The obsidiman would

have spent an eternity in that discussion, but time among the living presses ever on, and the fate of the Flaming Teeth was at stake. Well-pleased with the Nethermancer, Death agreed to send the ork hero to lead her tribe to victory once more, requiring only that the spirit return in one day. For in addition to His sense of responsibility and affection for the spirits of the dead, Death can only experience the passage of time and sensory information through communion with his subjects. Consequently, the loss of a single soul is like the loss of an eye or ear to a mortal.

The Nethermancer and the spirit returned together. Erkart at once entered into the body of her 15-year-old son, and after reassuring him, spoke to her people in her own voice. On the morrow they rose up to slay the slavers. The inspiration of freedom was in their fists, the love of life was in their tusks, and their foes fell like grain before the scythe, only to be raised again to slay at the Nethermancer's command.

That evening around the campfire was another celebration, fiercer and more tragic than the one preceding the capture. Many of the tribe were on their way to the halls of Death, and most that were

left were the very young and the very old. But they sang bright songs to honor the departed and the spirit of Erkart.

She grew vain. Enamored of the praise, and taking literally the words of her tribe that she had "conquered Death," she lingered until after the time limit had expired. She laughed with her son's mouth, danced with his body, and ridiculed the Nethermancer's warnings. That night she slept in his body.

Her son may have been intended to live another 25 years, but her contract was up. The pull of Death on her unconscious form was such that it severed his spirit as well. When ten days later he still had not woken, the orks burned his still-breathing body on a pyre. It is said that together the spirits of mother and son still wail at the Gates, but Death will not admit them until his imprisonment is over.

Game Information

The Flaming Teeth still ride the plains of Barsaive, though the unNamed Nethermancer is no longer with them. They are both bolder and more contemplative than most Scorchers. Though they have replenished their population somewhat by adopting outsiders, they are still weak,

numbering less than 200. News of Cara Fahd's rebirth has reached the tribe, but the chance of losing their identity among the stronger, more established tribes seems too great. Among the younger generation, nethermancy is a much more popular Discipline than usual, and it carries little of the stigma it does in most societies. The Flaming Teeth have become a hotbed for nethermantic studies.

Economically, the Flaming Teeth survive less by raiding now and more through herding, hunting, and foraging. Their future is uncertain, but many fear what may result from a society in which Nethermancers work openly and together. Thera, these people say, began with less. Some believe the author, Obar Stastes, to be the Nethermancer who spoke with Death. If so, he could be an invaluable resource for research dealing with the Final Spirit or the Named Spirit who guided the Nethermancer to Death's Realms, if he could be persuaded to talk. The Flaming Teeth are able to contact him, but are very protective of their adopted obsidiman's privacy.

Obar Stastes is an Eleventh Circle Nethermancer and a Sixth Circle Troubadour. He is from the Delaris Mountains.

WHEN WRITING AN ADVENTURE

If you have used any of the modules, you may note that FASA's writers follow a specific framework for laying out the adventure. Below is listed an abbreviated version of that framework. You may find the description for the framework in the opening pages of any Earthdawn adventure book, should you need more information.

All adventures begin with a **Plot Synopsis**. This sets up the background of the situation the characters may find themselves in, as well as laying out the most likely course of the adventure once the characters are involved. The adventure then follows, with encounters broken up into named chapters, which are then further subdivided into sections.

A typical chapter in an Earthdawn adventure is broken up into five sections. The first is a section titled **Overview**, which describes in brief terms

what occurs during the encounter that the chapter covers. Following this is **Setting the Stage**; this includes information that is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased to the players, to set up the mood or environment the characters find themselves in.

Themes and Images is next, and gives the gamemaster hints on setting the mood for the scene, or specific sensations to describe. **Behind the Scenes** gives the gamemaster the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" of the encounter. It may include information on opponents, or information that a particular cast member knows. The final section is **Troubleshooting**, which delineates what may go wrong with the encounter, and how to possibly fix it if it does go awry.

After the encounter chapters, the **Loose Ends** section sums up possible results of the adventure, depending on

what actions the characters took: it also suggests uses for cast members or places in future adventures. This section also includes **Awarding Legend Points** (guidelines for the distribution of Legend Points for the adventure) and **Cast of Characters** (gives a brief description and game statistics for nonplayer characters in the adventure). Sometimes it may also include a final section, **Rumors and Research**, which is a catchall section for legends, information that can be found in interviews with cast characters, magic item descriptions and statistics, and anything else that doesn't really fit into any of the above sections.

This style is also well suited to mini-adventures, as you may have noticed in this issue's feature, **Turnabout is Fair Play** (see page 6).

The Ways of Nethermancy

May the Passions smile on you, friend. Through years of travel, I have determined a few things for certain. One, most Name-givers know little of the spirit world that is their ultimate destination; and two, that Nethermancers do little to vanquish that ignorance.

I am Obar Stastes, one of the obsidimen, and a Nethermancer and Troubadour of some skill. For the past eighty years or so, I have been doing what I can to help the energy-wasters, as well as my own kind, understand a little more of the Unseen Realms.

WHY STUDY DEATH?

First of all, why do my fellow Nethermancers and I seem so preoccupied with death and all its accouterments? Well, it is the one thing that all Name-givers and most creatures have in common. To understand death is to understand a great deal of life.

Nethermancers are not desirous of death. We understand that the living have a much greater capacity for growth and change, for action and ambition. Though a spirit may grow more powerful, it can never feel or experience as keenly as it did in life. Ambition is stilled in the dead. Life is for molding one's spirit; death is for reflection.

This explains why so many spirits are so bitter, so filled with rage. Powerful emotion comes with difficulty to a spirit, so its touch is an intoxicant. Many aren't eager to let it go; they may be in the grip of love or hate for centuries. Unfortunately, extreme emotion also ties a spirit to the physical plane, making it difficult for a Name-giver's spirit to escape. The best place for most spirits, once their bodies are dead and their tasks among the living are complete, really is Death's Realm.

In many cultures, handling dead bodies is considered distasteful, even disrespectful. It is easily understood where such a taboo originated. After all, if a body is allowed to decay it produces a distinct odor, and perhaps disease. Consequently,

every people have developed customs to deal with corpses, from burial to burning to consumption. Naturally then, when a Nethermancer desires to study or dismantle a body, many people react with shock or horror.

However, it is important to remember that, even after death, a body retains an astral pattern, though not a True Pattern. Since it has been associated with the living spirit's pattern so closely, it retains echoes of that pattern as long as it physically exists. The study of the mechanics of the spirit-body pattern connection is critical to the understanding of fundamental issues such as the difference between life and death. Exercises in severing and reattaching that connection can teach a Nethermancer a great deal. In most cases, these experiments can be done without undue suffering and inconvenience on the part of the spirit in question.

This explains why Nethermancers like to collect, refine and utilize the components of corpses. The energies residing in the bones, teeth, hair, skin and even fat of Name-givers can make spellcasting, summoning and meditation easier and more pleasant for spirits and Nethermancers alike.

WHY STUDY SPIRITS?

Great wisdom may come to a spirit in quietude. In the Unseen Realms, wisdom is the only thing of value. Once a spirit gets its bearings and realizes this, it may go about acquiring it in a variety of ways. Some become curious, striving to learn more about the varied realms through exploration, or conversations with other entities. These spirits are much valued and sought out by the wise Nethermancer. One of the most common tools for acquiring wisdom is meditation, either alone or in communion with other spirits. This may last for centuries, if not disturbed. If you've ever been rudely woken out of a beautiful dream or interrupted in the middle of a truly captivating book, then you can understand why many spirits are somewhat disagreeable when summoned.

Many spirits, of course, are too sim-

plistic to be involved in all this. These are the spirits that guard a Nethermancer's pocket, delight in dancing with another's bones, or tickle babies in their sleep. The exact origin of these spirits is a subject for much scholarly debate, and many intriguing theories have been proposed. The entities in question, of course, are too limited in intelligence to finally settle the question. Some feel that when a living being's physical body is totally destroyed all at once (perhaps roasted by dragon fire), the spirit doesn't have a chance to escape and so is fragmented as well. Some of these fragments heal and survive on their own, like earthworms. These tasked spirits (for so they are called, even those that are not performing some work for a Nethermancer) typically have one or two characteristics, such as mischievousness, bitterness, or a sense of duty, and a limited capacity to interact with the physical world. They typically are unable to remember anything at all past one or two days. Since spirits exist practically forever unless deliberately destroyed, this is the only way they can maintain any sort of sanity.

Other sages believe that tasked spirits are formed by the repetitive actions of Name-givers. For example, the people in a town customarily bury their dead in a particular plot of land, amid much weeping and gnashing of teeth. Over time, the world's pattern in that place will have become tense and tangled enough that malevolent spirits spin off from the astral energies. Or, in a city filled with pickpockets, so many people will be filled with anxiety about their pockets that spirits will come to exist that are obsessed with the interior of Name-givers' purses. The origin of the more complex spirits known as ally spirits is, well, more complicated. While tasked spirits are tied to our material world, ally spirits come in as many flavors as there are astral realms (and perhaps other physical realms? But that is out of the scope of this essay.) Since spirits seldom die, it follows that they are seldom born, or astral space soon would be too cluttered to move in. Some feel that they were formed when their home plane was formed. If this is true, then study of these entities may

The Hunter's Folly

reveal the secrets of the building of the Universe. It has also been proposed that ally spirits reproduce somehow without sexual union. As Obsidimen can testify, this is not as ridiculous as it sounds. I have even heard it said that before his fall the Trickster Passion created them to bewilder hapless Nethermancers!

DON'T ALL NETHERMANCERS EAT BABIES?

Perhaps the most common stereotype of the Nethermancer is the Evil Nethermancer. True, many of my colleagues are not content merely to study the varied realms for the betterment of all entities. Many pursue world domination. Some focus their efforts on the eradication of the Horrors: certainly a noble goal, but one fraught with danger, for the Horrors are more devious than can be imagined. Some Horrors are capable of so warping a mind that it works at cross-purposes to itself, or confusing its priorities, or collapsing its moral order. Others become so entranced with their own work that they forget that the well-being of other entities is the true concern of our Discipline.

But Nethermancers are nothing more or less than people. Who hasn't heard of some Warrior or another, a cobbler, or anybody, who did evil things; lived an evil life? Though their capacity for damage may be less due to the limited scope of their perceptions, they are fundamentally no worse or better than the Nethermancer. What sets one of my peers apart from others is not an issue of morality, but perspective. My advice to the lay person is to understand that a Nethermancer may be a person with great power, and should be treated as such, but not feared or hated indiscriminately. In this way, everyone can get along with his or her work, and we Nethermancers can get a drink in the local taverns without clearing out all the customers.

The Duke opened the door. The visitor stood outside, drenched to the bone, fist poised to beat on the door again. The Duke's lip curled.

"Oh, it's you." He turned away from the door, leaving it open as he walked away.

The visitor stepped inside, gingerly. "What is the matter? Household staff rebelling?" he quipped, sliding the well-worn coat off his arms and letting it fall to the floor.

The Duke arched one eyebrow, looking over his shoulder. "Not that it is any of your business, but the fields are flooding. I sent them to help with the crops. And close the door behind you. You've brought in enough rain as it is." He gave the coat an icy glare. A puddle of water had already formed around it, soaking the priceless Landisian rug.

The visitor gave the coat an unconcerned glance. "Oh, yes, terribly sorry," he said, not meaning a single word. "From the Felshears region of Landis, is it not?"

The Duke harrumphed. "Good eye." He suddenly lost his temper. "This idle chit-chat is useless and annoying! I know your reputation and your purpose here. Your journey was wasted. You can learn nothing new from me."

"We shall see." The visitor's expression grew sly. "I intend to join the hunt this year. We shall see if it meets the same fate as last year's. There will be a hunt, will there not?"

The Duke pressed his lips into a tight, angry line. "The weatherwise told me the rain would end in two days, and she has never been wrong."

The visitor leaned against the jamb, arms crossed. "My younger sister was training to be a weatherwise, too, until she died serving Lord Descali on the hunt last year." He scratched his head. "How many Name-givers died on that hunt? I don't quite recall . . ."

The Duke sat heavily into a burlwood chair. "Fourteen."

The visitor tapped on his scalp, affecting a pretense of concentrating heavily. "And how did they all die?"

"Their hearts stopped." The Duke's voice was devoid of emotion, his glassy

stare fixed on nothing in particular.

"And why weren't you on last year's hunt?" the visitor pressed.

"I was ill." The statement sounded weak, even to the Duke's own ears. "It is true!" he exploded. "Ask the questor. He was here, treating me."

The visitor looked unconvinced. "I trust you will be on this year's hunt."

The Duke looked down, and scratched his forehead over his left eye. "No reason why I should not." He waved the visitor away. "Stay here if you wish, but leave me be. I have . . . matters to attend to." He sighed. "Just pick any room upstairs."

With a vexed expression, the visitor huffed an exasperated breath, and ascended the stairs.

When the Duke could see he was alone, he let his eyes wander up to the magnificent deer head trophy hanging on his wall. The antlers looked as sharp as they did that fateful day two years ago, when the Duke brought down the hart with a single well-aimed shot, just as the buck was about to charge him. He could still feel the thrill of the hunt singing in his blood, and he sighed. In his thoughts, he cursed that day, and cursed that he did not take down its mate, too, when he had the chance.

In his thoughts, he could still see her out there in the woods, still feel her hunger.

The Duke shivered.

The visitor reined in his mount, shaking his head with disgust. "What is the excuse now?" he asked the huntsman, with barely disguised annoyance.

"Something about an ague. Probably all this cool, wet weather is the cause. The questor and herbwise are seeing to him." The huntsman scratched the back of his hand, and gazed up at the breaks in the clouds. "The weatherwise was right. With any luck, we'll be out of this cursed rain for a while."

"Hmm, yes," the visitor answered with a distracted air.

The huntsman gave him a sideways glance, then raised the horn to his lips. A bold but tremulous note sounded in the chilled air, and the group that had gath-

ered for this year's hunt rode forward, through the sodden pine needles and moss, deep into the forests of Landis.

The visitor watched the actions of the others carefully. Some seemed to be thrilled by the potential danger, others were simply bored and looking for another trophy to hang from their mantle. He allowed himself a small, secret smile at the foolishness of it all. *Killing an animal simply for sport.* The visitor gave a single groan. *How wasteful. Food and protection, yes. Decoration and social status, no.*

A flash of brown in the midst of the trees broke his thread of thought. Before he could see what it was, one member of the hunting party fell off his horse. The man rolled on the ground, clutching his chest and making small, strangled mewling noises. The horses milled about in confusion, until the smell of blood came clear and sharp in the air. The visitor reined in his mount, and it grudgingly obeyed. The others had no such luck. Their horses were bred for looks, not temperament, and the panicked animals bolted, throwing their riders.

The visitor stood still. The air seemed to grow closer, warmer, and odd sounds whispered from the trees. A strangled cry drew his attention: another hunter fell, clawing at his breast. In less than twenty breaths, he was dead.

How is this happening? The visitor attempted to still his shaking hands, but suddenly became transfixed. He knew someone was staring at him from behind. Slowly, deliberately, he turned his head. Behind him stood a tall, graceful doe, her coal-black eyes staring directly into his. Her gaze was cold, and alien. Fear rose in his throat; he brutally whipped his mount into a panicked flight, while behind him Name-giver after Name-giver fell and died.

Deep in the forest, Nenna the hind raised her head, scenting the air. Her skin shivered under her golden-brown fur. She rose with a sudden grace, looking around at the stilled bodies with eyes that had seen many ages. *I know you are there, defiler. I can feel you, feel your heart. You cannot escape me forever, defiler. You will suffer for the murder of my mate, suffer like*

those you sent before you. You will come to me, one day, and pay your penance.

A cunning light glinted in her eyes. *You will come. I have patience.*

Game Information

It always gives a special flavor to the hunt, when the prey has an edge on the hunter.

What happened in this place, somewhere in Landis? It's a tough question.

Who is the Duke? Well, he is a Duke. Not *the* Duke of Landis, of course. There isn't a real Duke in Landis, but plenty of would-be nobles, mainly successful merchants, adepts who come to wealth, or mercenaries who had enough power to declare themselves as rulers of small areas of the former Landis. These people fancy themselves as the continuation of the ancient noble traditions. They trying to recover the ancient style of life of Landis—not because they have dignified plans of re-creating and re-uniting the kingdom, but because being a noble is always a good thing. However, maybe there are some of among them indeed, who are really the descendants of the old noble houses—but this is another story.

This particular Duke hired a new forester a while ago. This is for sure. It is also well known that this forester proven himself worthy of this position. With his help, the Duke and his friends managed to track and bring down the most magnificent buck that they have ever seen. Not that they never heard of about this animal before. Those who lived in the near of the forest knew of the mated pair—they were here supposedly since the forest existed. In addition, everybody knew that it brings misfortune to those who harm these animals.

The magnificent trophy was placed on the Duke's wall, and the next year's hunt attracted more participants than ever. All of them died.

It was a big scandal, of course. Claims of treachery and assassination surfaced, and several people thought that maybe a Horror's tentacle was in play. However, the would-be Horror-hunters didn't find anything in the peaceful forest. In fact, people know nothing more now than they knew after the first day of that fate-

ful hunt.

Of course, there are relatives, Horror-hunters, and other curious folk about, people who want to know what happened a year ago. These people are sure to come to this year's hunt.

Instead of giving out the full story, here are some possibilities that can be chosen and used for an adventure. Pick what suits to your gaming style, or create completely different approaches.

Who is the hind? A Horror (this idea may be a bit worn-out)? A noble animal, chosen by Jaspree (or one of his questors, when they revived the place after the Scourge) to protect the forest, and driven mad by losing her mate? Or did the pair hold captive a certain Horror, which is partially free now and controls her, now that the buck is dead? Does she attack and punish the hunters only, or did she pick up hunting as a new and exciting habit? Or is she the punishment of Jaspree for the disregardful over-hunting? (Questors of Jaspree do seem to avoid the forest. Maybe one of the PC's will be the chosen questor who has to deal with the situation?)

Who is the new forester? A questor of Raggok, causing mayhem to bring down the newly born 'nobility'? A real descendant of the real noble bloodline, who wants to get his birthright back and dispose of these usurpers? Or just a lucky fellow who caused trouble with his curiosity?

What's the deal with the Duke? Is he simply afraid because he knows that he made a serious mistake, and too cowardly to face the consequences? Or did he make a pact with that certain Horror, and he sacrifices everybody who comes to the hunt?

What is the trophy? Just a nice decoration? A core pattern item of the forest, since the buck was a chosen and favorite animal of Jaspree? A tool, which permits the Horror to communicate with the Duke, or control him?

Is there a solution for this situation? Would the punishing the Duke extinguish Nenna's death wish? Maybe killing the hind would solve the problem—but what will happen with the forest after that?

NENNA

DEX: 9 **STR:** 9 **TOU:** 8
PER: 10 **WIL:** 10 **CHA:** 10

Initiative: 11 **Physical Defense:** 10
Number of attacks: 1 **Spell Defense:** 13
Attack: 11 **Social Defense:** 13
 Damage: 9 **Armor:** 0
Number of spells: 2 **Mystic Armor:** 6
Spellcasting: 14 **Knockdown:** 10
Effect: 16 (See text) **Recovery Tests:** 4

Death Rating: 69 **Combat Movement:** 100
Wound Threshold: 15 **Full Movement:** 200
Unconsciousness Rating: 67

Karma points: 20 **Karma steps:** 10
Legend Points: 660

Powers: Silent Walk 10, Frighten Animal Servants 10, Constrict Heart, Fog 4

Equipment: None
Loot: None (Hinds don't even have a buckhorn, you know.)

Fog
 Nenna can create a dense fog in her home forest any time she wishes. To do this, she spends 2 points of Karma and makes a Fog test. The result is the number of hours the fog lasts. The area of this effect is a diameter equal to the result of the test x 100 yards. In the affected area every sight-based Perception test suffers a -2 step penalty. This applies for heat sight, low-light vision and even astral perception methods. While the effect lasts, Nenna can spend an additional Karma point any time to create and even more dense cloud around her in 10 yards of diameter, which causes -5 steps of penalty for these tests. Nenna herself, of course, is immune to this effect.

Nenna is also immune to most of the Beastmaster talents like Dominate Beast. Note that her powers work only in her forest, which she would never willingly leave.

Nenna is a beautiful, strong representative of her species, and a stunning sight for anybody whose heart was ever touched by the beauty of Jaspree's work. Of course, if a person has evil intentions regarding her, his heart may be touched by a not-so-gentle force soon.

She has some special abilities that work similarly to existing talents and spells. These include Silent Walk, which she uses at rank 10; Frighten Animal Servants, also at rank 10; and Constrict Heart. She can use karma for these powers, as well as any other tests.

Following her trail is not easy, as she seems to bond with the forest more than any other animals. Anyone following her trail needs to roll an Extraordinary success. As a side effect, if anybody makes this test successfully, Nenna and the tracker will be aware of each other's presence - they both can hear each other's heart beating, which becomes louder as they get closer and closer to each other. This effect fades only if the tracker leaves the forest for a day. In addition, it sometimes seems that the forest itself protects the hind as well.

She is a careful hunter. She usually picks the lone targets, and generally avoids direct combat. She approaches silently, and usually her prey's last sight is a gentle, deep, black pair of eyes of the animal that seemingly came from the nowhere, accompanying the ticking sound of her heartbeat.

Author's Note

This story was inspired by Viola Pap's short story, Anomalous Hunt, which appeared in Galaktika in January 1986.

—AH

RACE NAMES AND RACIAL TERMS IN EARTHDAWN

Certain forms must be followed when referring to races in Earthdawn.

Orcs are a race from Tolkien novels. Earthdawn races include orks. Do not use a "c" where a "k" is most appropriate.

In certain circumstances, you may find it necessary to refer to something with a racial qualifier, as in "a dwarf merchant," "a group of dwarfs" or "a dwarf sword." Please use the following forms for singular, plural, and possessive/descriptive:

Singular	Plural	Possessive/descriptive
dwarf	dwarfs	dwarf or dwarven
elf	elves	elven
human	humans	human
obsidiman	obsidimen	obsidiman
ork	orks	ork or orkish
troll	trolls	troll or trollish
t'skrang	t'skrang	t'skrang
windling	windlings	windling

(Note: When two examples are given, the *first* is preferred.)

A Plea for Silence

Through the eternal clouts and thunderclaps of the Great Ravines, a calm voice spoke to him: a voice speaking in a language he had not heard for hundreds of years. Had it been any other language, he would most definitely have struck down the poor being for its impudence, but then, it had been hundreds of years since...

He first was a face inside the waterfall; then, an arm gesturing, then a second arm, as he slowly rose to manifest on the plane of material existence. It was indeed one of the lizard Name-givers, and a being of-power-to-come, too. This might still prove rather interesting, provided this puny being did hold on to the etiquette of the aeons. Then she began to speak. Her tongue seemed to flow with the ear-numbing crushes of the Serpent at its cruelest, but the tale she spoke was spoken by her heart, not her lips, and it was a sad story indeed. She recited the story as if she herself had seen what she described, and after a few moments, he who had lived since the birth of the Serpent knew that it was so. She spoke of the last remnant of a congregation, an item bearing the entire pattern of a group of over a hundred Name-givers, all lost in time. She talked about how all these patterns were decaying for their loneliness and their longing for the Serpent was getting stronger day by day.

The Ancient One knew then what she was going to offer, but her touching story still did not make him forget that she had not even brought the humblest present. Or had she?

With a rumbling voice that reduced the waterfalls to virtual silence, his words rang in her head as he finally spoke: "I know what you are going to ask of me and it does you honor that you do not try to force me like the others who came before you. But I have decided to demand a test of you, to determine whether you are truly worthy of my company, whether you are one with the river enough to be one with me. So you will climb up the mountain and swim down the Serpent's falls, which no Name-giver has ever tried. If you survive, you shall be worthy."

But she replied: "I am filled with regrets deeper than the coils of the Ser-

pent which drown the proudest ship within seconds, but I cannot do what you ask of me, as I am a River Child and I live as one with the River. The River has birthed me at its source and its flow is my life with all the falls and coils and currents. Since I am standing here, under the falls, I must already have done what you ask, so this test is none at all, as I know I can do it and there is no reason to prove it again."

Amused, He Who Is The River answered: "Very well then. I shall retract my request and instead ask of you to remain here and swim up the waterfalls as no Name-giver has ever done."

But again she replied: "My heart is troubled by despair as consuming as the Death Sea which swallows the Serpent, but again I cannot do what you ask of me. For I am a River Child and my life is one with the river. It is my destiny to one day travel *amotla shivoam ju'nai*, down the river into the sea. Although it is not my desire to make this journey, I am stepping closer to it everyday and as every hatchling knows, there is no way to reverse these steps. Because I am growing older and not younger, I cannot do what you demand."

Desperately thinking about a test the River Child would accept, the Eternal One realized the test was over. And so he spoke: "Your voice is that of the river. Your heart flows with it and your words flow like tricky currents around my demands but still they do not lose the direction of the stream. You have proven yourself well, but you shall pay a price nevertheless. For the company that I provide to this relic to soothe your soul is not a free one, and so your words that are the river shall give only me comfort when you ask my aid."

After a pause in which the two stared into each other's eyes, he continued: "The Name you have chosen is a good one indeed, as you gave the Name are you are the central pillar, the present. And I am the left pillar, the future and the potential. And the Makers of the spear are the left pillar, your past and your destiny. Together, the three pillars shall share a silent communion, a unity of balance your people call the *kyapas*, balance."

With these words, he disappeared, soaking the trispear in front of her in sparkling water and giving it the unearthly gleam it sustains to this day.

T'kree Shustal (Three Pillars of Silence)

Maximum Threads: 1

Spell Defense: 22

Smaller than most trispears designed for combat, the weapon appears to be an ordinary fishing trispear, of the kind typically used by the t'skrang of the Southern Reaches of the Serpent. Although its appearance offers no hint, it may be wielded as a melee weapon as well as a throwing weapon. Without a thread attached, the spear maintains all the typical characteristics of a trispear, inflicting Strength + 5 steps of damage.

Thread Ranks

Rank 1 Cost: 300

Key Knowledge: The bearer must know that the Name of the spear is 'T'kree Shustal', and learn that the ritual translation and meaning of that Name is 'Three Pillars of Silence'.

Deed: The bearer must swear an oath never to speak a word during combat while wielding the trispear. This oath does not require any blood magic but is mandatory to ensure cooperation of the water elemental who resides within the spear. This Deed is worth 800 Legend Points.

Effect: "Quicksilver Shape": At the bearer's will, the spear can attain a state of quicksilver-like consistency, shining like True Water. In this form, the weapon can change its shape and flow under mental control of the bearer at a Movement Rate of (Thread Rank) x 10 yards per Combat Round. When commanded to flow, the weapon achieves an amorphous form which moves freely across all surfaces. Note that outside of a direct line of sight, giving precise commands may prove difficult.

Shaping the spear is not an action for the character, who is merely asking it as a service from the elemental, although it cannot assume quicksilver form and solid form in a single Round. Re-forming it requires 1 point of Strain.

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Rank 2 Cost: 500

Effect: The damage step increases to STR + 6. Additionally, increase the bearer's Physical Defense by +1.

Rank 3 Cost: 800

Key Knowledge: The bearer must know that the Name of the elemental who resides within the spear is Yellareesh, and learn the legend connected with the creation of the item (see 'A Plea for Silence').

Effect: "Battle Flow": The elemental gains better control over the spear's shape in combat, twisting and flexing it to aid the bearer. Increase the Difficulty Number for talents or spells directed against the spear, or against actions performed using the spear, by the Thread Rank (i.e. Avoid Blow, Riposte, Weapon Breaker...).

Rank 4 Cost: 1300

Effect: The damage step increases to STR + 7. Additionally, increase the bearer's Spell Defense by +1.

Rank 5 Cost: 2100

Key Knowledge: The bearer must learn that the spear gained its True Pattern by being the central part of the coming-of-age-ritual of the t'skrang niall of Selivri'kirea, and that it became the niall's

epitaph upon its extinction by Theran slavers.

Effect: "Soothing the Edge": The bearer may fling quicksilver drops from the spear toward enemy weapons or claws, covering them with a thin film of water and rendering them less effective. Make a Throwing Weapons Test against the highest Spell Defense of all targets. Success bestows a step penalty equal to the Thread Rank upon all Attack Tests and Damage Tests made with the weapons for 3 Combat Rounds. This effect counts as an action, although the bearer may strike a number of targets equal to his Thread Rank. Decrease the spear's Damage Step by 1 for each target affected.

Rank 6 Cost: 3400

Effect: The damage step increases to STR + 8. Additionally, increase the bearer's Physical Defense by +2.

Rank 7 Cost: 5500

Key Knowledge: The bearer must discover the reason the water elemental bonded with the spear voluntarily. The reason is that the spear still acts as a link to the soul of the t'skrang's lahala, who, embodying tradition, represented the ways of all who bonded into their community through proving themselves worthy by ritually recovering the spear. Feeling an affinity for the ways of the river-children, the elemental agreed to act as a comforting warden of the ancestral memories, quenching his eon-long solitude.

Effect: "Spring Tide": In a more refined dance of the Battle Flow, the spear may lash out almost before the bearer has even twitched a muscle. If the bearer breaks the dance, reconsidering his moves at a moment's notice, he physically suffers as if being buried by the wave he rode. The spear adds the Thread Rank to the bear-

er's Initiative Step when attacking as if he had the Quickblade talent. Raise the Strain cost from the talent description to 5 points.

Rank 8 Cost: 8900

Effect: The damage step increases to STR + 9. Additionally, increase the bearer's Spell Defense by +2.

Rank 9 Cost: 14,400

Deed: The bearer must find a way to use the elemental as a bridge to the soul of the t'skrang, allowing her a rightful place in the world of the living. This ritual effectively renders the bearer a lahala, which is likely to drive anyone who is not a female t'skrang insane. Due to the connection of the thread, the ritual precludes re-Naming, but makes the elemental's role futile. With the ritual's completion, the elemental, in the form of the quicksilver spear, once again gains independence to reform somewhere along the Serpent whenever a future Lahala of Selivri'kirea will die without passing on her memories. This Deed is worth 14,400 Legend Points.

As the trispear vanishes, it becomes obvious that the spear's powers do not originate in the elemental, but in the lahala's soul and the bearer's increasing affinity with the primal elemental nature of the t'skrang race, so that the thread and the odd-ranked powers (3,5,7,9) remain innately within the former bearer. In the case of powers described as shedding drops of water, these now come from the bearers cupped hands.

Effect: "Rain of Tears": Having reached communion with the legacy of the memories within the spear, the bearer learns to harness the righteous anger and sorrow she is connected with. In combat, drops shining like a rapid current's waves dance around the bearer's chest, arms and legs or around the tip of his weapon. In game terms, the bearer may either lower the Difficulty of scoring an Armor-Defeating Hit, or increase an opponent's Difficulty to defeat her own by one success level, at a cost of 2 points of Strain for each round in which the wielder calls on one of the two effects.

Festivals of Barsaive

Being a document researched, compiled, and prepared by the redoubtable Nossirkaj Tran, troubadour of Jerris, for publication by the Library of Throal, and use by the whole of Barsaive.

It is not by accident that I am known for having a frivolous, irresponsible nature. Friends at the Great Library have noted with some dismay (and not a little amusement, at my expense) that a substantial amount of my fees for my submissions go to pay boat or airship captains for impromptu midnight... ah, *excursions*: either that, or to erase gambling debts incurred when my skill and luck have run dry. Their sly chuckles are not unwarranted. I myself have had a few laughs at my own foolishness, when dashing out of Urupa before dawn with little more than my smallclothes and my beloved lute.

On the other hand, my personality has earned me a goodly amount of friends throughout Barsaive, and through them, the opportunity to witness things that others may miss. I have seen many wonders in this land, and I feel privileged to be able to share them with my fellow Name-givers.

I would like to say that Barsaive has come a long way since the doors of Throal opened more than eighty years ago. Adepts like myself are often credited, through legend and song, with promoting conditions in which our society has flourished, whether through fighting Horrors, discovering unopened kaers, or other noble deeds. Even more than those gifted with a Discipline, however, the non-adept Name-givers of Barsaive are responsible for the current state of the country. It is through their labor that this country has survived, and through their indomitable spirit that Barsaive has thrived.

An important part of this survival is the ability and desire *to play*. Even the most fearsome warm-blooded creature must take some time to gambol in the woodlands, or go splashing through still ponds. It is no different for Name-givers. Our children have invented many

games, and even as we grow, we indulge in sports like hach'var, games of skill, or my own particular weakness, games of chance. Other outlets for our desire to play include the subjects of this work; festivals, feasts, and celebrations of many types. The ability to enjoy ourselves is necessary—nay, *vital*—to our health and happiness, and anyone who denies this is well on their way to becoming a tool of the unspeakable, or a lost, bitter soul.

Having traveled a good deal throughout this land, I have had the opportunity to participate in many celebrations. Though I do not recall it, I have been told that I had my first apple brandy during the feast of King Neden's birth. I was barely a year old at the time, but I still hear stories about the dizzying celebration after the babe had survived his first month.

I have seen many other festivals as well, and would that I could share all that I have seen with you, the reader. I feel that this is a fair sampling of my more interesting experiences and anecdotes, so it must, for a time, suffice.

WHAT MAKES A FESTIVAL FESTIVE?

Though festivals and celebrations are as many and varied as the towns and villages that hold them, they are all united by common elements. If all of these elements are missing, the event in question is likely no longer worthy of the Name "festival". And what are these elements? They are as follows: food, games and plays or demonstrations, crafts, and music.

The first is food. Families and friends gather to dine together, even when their daily schedules are otherwise incompatible. Eating is a social event, as can be readily seen in any tavern or trisnari in our land, so it stands to reason that the same would hold true for a celebration.

Still, not just any food will do. One cannot properly celebrate a joyous event by eating a thin gruel, and so the dishes are usually spicier or sweeter than the norm, and served in larger quantities. It would seem that the zest for life increases when we celebrate, and requires that everything we do in connection must be

more, or larger, than we are accustomed to in everyday living. For example, at a t'skrang festival, I was once served a fish twice the size of a normal dinnertime serving, which was so spicy that it nearly burned my tongue away to cinders. This was chased by tea with a thick dollop of honey and flavored with cinnamon, held in a mug roughly the size of a horse's feedbag. I could finish neither, but I did feel more festive while I had it.

The second element, games and plays or demonstrations, also reflects the "larger and more" attitude that characterizes celebration food. While normal games, plays, and demonstrations can be, and usually are present, such as dice or storytelling, they are made much brighter, noisier, or more flamboyant. Dice games may be held in a special area with many contestants, or a storyteller may have the assistance of an Illusionist to enhance the tales. New games are also added in festivals, as well as events that appeal to observers. There is a festival every year in the village of Balense, near Urupa. This festival is centered around the waterways that surround and crisscross the town, bringing it life and commerce. Many games in this festival involve the water canals, including one where youngsters race around the town, holding long poles used to vault the waterways. They take long running jumps, attempting to plant the poles in the center of the canal, and use the resulting momentum to get to the other side, hoping to avoid taking a bath in the process.

Crafts could be considered part of the above, as they are often created as part of a demonstration. The result is something that can be taken home to serve as a reminder of the festival, though, so I felt that giving them a separate category was valid, especially as some festivals exist solely to serve as showcases for these crafts. For example, there is a celebration held in my home village near Jerris that is the only place in Barsaive where the rare art of glassblowing is consistently practiced. Granted, items made of glass are very expensive, and not terribly practical for the average Barsaivian as they break quite easily, but the event is still fascinating for locals, and a strong

draw for merchants and the idle rich interested in items of great rarity and beauty. I once watched, as many other children of my home village still do, open-mouthed and with glazed eyes, as the burly men pulled red-hot balls of molten glass out of blazing forges, and using long metal pipes, expanded and cooled the balls, shaping them into delicate vases and cups. My mother still has a single cup, formed of deep blue glass and etched with my Name, as a reminder of my first Glass Festival.

The final element, music, is perhaps the most important. It is hard to definitively explain the appeal of music, but who has not had an unpleasant task become more bearable by whistling a happy tune? Music can alter emotions in ways that other things simply can't, and so at festivals and celebrations, music appropriate to the situation is played to influence the mood of those attending. Imagine, if you will, a birthday where funeral music, or no music, is played. Who would feel like celebrating?

KINDS OF FESTIVALS

In my experience, very few celebrations are held *just because* (even those orchestrated by questors of Floranus!). There is a purpose behind even the smallest feasting or holiday. I have been able to discern, in general terms, various types of celebrations. I make no claim toward completeness; there are doubtless others.

Most common are those festivals held to commemorate the opening of a kaer. It is difficult to measure the emotional impact of such an event, but all should agree that the release of Name-givers imprisoned underground is a great cause for celebration. Some villages hold these festivals yearly, in commemoration of the day and remembrance of those who suffered so that future generations would see the sun. It is time of both joy and reverence.

The next most common type of festival involves, to put it delicately, fertility. This may include the harvest, or the introduction of eligible partners among the unmarried of a village or town. Often, these celebrations are held under the aus-

pices of Garlen. In many areas, such festivals are known as the Feast of Garlen, and embrace both aspects of fertility.

Other purposes for festivals include the following: veneration of heroes or Passions, commemoration of important events other than kaer openings, the promotion of foodstuffs or crafts for which an area is known, preservation of an aspect of culture (usually pre-Scourge), competition or rivalry between neighboring villages or towns (or within a town), and placation of an evil or benefactor. Often, these functions overlap.

I will attempt to give at least one example of each of these in the paragraphs that follow. This does not cover even one-quarter of my experiences, but hopefully the reader will find the entries entertaining and instructive.

Commemoration of Kaer-Opening

Many towns and villages hold festivals for the anniversary of their (or their predecessor's) release from the kaers. Most villages hold this event yearly, or on a predictable cycle, but only one that I have seen prefaces the celebration with a week-long stay sealed in the kaer of their origin.

Every three years in the village of Laecravín, during midsummer, the inhabitants begin moving supplies into their kaer for a week-long stay. I happened to be passing by the village two years ago, chasing my horse. The silly thing had tossed me and bolted off the caravan path from Urupa to Bartertown, only two days west of Urupa. I pursued the addled beast north for half a day, until it stopped at a watering hole outside of Laecravín.

While attempting to drag my recalcitrant mount away before it gorged itself, I noted burly young men toting heavy boxes and bags across the plain, only for them to slowly disappear beneath the tall grass. Curious, I investigated, and found that the young men were carrying food, and that they were vanishing because they were entering a hole in the ground. The hole was roughly circular, ten or twelve feet in diameter, and was paired with an

equally large plug of grassy earth, which shimmered brown on the bottom.

Being of an inquisitive nature, I asked one of the young men if they could explain to me what was going on. They were all suspicious at first, of course. I was a stranger to them, and they had no idea if I was untainted. With a hopefully disarming grin and a technically difficult but sprightly t'skrang air played on my lute, I managed to gain their confidence.

They explained that it was the thirty-sixth anniversary of their kaer's opening. They were to spend the next se'night inside, to emerge at the end to participate in a grand celebration.

Gwylym, the earnest young dwarf with whom I was conversing, further informed me that it was mostly the younger folk who were to engage in this most curious rite. "We're to learn what our forebears endured," he replied, smiling. "The oldsters prepare the feast for our emergence. I've done this for fifteen years, and I'll probably do it for three or six more, unless I have children. All children have to have their parents go in with them, y'know."

He scratched his head and quite unexpectedly offered, "You're welcome to join us, if you wish. We try to do everything like the town records say they did—especially entertainment." Gwylym gave my lute a rather pointed stare.

Though I was a year older than the maximum age allowed for participation, I accepted gratefully. I was among the first to descend before the plug was replaced and sealed. In the week that followed, I and those younger than thirty learned of the various agricultural techniques used in the kaer, participated in games, held meetings, and other bureaucratic and cultural details. The food supply was exhausted after three days, but that was part of the adventure. The kaer gardens were kept in perfect working order, so there was still plenty of food. The selection of victuals was greatly informative, though bland.

The games and dances more than counterbalanced the tastelessness of the food, thankfully. I learned all eighteen verses of "The Bar in Dibirin" while engaging in energetic dances with many charming, fetching young ladies, some

of whom had been my instructors mere hours ago. The puppet shows were entertaining, though they were designed to teach lessons from the Book of Tomorrow to children. Even the original mannikins were used. I noted, with some mirth, that the t'skrang puppets looked decidedly fishy.

At the end of the week, the plug was unsealed, and we were welcomed out with a feast of wild foods, of the kind that could not be cultivated in the kaer. There was pheasant stuffed with crushed wild berries and anise-seed, salads made with aromatic leaves, and all manner of things made with honey.

In the days that passed, I found I had gotten a little more out of my stay in Kaer Laecravain than I had first guessed. While inside, I continually noticed things that were, in my experience, unusual. There were no night insects chirping, nor birds singing in the morn. The air was always still and a trifle dense, never in motion except when passing someone else. The light quartzes and glowmoss did not—indeed, could not—reproduce the pure light of the sun. I found it difficult to know when to go to sleep, or rise for the morning chores.

I suppose the thing I missed the most was grass, strangely enough. Not a single blade grew in the kaer, and I often found myself wistfully dreaming of sitting on a hummock by a clear pond, drowsing and fishing. Silly of me, perhaps, but there you are.

Celebrations of the Harvest— and Match-making

There is a village of humans, called Alhena, near the ancient kingdom of Ustrect. A friend of mine retired there, and during a visit with her, I became involved in a Feast of Garlen. In my time, I have been involved in many such Feasts all over Barsaive. I have seen many of the courtship customs as well, from the mundane (such as perfumed notes and shy glances) to the absolutely preposterous (a horse race between two or more prospective suitors). In Alhena, I found something altogether delightful—and completely random.

The festival itself began with the blessing of a questor of Garlen, anointing a statue of the Passion with fragrant oils and placing flowers and fruits of the harvest around the base. Children gathered to sing songs to Garlen, wearing crowns of flowers and asking for a good harvest, and family events began, like stilt-walking, tugs-of-war, and races to claim items from the tops of ten-foot poles. There were competitions for the biggest animal or produce item, and demonstrations of lacemaking, weaving, or painting. Games involving agricultural tasks were employed, like fastest wheat-cutter. Traveling merchants came from all over to peddle their wares, and animal handlers and jugglers plyed the streets for coin.

There were other special events peculiar to Alhena's celebration of the feast. A few of the villagers decorated the ground with images crafted of ground pigment and carpets of blossoms. For those who wished to take a break from the spectacles, there were hot springs near the town where travelers or townsfolk could relax. Beasts of burden, like oxen and donkeys, were washed in nearby streams, and thanked for their hard work. On the last day of the festival, the courtship custom finally came to the fore.

Each year, a month or two before the Feast of Garlen, the eligible men of Alhena purchase a small token or charm, representing some aspect of themselves, and have their initials engraved on it. As an example, I myself purchased a tiny silver walking staff, symbol of a traveler. Unlike the other men, I did not give it to the town's rugmaker.

As the men turned in their charms to the rugmaker, she wove them into a rug, tying the charms onto scraps of linen. This often takes her several weeks, she said, but the result is a softly jingling, braided carpet that dizzied the eye with its colorful twists and turns. Tassels fringed the outer edge, also in a rainbow of hues.

On the day of the feast, eligible women were gathered together around the rug, and each chose a tassel. Then, they began to work the rug apart, eventually pulling a particular charm out of the weaving. After that, each woman located

the man who purchased the charm she now held, and arranged a suitable outing. There was no upper age limit on this practice. All that was required is that the participant be unattached, and of marriageable age. Even my friend Reza pulled a charm, and she is...

...Well, she wouldn't tell me how old she is, but she changed my diapers when my parents were working, back when I was a toddler in Jerris. The gentleman whose charm she pulled was considerably younger, and by the looks the two were sharing when I last saw them, I expect their handfasting soon.

Veneration of Heroes and Passions

"Hide from magicians, hire adepts, say hello to questors," or so the saying goes. But if the magician or adept happens to be your son or daughter... that's different then, isn't it?

I've been to many celebrations honoring Passions or famous hometown heroes, but I will never forget my experiences in a village called Tioshen, not as long as I live. This village is located north of Travar, and is populated by a hodgepodge of Name-givers, including dwarfs, trolls, humans, and even a clan of windlings. I had stopped there to stay overnight before continuing on to Travar. The Founding was only weeks away, and I wanted to secure suitable accommodations beforehand.

I was greeted at Tioshen's gates by Jirivil, a fair human boy with a ready smile and a limp, and Chaia, an equally fair troll girl who handled her scythe with practiced ease. The swing of it caught me completely by surprise, stopping only an inch from my belly. It was their form of challenge, and a very effective one at that.

We stood there for a few moments in silence. My stomach took this inopportune time to growl quite audibly, and Jirivil giggled. His laughter was infectious. Soon, even Chaia was weepy with laughter, and my belly was so cramped with the effort that I fell over and needed Chaia's help to get back on my feet.

“No one who laughs that easily or boldly could be tainted,” she replied, and Jirivil ushered me inside, still red-faced and gasping for air. “Your Name, good sir?” Her eyes lighted with recognition when I gave her my Name, and she introduced herself and Jirivil.

“You are an adept, no?” she asked as she guided me toward the town’s sole tavern, called, with characteristic brevity and common sense, “The Tavern.”

“Yes, a troubadour,” I replied as we reached the door of the alehouse. With a quick nod and a flash of teeth, she vanished from my presence. I shrugged, then followed the scent of roast hen into the common room.

It took me some time to notice the uproar outside. When I chanced to look out, I noticed that colorful tents were being raised on the village green, and bunting was being hung along the eaves of the houses. At one end of the green, the ground was being raked and the fire pits surrounding the area cleaned and straightened out.

As quickly as she had disappeared before, Chaia reappeared beside me. “What’s all this?” I asked her.

She flashed another smile. “It’s for you.”

I confess, my vanity perked up a bit... well, more than a bit. In my bliss, I nearly missed hearing what my part would be in this.

Chaia took me to meet with the village leader, a dwarf Named Kaelber. She explained to me that the purpose of the festival was not to honor me, but to allow me to do the honor of aiding her village. “You see, we do not have much traffic through Tioshen. We do this whenever an adept passes through. If this is done well and correctly, an adept will be born here within the year.

“You are not an Illusionist, are you?” An anxious look crossed her face.

“No,” I answered. “Does it make a difference?”

She steepled her fingers. “We would require you to take an oath to refrain

from interfering with the performance, if you were. There was, in the past, a time when Illusionists participated freely in the performance, but there have been too many occasions in which they felt the need to ‘tinker’ with things. When such things happen, the desired effect is not achieved. Therefore, those who might feel tempted to make a better show of things with their abilities are made to promise that they will not give in to temptation.”

“And what is my part in this performance?”

She looked out the window. “It will be a clear night.” Her chin firmed. “Good. At sunset, please present yourself at the stage on the green. The rest will take care of itself.”

With that last, enigmatic remark, I was dismissed.

I could only assume the stage was the area being raked when I exited the tavern. My mind was burning with curiosity, but no one would answer my questions, instead urging me to try the pickled vegetables, or asking for a dance. I was quite close to exploding when the sun was about to set. Dressed in my best linens, I presented myself at the stage as the last vestiges of the sun vanished below the horizon.

The fire pits flared to life as a young troll boy sounded a horn made of a hollowed gourd. Redolent of pine pitch and other, less familiar but aromatic scents, the air grew hazy and thick. Through muffled ears, I sensed the rolling thrum of many drums, and a staccato voice chanting in an unfamiliar tongue.

I did not hear more than one word out of five, and I understood none of what I heard. Even so, my mind began to conjure up images, things that I had not seen before in my entire life, yet were strangely familiar.

For once in my life, I lack the words to adequately explain what happened to me that night. To call it a simple possession would do a grave disservice to the event, and cheapen the gift it was

meant to be. No doubt some staid Nethermancer would boil down its tragic beauty into vague theories and jargon. For that reason, I have scrupulously avoided speaking to Nethermancers on this subject. Now, back to that night...

The words washed over me like a warm waterfall. I fancied I saw filmy gauntlets superimposed over my hands, an ethereal sword clutched in one of them. As the chanting continued, memories of another flowed into my mind...

My Name was Tioshen, a Warrior. My wife, Vala, a questor of Upandal, was eight months pregnant with our first child. The Scourge was upon us, and I was defending the village while others rushed into the kaer. Standing before me was a horrendous creature, hunched and skeletal, with thin, parchment-like skin stretched tight over its frame. Scoop-like eyes jutted out from its skull, and its long, narrow snout ended in a mouth with fangs arranged like a rabbit’s teeth. Attenuated arms were tipped in a pair of cruel, curved talons, which opened and closed like tongs. Its tail lashed like a jagged whip as it furtively snapped the air about me, testing my reflexes.

Another part of my mind registered the squeaks of fear emanating from the audience, but I did not—indeed, could not—acknowledge them. Tioshen’s thoughts flooded through me, cleansing away all else...

The beast—Horror—swept aside a shack to gain a better reach. I fended off its claws with my sword, but in the heat of battle I neglected to notice the other set descending toward me. Before I realized what was happening, my head was wedged between its fingers, with those long claws arching toward my back. I stiffened in shock as the talons slipped between my ribs and erupted through my belly.

My eyesight fading, I thrust my sword feebly at the Horror, but with a quick crunch, the monster crushed my blade. I was not yet unarmed, and though my blood poured down my legs, I kicked at the Horror’s chest with all my considerable power. It was to no avail. I succeeded only in breaking my feet.

A shriek sounded. Vala was fifty feet behind me, beset by a pack of bloated creatures with massive jaws. A group of our friends attempted to help her, wading into the fray with sickles and pitchforks. A few of the beasts were killed, but one tore Vala’s leg open. She staggered, fell.

Summoning the power of my Discipline, I rallied one last time.

Before the pack tore her apart, she summoned her will and created an axe, plain but serviceable. With praises to Upandal, she launched the axe toward me, before slipping beneath the tide of rending jaws. It was my final sight of her.

Impossibly, the axe landed firmly in my upraised hand. I leveled a mighty swing, creating the thing's neck. A thin, dark line of ichor oozed from the cut, and the monster shrieked. I aimed for the thing's narrow, grey tongue, slicing it away.

A wash of hot, fetid liquid rushed over me, and the Horror bellowed and choked. Its grip on me loosened, and I slid from its claws to the ground below. It retreated.

I poured my last ounce of will into the weapon in my hands, willing it to remain. Though it felt solid enough before, it became even heavier, more substantial. My final bequest to my family and home, an aid and a comfort, protector and ally...

The smoke cleared, and the flames died. In my hands was a simple, unadorned axe, its haft wrapped with plain hemp cord. Other than the vision I had just experienced, I had no memory of the axe came to my hand. There was a last, lingering taste of Tioshen's emotions; as I looked over the assembled villagers, I felt a fierce joy and pride in them that nearly shattered my heart. At last, my eyes rested on Kaelber, who nodded gravely.

"It is done. We thank you, Nossirkaj Tran."

I looked at the axe in my hand. Weeping, I handed it back to her. "No, thank you." I spent the rest of my stay somewhat detached and pensive. Tales were told, but I heard none of them, and I left the next day.

About two years later, a package was left for me at my favorite tavern in Throal. There was nothing in the package but a lock of fine, brown hair, tied with a yellow satin ribbon, and a dainty tooth. Whoever the child is, I have only good wishes for its future.

I have often thought about returning to Tioshen, to ask them what happened, how they brought the vision, how the axe came to my hand. Each time, I dismiss

the temptation quickly and brutally. I was given a special gift that night. Too much analysis will ruin it for me. I leave it to others to dissect it... if they wish.

Commemoration of Important Events

I consider this a sort of "catch all" category for festivals. Many events can be considered important enough to build festivals around; victory in an important battle, the changing of seasons, the arrival of a trade caravan, or as I will describe below, a momentous happening in a life. Some of these celebrations occur every year: others only happen once in a lifetime.

Such was the festival held for King Neden one month after his birth. Though I was but a child at the time, I know much of the celebration, as my mother and father love to talk about it. They attended the celebration as guests of one of their trade partners, and I was with them.

As many already know, dwarfs, particularly Throalic dwarfs, do not celebrate the birth of a child the way other Namegivers do. It is a joyous event, to be sure, but the celebration is delayed until the babe reaches the age of one month. This custom arose due to a plague that swept the ancient kingdom of Scythia, which killed almost every dwarf child within the first month of life. Those seeking more information may find it in the second Denizens of Barsaive compilation, available in the Reading Room of the Great Library in Throal.

Thus, when King Neden was born, King Varulus and Queen Dollas announced the new arrival, but did nothing until one month had passed. "Then, it was pure chaos in Throal," as my mother put it. The following is taken from stories she told me.

The festivities began with the distribution of roast joints, steaming potatoes flavored with onion and dill, and other foods. Drinks had to be paid for, but the price was one-quarter normal. Troubadours and hired musicians played on every hall crossing, and even out in Bartertown, closest to the gates. Outside

the mountains, airships trailed colorful streamers, and children were given small gilded coins impressed with the image of Varulus, Dollas, and Neden on the front, and the new prince's date of birth on the back. These were passed out by dancers in colorful costume, flowers twined in their hair, or around their hands. Buskers plied the streets, too; some of them juggling bright, shiny balls, or creating plays on the spot with their string puppets. There was even a race in mucker's carts, the participants including notable city officials and well-known members of the Royal Court. A parade came at noon-tide, with rare tamed griffins leading the procession of decorated carts and musicians.

As night fell, the time came for the presentation of the new heir. The crowd quieted as King Varulus and Queen Dollas stood at the top of the gates with Neden, giving a short speech on his birth and the hope he represented. Then, Illusionists hired by the court presented a fantastic light show. Nothing compared with the show put on by the sky itself. Shortly after the speech ended, all music and noise stopped once again, as a shimmering curtain of color and light dropped across the sky. It stretched from east to west, and rose over the mountain, almost to the top of the sky.

Some of the musicians began to play, softly. As the music grew louder, the lights in the sky seemed to dance with the rhythm, pulsing in rich purples and greens. It lasted for an hour or two, slowly fading away to a pale yellowish-white, then vanishing completely.

No one knew exactly what it was, although my research indicates one or two similar occurrences mentioned in legend. My mother said it was the most magical thing she had ever seen, and considering her son is an Eighth Circle troubadour, that is saying something.

Celebrations of Local Food Products or Crafts

Since food is an important part of any celebration, it stands to reason that festivals can grow up around a specific food. Many communities take pride in their

local products, and this pride is expressed in celebrations, as well. I have personally attended many festivals centered around a particular food or craft, but the one I remember best is the Fish Festival, held by the Sa'Tiol niall of the V'strimon aropagoi.

At the time, I was a guest of Garfiore Sa'Tiol, currently the head cook at the Silver Lantern Tavern in Bartertown. She had invited me so I could train her egg-brother, Kithasa, in the troubadour Discipline. (A small side-note, if I may be permitted: Kithasa's Name was actually K'thasa, but he Throalicized it for ease of pronunciation by other Name-givers.) She was but a young Warrior herself; only Second Circle, yet she had helped me defend myself against a group of bandits while on the road. I asked her what reward she wished for her valiant act. She chose training for Kithasa.

So it was that I stood at the prow of the Sa'Tiol trading vessel *Sujatha's Fortune* as it entered Lake Ban. The festival was already well underway, so the ship slowed to a crawl. I looked out over the water. Half-tame river otters leaped through hoops of entwined flowers that floated on the lake, entertaining those who were on the shore or in boats. Garfiore (or Fi, as she preferred to be called), nudged me in the ribs. "Ready to go?"

"Certainly. Where's the rowboat?"

She snorted and shook her head, and without a hint of concern, began to strip off her clothes. Being a conscientious and considerate person, I looked away. Fi laughed. "There's no need for that. I'm not undressing completely." I chanced a look back. Most of her clothing lay on the deck, and Fi herself was climbing a mast.

I watched as she reached the top, gave out a yell, and leaped off, plummeting toward the water. She straightened herself until she resembled nothing more than a large, rusty orange dart, and hit the center of one of the floating hoops of flowers. A crown of spray blossomed where she landed, and moments later, her head popped up, surrounded by a ring of yellow torchrose and red lambs' balm.

"Your turn!" she chimed.

My jaw dropped. The top of the mast,

where she had leaped off, was at least ninety feet from the surface of the lake. "Aw, come on!" she chided. "It's tradition! You'll have good luck for a year if you hit one of the hoops!"

I was still unconvinced about the validity of the whole thing, but I was game. At the very least, it was a good demonstration of *haropas*. I stripped down to just a shirt and breeches, and climbed half-way up the mast, Fi's eyes on me all the while. As I prepared to dive, Fi called out, "Don't jump from there! You'll hit the deck! Go all the way to the top!"

The sudden image of my crumpled body on the planks was quite compelling. Still, I fancied I could hear the otters laughing at me as I scaled the mast to the top.

The water looked miles away from my vantage on that tiny, very wobbly platform. Summoning all my meager courage, I closed my eyes and leaped out, hoping I would manage to keep from making a fool of myself.

Alas, it was not to be. Humans are built for shore, not sea, a point made abundantly and painfully clear when my ungainly landing prompted roars of laughter from those watching on shore. I didn't hit a flower-hoop. In fact, it was a Passions-granted miracle that I hit the water at all. Fi later described it as a belly flop combined with a seizure. I was taken back to land, and examined for injury.

When I could move again, Fi told me she would take me to the place where some of the events were being held. "You'll need this," she said. She uncurled my hand so my palm was flat, placing a pale blue gem in the center. With a sinking feeling I realized what it was, and what it meant.

A spark of merriment danced gleefully in her eyes, and her smile was predatory. "So, you've seen a swim charm before! You know how to use it, then?"

I nodded, and the t'skrang led me to a short reed boat attached to a stout rope, waiting on the edge of Lake Ban. "After your earlier performance, I thought I'd

give you a break," she said, and indicated to me that I should get on the raft. The thing was a bit wobbly, but very buoyant; it didn't seem to sink at all under my weight. Fi grabbed the rope and swam into the lake using long, easy strokes.

The raft finally did what I was dreading. It stopped. "Time to put in the charm," she ordered, then hauled me overboard. The water was cold, almost frigid, but with the help of the charm, I adjusted in no time. Below, I could make out shapes twisting in the water. As we got closer, I realized those shapes were t'skrang involved in a race. It was an odd race, as none of the t'skrang seemed

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to be moving their limbs at all. Other t'skrang seemed to be spectators, their fingers flitting back and forth in strange dances. Fi noticed my confused expres-

sion, making some hand gestures at me. My confusion deepened. Then, she jerked her thumb upward—a clear signal at last.

We broke the surface. "No one ever taught you t'skrang hand language?" I shook my head. "You'll need to learn it for the festival." The Warrior made a few rapid moves with her fingers, but I could not seem to grasp the meaning.

Fi gave me a concerned look, then shook her head. "Boy, that landing really did scramble your brains. This isn't like a spoken language. You read it. Try thinking of it that way." I blushed in embarrassment, and concentrated. She made the same gestures again. This time I found I could understand them completely. Then I realized what she had signed. I introduced her to a gesture I learned from some ork horsemen after I beat them at cards.

She gave a short bark. "You catch on fast, green-eyes."

I favored her with a ferocious grin. "You'd be surprised how often my education in a language has begun with an obscenity."

She waved that off, and explained to me that the race I saw below was not a simple test of speed. Paramount was the ability to read the nuances of the river's

current, along with the proper posture to take advantage of them. Endurance was a factor too. Swim charms were allowed, and most contestants used them, but the race was long enough to require several breaks for surfacing. Points would be taken off for excessive and unnecessary movement, too much time spent at the surface, deliberate interference with another contestant, or failing to arrive at the finish line with a fish.

“As you might expect, Boatmen excel at this sport, with their

ability to read the water, so often they agree to be handicapped.” She pointed down, and I stuck my head into the water to take a look. One of the racers had a large, flat slab of wood tied to one of his feet; it was being batted wildly back and forth by the current, but he showed no sign of frustration. “That’s Pacholek, a boatman from the S’dala niall,” Fi explained. “I think he’s Sixth Circle.”

We watched his performance as we drifted along up above, but the current below must have been faster. They were soon far ahead of us. I did manage to catch sight of Pacholek nabbing a fish, though.

There was more going on at the edge of the lake. A contest to determine the fastest net-maker was being held near where we emerged. Nearby, there were also other contests for fastest fish cleaner, largest fish caught during the festival (both weight and length), most fish caught during the festival, and best fish recipe. I could even see t’skrang tossing carved wooden fish for distance. All the while, nearby riverboats set off their fire cannons into the air at indiscriminate intervals, shaking the ground.

“The finale of the festival comes later tonight,” Fi remarked. “The Shivalahala V’strimon herself will come out with a questor of Floranus and rechristen the riverboats.” After we put our outer clothing on—ah, to be dry again!—Fi guided me to the V’strimon bazaar, where we indulged in fish broiled on sticks, spiced fish of many varieties, river clams, hon-

eyed slices of orange, and many other delicacies. It was in the bazaar that I finally met Kithasa, a young t’skrang with a talent for flute playing. It took me only a few minutes to determine that he would indeed be a promising student.

Kithasa and I whiled away the time until the rechristening of the boats, discussing various songs and popular compositions. Fi managed to keep herself busy by acting the food critic to some of the chefs in the bazaar stalls. The sun set, and as the sky turned purple, a whistling noise rose over the conversation, coming from the west. I looked up, and saw a huge white crocus bloom in the sky, each of its five petals limned in a different color—red, blue, ruddy brown, blazing white, and green.

“That’s the signal,” Kithasa remarked as he unfolded himself from his cross-legged position on the ground. “The docks are this way.”

Fi joined us halfway there, and we walked to the edge of the river, where at least two dozen boats were lined up to receive the blessing of Floranus. Their fire cannons, at last, were mercifully quiet. “You’ll have to come back for the Festival of Flowers,” Fi said as we came to a stop. The Warrior gave a nod, and made a few hand gestures. *It is time to be quiet, and wait.*

Kithasa moved ahead to join a group of t’skrang carrying musical instruments, mostly winds. From a long scrollcase dangling at his hip, Kithasa pulled a flute. I squinted, trying to get a good look at the instrument.

It is indeed made of bone, Fi gestured, forestalling an amazed outburst. *A leg bone, from a legendary t’skrang troubadour.* I rubbed my thigh almost self-consciously. Kithasa began to play, along with the others, as the Shivalahala made her entrance.

She wore robes of the finest silk, and a garland of flowers draped from her right shoulder to her left hip. By her side was a questor of Floranus, carrying a lit torch. As the t’skrang musicians played a subdued, reverent air, the Shivalahala and her charge went from ship to ship.

At each one, they would stop as the Shivalahala plucked a few blossoms from her garland, and set them aflame in the questor’s torch. The resulting ash was smeared on the fore of the ship, written in the ship’s Name. As this was done, the questor would drop a hoop of flowers over the prow. This was repeated over and over until all the riverboats were blessed and rechristened, a half of an hour later.

The moment this ended, the musicians began to play a lively dance tune. The crews leaped onto their boats, hauling in the anchors and raising sails. Within an hour, all the ships had gone on their way.

Preservation of Culture

A few years ago, I met some good fortune in disguise. It was an exceptionally good disguise. It’s not often you recognize good fortune when it looks like an angry troll raider.

I was a passenger on the airship *Mist*, outbound from Kratas to Alhena. At the time, I was avoiding a friendly disagreement between myself and one of Garlthik’s lieutenants, involving the outcome of a game of dice. I suspected his interpretation of the rules was a bit more malleable than mine. I wasn’t about to risk discovering how malleable my limbs were, so I left.

Somewhere over the eastern edge of the Liaj Jungle, drakkars from the Thundersky moot attacked. They plummeted from the ships, screaming and brandishing stone axes. As the raiders landed on the deck, I remembered a pithy quote a friend from the Arm of Throal once told me: “If you’re sucking breath, you’re still ahead of the game.” Favoring the idea of ‘sucking breath’, I raised my hands in a gesture of surrender. Only a few Name-givers were on board *Mist*: the captain, his crew, and myself. We were taken prisoner, and roped to the mast. I bided my time, watching the actions of our captors for things that might help us.

When I was able to discern the identity of the leader, I told him my Name, hoping I would be recognized. My attempt at making a good first impression worked.

I was able to convince the Thundersky captain to release me from physical labor as a newot, as long as I provided the moot with entertainment. My attempt to work out a similar arrangement for the captain and his crew met with failure.

When we arrived at the Thundersky moot, it was apparent that something unusual was about to happen. Trolls were unloading massive slabs of ice from other airships, moving them into a small valley on long, flat sledges. I watched for some time, but was unable to determine the purpose for this.

A hand landed on my shoulder. "You are curious," a voice rumbled.

"Yes," I answered in Troll.

"You will see." The hand left my shoulder. Before I could crane my neck back and around to see the speaker, he had melted into the crowd of trolls moving all around me.

After the last remaining blocks of ice had been unloaded and moved, the trolls filed into the valley, carrying baskets of light quartzes. I wanted to watch what came next, but one of my captors came and pressed me into service to entertain the youngest children while everyone else worked. From time to time, I could hear shouts, and some rhythmic droning I took to be troll song, but I could not hear enough words to give me any clues.

Night fell before I had finished my task, and was permitted to see what all the fuss was about. For the second time that day, a heavy hand fell on my shoulder. "Would you like to see?" I looked up at the speaker, and nodded. He was dressed in a manner similar to the others; heavy fur cape, leather garments whip-stitched together with gut or sinew, and decorated with bits of crystal. However, his expression and bearing differed. In his eyes, I could see he was more accustomed to seeing ghosts than living Name-givers. "I am called Miklosek. You will follow me, Tran."

Miklosek's bulk cut a path through the deep snow, and I followed in his wake, down the side of the small bowl-shaped valley. Rising from the valley floor was a palace of ice, likely on the small side by troll standards, but huge in my human-sized eyes. Quartzes glowed softly from

inside the blocks, in a multitude of pale colors. I became entranced by the beauty of it. Without a word, my guide Miklosek led me into the palace.

Its beauty was even more astonishing on the inside. Though the architecture was quite obviously in the troll style, the multicolored lights embedded in the ice gave it an added, spellbinding beauty. It was all I could do to keep from crying at the sight, and I was not the only one. Miklosek himself wept silently, though his eyes and mouth held the hint of a smile.

We walked through the halls for some time, marvelling at the beauty of it. When Miklosek and I finally exited the palace, he began to speak. "This was Skytoucher custom," he said, choking a bit. "We do this to remember what was lost, what must be regained."

"There will be food, later," he told me after a long pause. Miklosek added, quietly, "Be prepared for a visitor tonight."

I went back to the palace of ice, and sat to watch while others came and went. Miklosek left, then returned, gently informing me that it was time to eat. "It will give you strength," the troll noted in an enigmatic tone.

The long trestle tables in the main gathering hall of the moot were laid out with an amazing variety of steaming meats, and little else. I could see some bread, here and there, and one or two vegetable dishes, but even these seemed to contain some meat. I ate what I could, listening to the moot's skald (or *story-teller*) weave tales of the glory days of the Skytouchers. I suspected some of the tales were exaggerations, but there was no doubting the reverence the trolls of this moot held for the lost Skytouchers.

Mugs of a pungent brew were passed out, and one was handed to me, so I took a sniff. It was a horrible mistake. My toes curled painfully in a spasm of disgust, and I could feel my gorge rising. No one seemed to be keeping careful eye on me, though; I tipped the mug over, spilling the contents on the ground.

All around, trolls tipped up their mugs, and downed the putrid stuff in long swallows. I sought out Miklosek in the crowd. When I found him, he was doing his best to look as if he was indulging with the

others, but the bottom of his mug was still easy for me to see.

After a while, most of the trolls were snoring or too intoxicated to be paying much attention. A few were even involved in tossing stones, a game with which I was well familiar, to the detriment of my pocket. A heavy hand on my shoulder forestalled any thought of joining in. "Follow me," Miklosek ordered in a soft voice.

I followed him into the valley once again. There, in the light-shadow cast by the palace, stood the captain and his crew. Several other trolls were with them, watching our approach. "What is this?" I asked.

Miklosek looked back. "We are the Broken Chain. We will take you back to the lowland." We joined with the others, and trod toward the far side of the bowl valley in silence.

At the other end, we stopped before a small drakkar. Miklosek told me in a low voice, "We treasure the will of Lochost, that all things should be free. I am unable to free the dead, but I can prevent the living from becoming enslaved." There was a small catch in his voice, but I did not press. It was enough to be allowed to continue on my journey, and to have shared in a small part of their lives.

Festivals of Competition or Rivalry

When I was younger, I traveled with a group of adepts known to Barsaive as Masuya's Griffins. Our leader, Masuya, was an ork Cavalryman of the Sixth Circle. Normally, an adept of her skill would remain with her tribe and train new recruits. Masuya, however, had different ideas and gathered a group of adepts to travel Barsaive. I was among the three she chose, along with Grygier Breakiron, a Fourth Circle dwarf Weaponsmith, and Komendera Lamarand, a Third Circle elf Warrior. I was only Third Circle when I joined the Griffins. We traveled together for five years, into (and out of) some hair-raising scrapes. At the end of those five years, Masuya and her horse, Morningstar, decided it was time to retire; thus, we went on one last journey back to her

tribe's camp.

As the four of us approached the tent-town, we could hear hoofbeats, dozens of them, seemingly travelling aimlessly back and forth. Once we crested the gentle rise to the north of the camp, we could see what was going on.

Two groups of ork youths on horseback, clearly marked by gold or green flags on the end of slender willow twigs, were madly galloping about a dusty field, vying for possession of a freshly-slaughtered goat. It was quite evident that it was freshly slaughtered, as blood still dripped from the neck of the carcass as it was roughly jerked back and forth by the combatants.

"So it is time for the games again," Masuya observed. Rightly taking our silence for confusion (who would want to play a game with so gory a trophy?), she offered an explanation.

"The gold flags... that is my tribe, the Burning Blades. The green flags... that is my rival, Roshon's Riders. For many years, long ago, our tribes warred over the rights to a spring that lay to the north. The water there was good, sweet and fresh, and all who saw its worth desired to possess it. Many tribes fought, and were lost, as no one could stand the might of the Blades, or even the Riders.

"At the last, it came down to the two tribes. We clashed, over and over, but no tribe could be named winner. Both tribes launched raids for the water, but soon the Scourge came, and took the spring away.

"Though we were in the ground a long time, neither we nor the Riders forgot our rivalry, just as we did not forget the spring. We did not know the spring had passed. When we emerged, we clashed with the Riders again, and tried to raid the spring. There was no spring.

"First, this made us angry. Then, we found out the Riders blamed us for the loss of the spring, just as we blamed them. After that, some of us thought it was funny, just as some of the Riders did.

"There was a spring no more, but we still had our rivalry, and we orks thought it would be bad to let a good rivalry go to waste. Every year we come back to this place, to see who is better. Maybe we will

find the spring again, maybe we won't. If we do, this shall say who is it's master," she finished, pointing to the youths on the field below.

This was only one of the rough-and-tumble games we saw in the next few days. The green and gold teams also participated in drinking competitions, to see whose champion could drink the most hurlg without having the beverage make a return appearance. One game involved kicking a ball into a box set at one end of a long, open field. This was no hach'var ball, though. This ball consisted of a skull wrapped in thick burlap, then soaked in pitch and set aflame. More than a few orks were scorched as I watched, but the game went on.

Despite the number of dangerous events, there were also several that depended more on skill than brawn. Most of these also involved horses. In one, small rings no larger than a Braza dangled from lengths of ribbon, which were tacked to a tall framework. Riders holding stiff twigs would charge toward the frame, hoping to spear one of the rings. In another, riders raced to the end of a long track, only to quickly dismount and sit on folding chairs placed at the finish line.

In those three days, it seemed like the music and feasting never stopped. Apparently, the rivalry didn't end with the games. The Blades and the Riders vied for the title of loudest camp, or most food. At the end, the Riders were crowned the victors. Not to be outdone, the Blades' Elementalist gave the winners their 'spring'. He and others tossed buckets of water in the midst of the celebrating Riders, then cast a spell called Puddle Deep, giving the victors an impromptu mud bath.

Placation of an Evil or Benefactor

Once, long ago, before the Scourge claimed our land, our ancestors' freedom, and the sanity of three of our Passions, many Name-givers celebrated the Feast of Vestrial. On this day, Name-givers baked tiny sweetcakes by the dozen, then would play the most devious practi-

cal jokes on their friends and relatives. If the author of the joke was uncovered, he or she would be obligated to give a sweetcake to the victim by way of apology.

Not so today. The Feast of Vestrial comes and goes unremarked in most of Barsaive; perhaps this is for the best. Only one village maintains the tradition, in hopes of keeping the Passion placated. This village, Coldiron, near the Scythia Mountains, is a normal village every day of the year, except one. I was present for that one day, though at the time, I was quite ignorant of the whole affair.

As I was a visitor to the village, I was made the butt of most of the jokes. My morning cider was heavily salted; my evening wine was water colored with red ink. Someone made convincing quacking noises when I sliced into my roast duck dinner. Buckets of icy-cold water would appear over doors as if summoned by Elementals, and drench my good travelling clothes. Granted, the jokes were petty and not injurious, but they were, nonetheless, quite annoying.

By the time the sun set, I was nearly at my wit's end. My hair had been dyed green by the soap provided by the hosteler, my fourth set of clothes was still dripping on the windowsill, and someone had set loose a jarful of crickets in my room. I had started to shake the bugs out of my bedding and pack my things when a knock came at my door.

Before opening, I checked for buckets of water, spiders on the knob, or other tricks. Things seemed to be in good order, and I opened the door on a small group of villagers bearing trays of small sweetcakes and cider. They apologized for the events I had suffered that day, and explained that today was the ancient Feast of the Lost One, and they hoped that the Passion would be pleased by the remembrance. "We know some would think us mad, or worse, for doing this, but we hope, by honoring the Passion the way that was done before, that he might remember that his was a trickery that taught and enlightened, not destroyed."

I shook my head, laughed to myself, and accepted the cakes, but I marked the date, and resolved never to return to this village on it: Borrum 10.

In Conclusion

While it is my sincerest hope that this document has been both instructive and entertaining, it is not enough to simply read about festivals. They must be experienced. Therefore I charge you, dear reader, to go forth: seek out these or other festivals, and experience them. Life is short. Live.

Gamemaster Notes

Not only are the festivals described above fun for your player characters to attend (for the most part!), they can also provide good backdrops for scenarios, or constitute an adventure in and of themselves. What follows are some suggestions for using these festivals in campaigns, as well as more information on certain elements found in the text.

Commemoration of Kaer Opening

While the festival in the narrative text could be interesting for those who enjoy interaction, other elements can be included to engage those looking for combat. For example, a wanted criminal might slip into the kaer unnoticed, and depending on her motives, may either wreak havoc on the sealed kaer, or be the source of mysterious happenings (disappearance of food or clothing, strange shadows, etc.). Those in search of her might make trouble for those outside, depending on their motives. They may be officers of the law, or double-crossed accomplices looking for a pound of flesh from the betrayer.

As an alternative, the same situation can be used, but with a change in the characters involved. Instead of a wanted criminal, the fugitive could be a woman who refuses to marry a man who was chosen for her (or vice versa!). The situation, in this instance, could even be played for comedic effect.

Celebrations of the Harvest—and Match-making

Like the above, this festival is good for a group oriented toward interaction

and roleplaying. Intrigue can be added into the mix by using the following suggestion. The festival is used as a cover from a meeting between Iopan agents, a male and a female. Prior to this meeting, the rugmaker was provided with strips of cloth sewn together. Running through these strips is a very fine thread of enspelled silk. The spell does little other than provide a pattern for an astrally-perceiving adept to follow—in this case, the female agent, who needs to know which charm to pull so the meeting can take place.

Why all this trouble? The male spy is a double agent, and his cover has been blown. The Therans he betrayed are now on his trail, and he needs to pass very delicate and vital information to his government before the Therans find and silence him. Currently, the male agent is disguised as a textile merchant, which allowed him to pass the enspelled cloth scraps to the rugmaker, along with the charm he purchased (a miniature silver coin).

It may seem difficult to set the adventurers on his trail, but Throalic authorities may send the group there to investigate reports of espionage. As the Therans are also investigating, the adepts may find themselves in the unenviable position of having to ally with the Therans against the Iopan agents, particularly if the Iopans have sent along insurance in the form of other, more violently-inclined agents or hired mercenaries.

Veneration of Heroes and Passions

As the gamemaster could possibly imagine, this festival is an encounter of great interest and mystery in and of itself, but this does not preclude adding new wrinkles and situations.

Perhaps someone from a nearby village decides that he wants his unborn child to be an adept, and attempts to steal the axe, along with kidnapping an adept to help power the ritual. The adept in question could be either a member of the player character group, or one of the inhabitants of Tioshen. Either way, the player characters may wish to investigate,

either of their own volition, or at the behest of the village elder, Kaelber.

Alas, the axe will only work within the bounds of the village, as the culprit discovers when not only does the ritual fail, but his dreams become haunted by a torn, bloody figure silently pleading for something. The gamemaster may either have the adepts intervene before the man goes completely mad, or let them deal with the results of the culprit's lunacy. Meanwhile, the village begins to fall apart, as an integral part of its pattern is missing.

As for Tioshen's Axe itself, it is a magical item, and it is threaded, but the threads are not woven between the axe and any one person—rather, Tioshen's Dying Legacy bound the axe almost inextricably to the village of Tioshen. It is a significant part of the village's pattern, though it is not immediately apparent as the axe seems to 'disappear' when viewed on the astral. (This is due to it being, for all intents and purposes, part of the village itself, as well as being somewhat overwhelmed by the adjoining parts of the village's pattern.) It should take a very intent scan to differentiate it from the surrounding astral landscape.

Commemoration of Important Events

While the celebration described in the narrative text has long since passed, elements from the description can be woven into a new adventure.

The lights in the sky mentioned in the text are a rare appearance of the aurora borealis, but scientific knowledge of such phenomena does not exist in Barsaive. The fact that the lights appeared over Throal during Prince Neden's presentation is mere coincidence... but not everyone thinks so.

A cult has formed, calling themselves the Spirit Light Society, led by a Name-giver who was born under the lights. They believe that Neden is prophesied to be a great leader, based on the appearance of the 'spirit lights' at his presentation. They believe themselves to be his guardians, and are somewhat militant in belief. As a result, they have embarked

on a campaign to harass and discredit anyone who stands against Neden.

King Neden, of course, is unaware of any malfeasance by this group, and would not condone it if he did. Nevertheless, that fact does not prevent his craftier enemies from using the cult against him, especially when a vocal critic of the King's policies is assaulted by a group of fanatics declaring that, "Anyone who defies our sovereign King will face our wrath!" The adepts may be hired by the throne to deal with the Society, or used by one of the King's opponents to flush the cult into the open to create a smear campaign.

Celebration of Local Food and Crafts

T'skrang Hand Sign

This language consists of a set of gestures used to communicate ideas quickly when underwater, and quietly on land. Since brevity is important, the vocabulary of this language is comparatively small. This language may be learned quite easily with proper training. The Difficulty Number for learning this language with the Read/Write Language talent is 5.

Kithasa's Flute

Kithasa plays a legendary flute made from the femur of Hanjori Petrarca, a t'skrang Troubadour who lived before the Scourge. Hanjori is distinguished in t'skrang lore as being one of the few Troubadours who actually rose high enough to attempt the talent Confront Horror in combatting an entity. Unfortunately, he lost, and was killed.

This Horror, Abendroth, continued to be a plague on Barsaive until another t'skrang Troubadour, Oriana Sa'Tiol, took it upon herself to banish this Horror, inspired by tales of Hanjori's bravery and sacrifice: this, despite she was only Seventh Circle herself. She located Hanjori's remains with a spirit-talker half-adept. Only the femur was complete enough to be of any use in enchanting. She next enlisted the aid of a Nethermancer, Illusionist, and an Elementalist to fashion the *memento mori* into both a musical instru-

ment and a weapon capable of aiding her in the battle against Abendroth.

It took several years, but when the work was finished, Oriana sought out Abendroth. In the end, Oriana lost an arm and an eye, but the Horror was banished for the remainder of her natural span of years.

Oriana died, not long ago, and the flute was passed to her great-grandson, Kithasa. When Oriana passed, Abendroth's banishment ceased, and now the Horror seeks to destroy the flute, as well as whoever wields it. Kithasa knows this, and seeks aid.

HANJORI'S SONG

Maximum Threads: 1

Spell Defense: 20

Hanjori's Song is a flute made from the femur of a legendary t'skrang troubadour. It is roughly a foot long, and is etched with small geometric designs.

Thread Ranks

Rank 1 Cost: 200

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the flute. (Hanjori's Song)
Effect: The wielder adds +2 steps to his Emotion Song talent. If the wielder does not possess this talent, he gains it at Rank 2 when using the flute.

Rank 2 Cost: 300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Names of the creators of the flute. (Oriana Sa'Tiol, troubadour; Avenall Cullen, Elementalist; Osral Gyuras, Nethermancer; Morelan the Just, Illusionist.)
Effect: The wielder adds +2 steps to his First Impression talent. If the wielder does not have this talent, he gains it at Rank 2 when in possession of the flute.

Rank 3 Cost: 500

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the Horror that the flute was created to combat. (Abendroth)
Effect: The wielder adds +2 steps to his Taunt talent. If the wielder does not have this talent, he gains it at Rank 2 when in possession of the flute.

Rank 4 Cost: 800

Effect: The wielder adds +2 steps to his Bardic Voice talent. If the wielder does not have this talent, he gains it at Rank 2 when in possession of the flute.

Rank 5 Cost: 1300

Deed: The wielder must locate Hanjori's mortal remains. Once he does this, he must play a song of mourning with the flute. As the song nears its end, the wielder will be able to perceive the sound of a faint male voice singing along with the music. At this point, the wielder must pledge to banish Abendroth or see the Horror slain, sealing the pledge with blood magic (2 points of permanent damage). The voice will answer, "We shall not fail." This Deed is worth 1300 Legend Points. If the Horror Abendroth is already slain or banished, this Deed cannot be performed.

Effect: The wielder gains the Confront Horror talent at Rank 3 when in possession of the flute. If this effect is used against Abendroth, the Rank becomes 5, and may be increased by spending 1 point of Strain for 1 additional Rank, up to a maximum of Rank 15.

Preservation of Culture

Miklosek's Story

Miklosek is not, as the narrative text may suggest, a Nethermancer. Rather, he is a spirit talker half-adept, and as such, he possesses the following talents: Astral Sight, Spirit Hold, and Spirit Talk. While these talents have been of use to his moot, they have also brought him pain.

When he was a child, his best friend, Trosin, aspired to be a raider. Miklosek's talents were discovered early. Though he trained as a sailor and fighter, he was not permitted to go on raids. Still, he supported Trosin, and was proud to see his friend realize his dream. Miklosek was present when Trosin left on his first raid.

Unfortunately, Trosin's ship was downed by a Theran vessel, and the surviving crew taken as slaves. No one knew this until Trosin's spirit came to talk to Miklosek after the raider died. Trosin could not express himself well, but told

of the torments he'd suffered at the hands of the Therans, including his eventual death as a raw magic filter, used by a Theran magician.

Miklosek could feel his friend's pain, but helping Trosin was now beyond his meager capabilities. Trosin was able to reveal the Name of the magician, and now Miklosek seeks assistance in taking revenge on the murderer. If a group of adepts come into Thundersky hands, they may have a chance at freedom through Miklosek—if they swear to find and kill the magician.

Festivals of Competition or Rivalry

More than one ork tribe was interested in the spring. Though Matsuya claims only two are left, there is one more tribe surviving that fought for the spring. They have emerged from their kaer, and will search for the spring. An adept group may come across the first contact between the newly-emerged orks and the competitors.

Placation of an Evil or Benefactor

The Feast of Vestrial is an ancient holiday, no longer observed in practically all of Barsaive. It was celebrated as described in the narrative text, with the following alteration: no one knew what exact day the Feast would be, until the questors of Vestrial gave the announcement.

Once word went out, Name-givers would scramble to make the cakes, then set up suitable jokes to play on others. Most Name-givers who celebrated the holiday kept supplies in stock and on hand in case the Feast of Vestrial popped up. Those that didn't prepare in advance simply became victims.

It was only when Vestrial began to go mad that the date (for Coldiron, at least) became fixed. No one from the village knows when or why the change occurred, as records are spotty at best.

Being a treatise transcribed from the journeyman speech of Celia Toresque, held before the Council of Shadows in Bartertown.

*I have most humbly petitioned my superiors to allow this discourse to be included as an appendix to the mournfully fragmented chapter of the otherwise remarkable work **The Adept's Way** dealing with the Discipline of the Nethermancer. While it may still be a long time before I may be granted this honor, a visitor to the Great Library may gain access to these scrolls by filling out the proper forms in the Chamber of Unfinished Works. Please note that I have given my very best efforts in transcribing the oration as accurately as possible, and that I complied with the author's wish to include her corrections and notes, appearing in brackets.*

—Thalom, Junior Archivist
Great Library of Throal

Ask a Throalic merchant or a peasant from the shores of Lake Ban what happens to the deceased, their dear ones who have passed away, and you will likely receive the same answer: that Death herself has called them into her kingdom under the Death's Sea.

While in the face of the Passions we have no reasons to doubt this fact (and certain legends of nethermantic lore to suggest it as truth), a very crucial question poses itself to anyone with experience in the dealings of the nethermantic way: Why is it that some spirits (of Name-givers, that is) remain accessible to contact, some remain at the location of their deaths, and some remain inaccessible, while others may even be resurrected without trouble from but a speckle of dust of their former shells? The same old legends that give credence to the existence of the Imprisoned Passion state that it is weakened, that its grasp over life and death is rather uncertain at our time. Now ask yourself, dear reader, if Death is too weak to hold some within her kingdom, should those that are obviously outside of death be considered non-dead, or undead? A frightening notion? That everyone summoned, revived or called is or has been undead? Do not let predispositions blind you, though. The Undeath

you think of is likely to be Horror-related, or an imitation of that way—replacing the spirit to dominate the body, or twisting the spirit into a tool just like the body. Since the spirits of naturally deceased Name-givers are rather the opposite, spirits without a body, the idea 'Undead' does not fit. Not as well as *Sarrellien*, or 'Yearning Wanderers' for those schooled in the Throalic tongue.

So there are wandering souls and resting ones, the latter being those that remain sheltered under the Death's Sea. But why do the wandering ones remain behind? Did they love life more than others? Hardly so. Considering the rare cases in which spirits have been reported to return at their own will—to right a wrong or the like—(following the call of justice—a kind of summoning?) as opposed to the cases where living Name-givers summoned those souls, a conclusion suggests itself for the situation: it is not the spirits who remain behind, but the living who keep them behind—or at a grasp, enough to keep them from their final rest. Yes, that means that for every minute that you remember your deceased friend, he remains undead, in a way! This also explains some riddles of nethermantic magic.

First, why has no spirit summoned ever been able to confirm stories about Death's kingdom? Is it because it is unique for every one, as unique as the beholding of a Passion, or because the summoner has kept the spirit from reaching that place? The answer is simple. As long as the Pattern of the Name of the spirit remains in the minds of the living, he is not truly dead, as his legend is not yet forgotten. Also, this explains the fact that all enchantments dealing with the dead require Pattern Items or True Names, as does any Pattern magic. A puzzling question arises from this chain of thought which cannot be ignored, though. How can it be that attempts in summoning fail? We know we want to summon someone, so he is not forgotten, but still the attempt bears no fruit of success. Recall these cases, fellow Nethermancers, and I believe most of the Names of your targets have risen from books, and some gleaned from beings

other than Name-givers: sources without power over Patterns whatsoever.

The conclusion is obvious: the target has been forgotten before, his active Pattern dissolved. The memory recalled later by means of study cannot reach the spirit anymore—he passed away the moment he was first forgotten. This adequately explains how Nethermancers could have so long believed that the time someone has been dead mattered: a person dead for a day is more likely to be remembered than one dead for a hundred years, but either case is not impossible. Beware of one exception from these guidelines. Spirits may no longer be Name-givers as we know them, and who believes Tas-sashla's thesis of "every dead being the passion of his memory"? But every summoner knows and dreads the immense wills and the ambitions some astral denizens possess. Well, dear reader, so do spirits of the dead. Some have wills stronger than others and it is no wonder that former adepts among the spirits make up the bulk of those. A spirit may refuse to answer you, requiring strong magic to force him, or require you to utilize a Pattern Item, although he remains outside of the Kingdom. Still others—the legendary ones, no doubt—have entered Death's Realm and yet return, fuelling the legends we hold so dear. These are the ones who wage their wills against that of Death herself—a challenge indeed.

Seizing upon the topic of exceptions, it may be noted that major and core Pattern Items often survive their originators, acting as a strange sort of memory link. In special—unverified—cases of a willful spirit and a caring and skilled summoner, a forgotten spirit might even be drawn from the embrace of the Thirteenth Passion [yet some spirits seem to dread this possibility, seeking to destroy their former Pattern Items to become 'free'...]. Let me close this discourse with a blessing and a warning to the readership then. The danger be addressed first: Death may not be able to seize every spirit, but she may seize a many and these are always enough to include those who have come to her special attention. The lesson: you may resurrect someone once, but expect Death to cling to him the next

time with the force of a jealous lover. The blessing is a two-sided coin: you are more immortal than you think but do you truly want this existence, these shackles of other's memories?

Gamemastering Notes

Contact with the dead is a potential atmospheric device, and can be a defining, as well as a dangerous, act for a Nethermancer character. While spells like 'Experience Death' are easily controlled by the gamemaster, other available methods can become far more dangerous and destructive to the storyline than to the character. With the 'Whisper through the Night' spell, a gamemaster might find himself hard-pressed to keep players from gaining certain information they just should not have at a specific point in the story.

Aside from offering a number of story ideas, the fiction above may offer good reasons why a Nethermancer character could not just summon the spirit of a murder victim, which may prevent the player character from spoiling a well-planned plot centered on uncovering the victim's ancient past. Neither could he use that old grimoire found in a kaer to summon its ancient owner to simply reveal to him how to banish the Horror, keeping the characters from escaping its clutches too quickly. Additionally, the madman who would rather fling himself off a cliff instead of answering the characters' questions for fear of his master's punishment would be kept silent, without a Nethermancer player commenting that "This made the interrogation so much easier". Of course, these situations are, and should be, possible, but every one of them can be as supportive as they are destructive to a good storyline; controlling these situations with in-game reasoning should be at gamemaster's discretion. In short, with the concepts presented in the fiction above integrated into the game world, a gamemaster can easily create circumstances in which such a 'game-breaker' situation does not occur without either banning all related spells or forcing a player's hand.

WRITING TIPS

Capitalization in Earthdawn

There are certain circumstances in which a word must be capitalized when it does not appear at the beginning of a sentence. Examples include:

Game terms specific to Earthdawn (e.g., Attribute Step, Combat Round, Recovery Test). If in doubt as to whether a game term should be capitalized, refer to the Game Concepts chapter of **Earthdawn**, beginning on page 32. Locate the boldfaced game term in question. Chances are, if it is not at the beginning of a sentence and is capitalized, you should capitalize it, too. If it is at the beginning of a sentence, look further in the paragraph for the word, and note whether it is upper- or lowercased.

Terms specific to the history and culture of the Earthdawn world, especially those of great importance (e.g., Horror, Scourge, Passions, First Book of Harrow). If in doubt, the **How It Came to Pass** chapter of **ED**, beginning on page 20, may be of some help.

Anything that must be capitalized to be grammatically correct (e.g., proper names of geographical locations like the Thunder Mountains or the Serpent River).

Discipline Names

Take care when spelling the name of a Discipline. For example, the title of the Discipline is *not* Troubadour, but Troubadour.

The EDPT capitalizes Discipline names when used to refer to adepts devoted to its practice; thus "he is a Warrior" replaces "he is a warrior adept." This distinction also helps to distinguish between adepts (Warriors) and non-adepts (warriors). Descriptive words related to the Disciplines, like "nethermantic" and "wizardry," are not capitalized.

Similarly, each school of magic should be referred to by its Discipline (i.e., Elementalism, Wizardry, Nethermancy, Illusion), but the school is not capitalized when referring to individual spells (e.g., "It was an illusion.").

A New Beginning

The sleek dart arced gracefully through the air and sank into the cork with a satisfying lack of resistance. Ebon raised his eyebrows and took a step backwards. Just the slightest hint of smile threatened to shatter a face that, as far as anyone in the Lifted Veil who had seen him that evening could tell, might as well have been carved of stone. He turned and faced his opponent, a burly human with dark hair and a beard named Timon, who grudgingly began to reach for his coin pouch. In the background, the level of conversation had already returned to a steady buzz, with the sound of a lute accompanied by a voice which could probably have done with another drink right then, drifting through the thick atmosphere.

“You play well, elf. I have to admit that. Still, you nearly threw it away by missing with your second dart.”

The last dart had also missed the cherry but had landed neatly in the inner ring.

It is good enough. “Sometimes the luck falls my way. Sometimes it doesn’t. I was lucky to come out ahead.”

In the background Ebon’s ears could make out the faint chink of silver passing hands. He wasn’t the only one who had bet on himself.

“That’s three in a row now.” Timon cast a quick glance around the tavern, “I think I’ll quit for this evening.” His eyes settled quickly on the comely figures casting glances at him from the far end of room. “I have a far more rewarding plan for the rest of evening.”

He dropped the five pieces of silver into Ebon’s hand and began moving across the room.

Sitting behind the counter, the proprietor of the Lifted Veil, an aging dwarf who looked as though he had spent his entire life there, gave Ebon an appraising nod. “Tisn’t often that Timon is taken at that dartboard. Wherefrom do yer hail, stranger?”

The tall elf ran his hand through his dark hair, along the silver streak that parted it, and pulled up a tall barstool “I’ll have an ale please.” Ebon pushed some

of his recent winnings onto the bar.

“Strange name for place, isn’t that? Meriam! Methinks that ork could do with some more hurlg.” He sighed pushing the mug of ale toward Ebon in exchange for the coin and shaking his hairy head, “It is so hard to find good help these days.”

“I come from far away.” *You wouldn’t want to know anyway.*

“Oh, I could tell that. From yer accent I’d say ye be from the southwest, near Vivane. Me cousin Glenrick hails from that land. He runs a fine business. Don’t see much of him though -- long distance to travel, and it is far too close those Theran bastards for my liking!”

A rather large troll staggered up next to Ebon, and almost succeeded in missing the bar with mug. Good thing it was made of steel.

“Let me guess... Refill?” The dwarf

almost caused the troll to lose his balance by taking the mug from his hand, then turned around and headed off to a tankard with a label written in something illegible, probably troll.

Ebon took the opportunity to remove himself to the edge of the tavern where he had espied an empty table. *It is better to drink alone.*

Twelve drinks later he was staring blankly into the fireplace, seemingly mesmerized by the flowing patterns reflected in his amber eyes. The Troubadour was still at it much to the enjoyment of the crowd which was finally beginning to diminish.

It is truly amazing how a bit of wine can soften up the throat ...and the brain.

It was true. All signs of hoarseness had left the Troubadour hours ago. His wits had followed soon after and by now anyone listening to the actual words he was singing, would probably be more than a little confused. The few members of the audience who had not the common sense to have departed earlier

couldn’t have cared less. Part of the reason was that their minds had also descended into the abyss of intoxication. The dwarf behind the bar was smiling although he too was starting to show signs of strain. Business had been good tonight.

Ebon stood up, very carefully. *Why do I do this to myself?*

Fortunately the chair he had been sitting on was fairly sturdy and it helped him support his weight. As he took a deep breath his blurred vision snapped back into sharp focus.

I have been worse.

His vision began to blur again.

Focus!

Leaving his remaining winnings on the table for the barmaid, he slowly made his way towards the door.

The rush of cool, fresh air filling his lungs did wonders for Ebon’s head. He took a deep breath through his nose, intent on savoring the fresh smell of the pre-dawn morning, and immediately regretted it.

There really is nothing to compare to the foul stench of the city. How does everyone here bear it?

He began a slow amble towards the inn at which he had booked a room earlier in the afternoon.

No point in rushing back.

With no clouds or moon the sky painted a perfect starscape, like thousands of tiny kernels of fire floating in the distant ether above.

Suddenly something came over him. The fine hair on his back began to tingle, standing on end. Ebon’s vision snapped right back into focus, the drunkenness dissipating in an instant. His instincts never lied, something was not right.

He paused. His footstep echoed faintly from the wall of the house behind him.

That was no echo.

Quickly he spun around, scanning the narrow alley behind him. A wave of dizziness threatened to overwhelm him momentarily.

Damn. Don't show any sign of weakness.

Hiding in the shadows about 50 yards back was a small figure -- probably human. Even as Ebon began to retrace his footsteps back towards the figure, it remained perfectly still.

Idiot still thinks I haven't spotted him yet. To his credit though he was fairly well hidden. Probably an accomplished thief.

Once Ebon had closed to within ten yards though, the would-be follower finally panicked and leaped up as if to run away. Ebon was faster, grabbing the slight human by the shoulders and spinning him around, pinning his back to the wall in one swift motion.

"Why were you following me?"

No reply. The follower was a human male, and one of the ugliest specimens that Ebon had ever had the misfortune of having seen. It appeared that his face had survived an encounter with a worm-skull.

He tried to struggle free but Ebon was larger and stronger. Moving his hand to the little man's throat Ebon squeezed gently and repeated his question.

"I asked you why you were following me. I am not going to ask again." Had the man's face not been purple from asphyxiation it would have been white from fear.

Ebon heard the tell-tale sound of gravel between stone and soft leather a moment too late. *I should have guessed a thief like this would not work alone. Move!*

Ebon spun around just in time to avoid being skewered in the back by a very nasty looking knife. It caught him in his side instead of the heart.

A wave of dizziness coupled with nausea rolled over him as he staggered backwards clutching at his side.

For Florannus' sake, that hurts!

Ebon got a glance at his assailant. Another human, but this one was a brute, at least as tall as himself and built like an ork scorcher. His grin revealed a mouth with three and half teeth and the smell emanating from it did not help the nausea. To his side, Ebon could hear Ugly getting to his feet, coughing, spluttering and cursing some of the more colorful profanities known in Barsaive.

He glanced at the wound in his side. It looked nasty.

It won't kill me, though I can't say the same for you two.

As if to try and prove him wrong, a searing pain ripped through him as Ebon took a step backwards. Another wave of dizziness rushed him, and a burst of stars appeared in his vision, which was narrowing down to a small tunnel, at the end of which he could see the brute advancing on him with the knife.

Ebon stumbled back another step and the tunnel closed completely.

The cold breeze across his naked curled up form woke Ebon. He opened his eyes and drew a sharp breath. For his effort he was rewarded with a dull pain from his right side, just below his ribs. *Muggers.*

In an instant he was sitting bolt upright. The smell of blood was very thick in the air. He shivered as a small gust fanned over his body. It was at least another hour and a half till dawn. Reminded of his injury as he shivered, Ebon gazed at his side. The gash was almost completely healed.

Tomorrow that will be gone, as will any link to those savages.

Ebon gazed at his hands. They were covered in dried blood.

Ten bars of orichalcum say that most of this is not mine.

About ten yards away, Ebon could see a small puddle left over from the storm from the previous day. He moved over to it and proceeded to clean off the dried blood. Once that was done he looked up the alley to where he had been attacked. Even without his exceptional eyesight he would have known that the two mangled forms lying there were his assailants.

Brute was about two yards from where Ebon had last remembered seeing him, lying face up in a pool of his own blood. Most of his throat was missing.

Ugly had made it twenty yards before he too had ended up in pool of his own blood. At least he was face down, sparing the unfortunate person who would find his corpse in the morning the added trauma of gazing upon his hideous visage.

Ebon gathered his scattered belongings. Except for his cloak, all his clothes were torn apart. *It's always such a waste.*

His leather pouch still contained the ten silver pieces he had left. Searching the bodies of his attackers Ebon found another fifty.

Well that's irony for you. Little point in letting this go to waste.

Donning what remained of his clothes and wrapping his cloak tightly around himself, Ebon left the grisly scene as hastily as possible, looking furtively around to see that no one else was about.

The rest of the short journey to the Twisted Band was uneventful. Even before he entered through the back door of the reasonable establishment, Ebon could smell the faint odor of yeast rising, and the faint hint of a nearly lit oven. The dwarf baker seemed unfazed by the entrance of an inebriated patron at four thirty in the morning, and continued to knead his dough, acknowledging the newcomer's presence with a small nod.

Ebon returned the gesture as he headed for the common room and the stairs leading back to his room. Without a sound he returned to the room he had procured earlier and collapsed on the bed, the distant sound of morning birds barely slowing his passage to slumber.

The faint sound of conversation and laughter drifted up to Ebon's room. He stirred and opened his eyes. The sun was streaming in through the ample window on the south side of the room. A dull pain in his head, as well as from his side reminded him of the previous night's events. With that thought he awoke fully.

Ebon descended the stairs into the common room with a cat-like grace lost to the patrons breaking their fast below. The smell of freshly baked bread accompanying that of fried bacon would have been enough to arouse the hunger even of those who had already eaten this morning. A table in the corner of the room was empty and Ebon headed straight for it.

Two tables away sat a pair of guardsmen, stout dwarfs clad in chain mail that must have uncomfortable at best,



Image © Rita Márföldi

although they appeared not to notice. Before Ebon's breakfast arrived they were joined by three others. Two more wearing chain mail, and the third a human dressed in black robes. Although no one in the room made any obvious attempts to move away from her, the space around remained strangely devoid of anyone save the two dwarfs she was accompanying.

As they approached, one of the seated guards raised his coffee mug and greeted them jovially. They seated themselves as the barmaid took their order.

"So, Chiara, what have these two dragged you out for this morning?"

The Nethermancer remained silent and shifted a commanding gaze over to one of the dwarfs who had accompanied her into the tavern. He piped up quickly, "Ahem. Well, there were some killings down by Fifth. Rather strange circumstances."

His companion continued the tale. "Looks like two thugs got their just desserts. Still, their bodies were horribly mangled, as if they been savaged by a wild beast..."

"A tiger?"

The volume of the entire room almost seemed to dip for a second as the Nethermancer spoke. No emotion passed through those cold lips whatsoever.

The barmaid returned with two more steaming mugs of coffee. Ebon could smell the hint of rum mixed in with it.

The first dwarf, having regained his composure, continued, "Well how an ani..."

He glanced at the robed figure seated next to him. "...*tiger* got into the city is anyone's guess. If it's still around though, we'll find it. Farvlen is still out of the city, but I'm sure he'll be able to track it down."

Ebon shifted uneasily as another barmaid placed his breakfast in front of him. Only two days and already he would have to leave.

Chiara passed her gaze over in his direction. She seemed to be staring through him, as though she was studying something imperceptible to anyone else in the room. A small furrow creased her brow as her eyes returned to their normal focus. Ebon pretended not to notice her close scrutiny of him. As suddenly as her attention had drifted to him, it seemed to return to the conversation at hand. She casually removed her steely gaze, allowing him the luxury of finishing his meal in peace.

The harsh sun beating down upon his back, Ebon crested the hill and gazed back along the sinuous road. Despite the sweat painting his face, the weight of his pack and the handsome bow in his hand barely seemed to bother him. Directly overhead, the sun glinted on the roof tiles of the town in the distance, shimmering in the midday heat. Slowly he turned around, eyes looking to the road that lay ahead. In the distance, maybe two days' travel away, he could see the faint hint of chimney smoke from Travar.

There I shall start again.

Ebon resumed his course.

EL KABONG!

Maximum Threads: 1

Spell Defense: 15

El Kabong appears to be a simple lute, formed of plain wood; a brown leather strap is fastened to each end of the instrument with bronze studs. However, when a thread is woven to the item, it becomes a formidable weapon.

El Kabong was the lute of the famed Troubadour Q'kstrau Makgra, a t'skrang from House Syrtis. He was one of the first t'skrang to emerge from torpor after the Scourge, and some have whispered that the experience left him somewhat... addled. Still, no one could doubt his courage and strength. He was single-handedly responsible for many noble deeds (though his sometime partner, fellow t'skrang Boboluea, would beg to differ), and through them all, this instrument was his dispenser of both song and justice. Eventually, he was made head of the Syrtis guard, in recognition for his contributions to society at large (or to keep him out of trouble, Boboluea claims).

Thread Ranks

Rank 1 **Cost:** 300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the lute. (El Kabong)

Effect: The lute may be used as a melee weapon. It has a Damage Step of Strength + 2. It also increases the wielder's Emotion Song talent by 1 Step. If the wielder does not possess the talent, he gains it at Rank 1 when using the lute.

Rank 2 **Cost:** 500

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the first wielder of the lute. (Q'kstrau Makgra)

Effect: The Damage Step of the lute is increased to Strength + 4. The strings jangle loudly whenever a blow lands.

Rank 3 **Cost:** 800

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the first wielder's partner. (Boboluea)

Effect: The Damage Step of the lute is increased to Strength + 5. In addition, the wielder may, for the cost of 1 Strain, use

the jangling of the strings to create confusion in his enemy. In order to use this ability, the wielder must shout "Kabong!", make a successful hit, then roll a Dexterity test, adding the lute's Rank of Thread to the step. If it exceeds the opponent's Spell Defense, the opponent will be at -2 Steps to all tests for a number of rounds equal to the Success Level (1 round for an Average Success, 2 for Good, etc.). One Karma may be spent on this effect for an additional 1 Strain.

Rank 4 **Cost:** 1300

Key Knowledge: The wielder must learn the Name of the first wielder's most implacable enemy. (Marfella 'Dirty' Daunella, of House K'tenshin)

Effect: The Damage Step of the lute is increased to Strength + 6. In addition, if the ability from Rank 3 is successfully used, the wielder may spend 1 additional Strain to increase the length of the opponent's confusion by one round. When this is done, illusionary exploding stars or tweeting birds circle the opponent's head (at the wielder's choice) for the duration of the effect.

Coming in Issue 3: *The Veins of Throal*

The first war against Thera was a dark time for freedom. Throal won in the end, with the help of their allies, especially Jedaiyen Westhrall, who had mapped out caverns leading into Throal from the Serpent River where supplies could be brought, destroying the effectiveness of the Theran blockade.

But that has now changed:

"Westhrall's Passage has been destroyed. We did so several months ago, in preparation for a possible Theran attack. We have solid intelligence that they were using it as a passage for Theran agents and infiltrators into the inner cities. What that means is we now need a new route."

This brought another gasp, this time from Nael, whose features had gone pale. Barreling on, Telbon continued. "We desperately need you to seek out another passage, a passage that we can use to get supplies to Throal in the event of a siege."



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The Veins of Throal is an exploration of the caves and tunnels that crisscross the Throal Mountains and beyond. Whether the veins are an exploitable weakness or a saving grace remains to be seen....