

100% Fan-Created Content!

Autumn, September 2019

DEATH JOURNAL

Issue #30
Vol 3, no.3



**CREATE RIVALS
FOR YOUR PCs**

**KAS vs. VECNA
& CONSTELLATIONS
OF GREYHAWK**

**INTRODUCE 5E PLAYERS
TO GREYHAWK**

RHENNÉE vs. DUKE KARLL

MASCOTS OF THE PIT

BEGGARS vs. THIEVES

Librarian's Chronicle



In publishing, there's a few constants which are almost always gonna happen. Authors and artists will run behind schedule. There will always be last-minute changes. Fonts will be a headache. Work will get lost in a reboot, hard drive failure, or a system crash. Prices will rise. There'll be hours and hours spent on hunting down citations.

This issue has been surprising, though. Not because a lack of all those things—because all those things *did* happen, including the failure of an external drive which delayed this issue's release by a full week. Rather, because of the interest and response from the community. We always try to get an issue out within a certain window. But, as long as it's in that window, everything's fine. The Summer issue, however, was a little further into the window than usual, so there was only two months between issues, rather than the normal three. All the authors and artists, however, really stepped up and community members responded to calls for articles with gusto! There was no shortage of material, and even one artist gave ideas for content based on the art they were doing.

That's likely been the most amazing part about being the Editor-in-Chief of the magazine. I had *no idea* there'd be so much interest. We're already at about 1,000 downloads of the previous issue of the *Oerth Journal*. We're starting to get enough articles that we can plan more than one issue ahead. We have some artists who contribute to *every* issue, helping establish a certain look for the magazine. Readers talk about what they'd like to see. There's even an *adventure* in this issue. And two more adventures already waiting in the wings.

It's likely, as a contemporary content producer, it's a bit easier to garner readers and contributors than it was when the previous Editor-in-Chief, Rick Miller, first took over the magazine in 2005. Facebook had only just started, let alone gotten popular. MySpace was still a thing, and the concept of "social media" didn't even exist, yet. There was only one issue in the twenty-teens, and even then, it was difficult to get content. I'm sure Erik Mona, Steve Wilson, and QSamantha had quite a time getting writers. So, I have the privilege of curating the magazine in an age with more actively engaged fans than ever before.

There's certainly different expectations nowadays. Like movies all have to have better and better CGI than they did last year. Art, writing, layout, licensing, design, intellectual property laws, and much more have changed in the last 24 years. But, thanks to the contributions of you, the Reader, and you, the Fans, I have the privilege of producing and publishing this magazine more frequently and regularly than ever in its history. We're on track for the Winter issue to be the fourth this year. A rather monumental feat, to be sure, and we're glad to have an audience engaged enough to read it all!

Kristoph Nolen
Editor-in-Chief



THE OERTH JOURNAL

Volume III, no. 3, issue #29

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kristoph Nolen

Editorial Assistance — Allan T. Grohe Jr., Bryan Blumklotz, Krissy Dominy, Cal Scrivener, Denis Tetreault

COVER ART

[Shabazik](#) — The cover art is titled "Canned Meat". Undoubtedly a "feud" going on with ogres on the winning end!

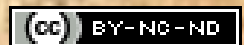
Contributing Artists: Darlene, Chad DuLac, Will "Giantstomp" Dvorak, Karl Kersch, Anna Meyer, Kristoph Nolen, Zuul "Rurat" Ramsey, Wayne A. Reynolds, Thom Vandevenne, and Jim Zubkovich.
Additional art courtesy Wizards of the Coast.

Contributing Cartographers: Nathan Doyle, Tom Vandevenne

LAYOUT Kristoph Nolen

WEBMASTER AND PROVIDER

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A FIFTH OF GREYHAWK

Introducing 5e Players to Greyhawk



A continuing series looking at helping new players and DMs

By Jon Roy, [@johnroycomic](#)

Greyhawk Online is proud to bring you our newest contributor – John Roy. John is a lot of things, but, perhaps the most significant to the Greyhawk reader here, is that he’s a published author for Wizards of the Coast in Dragon magazine. Specifically, a recent article introducing the World of Greyhawk to new players, Behind the Screen: Greyhawk. So, Greyhawk Online asked John to come write for us, and he happily came onboard!!

One of the other things John is, is a fantastic comedian (whose credits; include being on shows like the Tonight Show, Conan, Craig Ferguson, etc.). Take a look at his [performance on Conan!](#) So, rest assured, he’s likely going to bring a light-hearted and easy-reading style to this new article series.

Lastly, John is also a really big fan of the WORLD OF GREYHAWK. So, John is addressing a topic which is often difficult for a lot of groups with new players ... how to introduce Greyhawk to players without having to get inundated with a zillion facts to have to memorize. In this first article, Jon talks about how Greyhawk can be anything to anyone, there’s no one single way to to play in Greyhawk ... and characters can be all kinds of things!

Look for John’s [continuing series](#) each week, starting now! You can find his articles on GreyhawkOnline.com, with the next installment already available!

A Fifth of Greyhawk – Part One

When I began my Fifth Edition Dungeons and Dragons campaign, there was never any question which setting I would use. My favorite has always been Greyhawk. None of my players had ever played in The Flanaess and knew nothing except the list of gods in the back of the Players Handbook. I wanted to give them an authentic Oerthly experience which would show off everything I love about the setting, but not let that get in the way of playing a fun campaign. I gave myself a goal. Without bogging them down with character restrictions, reading assignments or expository speeches, I would immerse them in The World of Greyhawk from their first act as players.

Creating your ideal character exactly as you see them is one of the central pleasures of a role playing game. I told my players to come up with whatever they wanted and together we would fit them into The Flanaess. If it was in the official Fifth Edition books, it was fair game. Gary Gygax’s world was vast enough to encompass gun-slinging demigods and crashed starships. It would be able to handle whatever Jeremy Crawford threw at it.

My first player wanted to play a African woman cleric in “Egyptian style armor.” They selected Boccob as their god and Knowledge as their Domain. I remembered Gygax saying he originally envisioned the Flan as Africans so we decided his cleric was a Flan nomad from the Bright Desert. The nomadic tribes had limited roles for women so in my campaign the Church of Boccob would recruit talented tribal girls at an early age so their potential would not be wasted. This cleric was raised in their Egyptian-style temple in a Bright Desert oasis in a nod to my player’s original concept. Now she repaid her educators by adventuring on their behalf.

My next player wanted to play a Lawful Good half-orc paladin. I explained that in the Flanaess, half-orcs were social outcasts, living among the orcs or in human slums. He suggested a human soldier found a half-orc baby after a battle with an orc tribe, and took the child back to his village to raise him in the faith of St. Cuthbert. The half-orc paladin would have to constantly prove his worth to a world which shunned and distrusted him. The player loved the idea. I placed his home village in Furfyondy, and we had another character with ties to the Flanaess.

My next player wanted to play a Neutral drow ranger who had escaped from the Underdark. I explained drow were even more despised on the surface than half-orcs, but the drow librarian at the Guild of Wizardry showed that, with effort, they could fit in to society. My player was up for the challenge and decided his ranger had been anonymously helping a human village from his forest hideout until he earned their trust.

Finally my fourth player created a warlock of The Great Old One named Baba Manyá. Off her Russian-style name, I suggested the Rhennée as her ethnicity. We decided her Patron was an entity from the Rhennée home world, greatly feared by Baba's superstitious people. Before we played a single encounter, my players had a glimpse of the world of Greyhawk and where their character fit into it, without having to sacrifice their creative vision, or read a bunch of lore.

Available Online Now— [Part II: Immersion Without Boredom!](#)

Check online at GreyhawkOnline.com for more in this series by John Roy!

[Editor's Note:

John has presented us with a fine little group of adventurers. They are, without a doubt, a mixed bag. ... and that's the intent. Gary Gygax used to continually be amazed people unrelentingly wanted information about **his** version of Greyhawk. And he would most often fairly politely remind them his home game was his own, and they should go out, make Greyhawk their own, and do with it as they wished.

Allen Hammack, in the Foreword of *the World of Greyhawk* (1980) by Gygax, said: "The WORLD OF GREYHAWK is yours, now — yours to do with as you wish. You can mold new states out of old or inflame ancient rivalries into open warfare as you tailor the world to suit the needs of your players. The time has come for new legends to be created, new battles to be fought, new songs to be sung. It is your world — and welcome to it!"

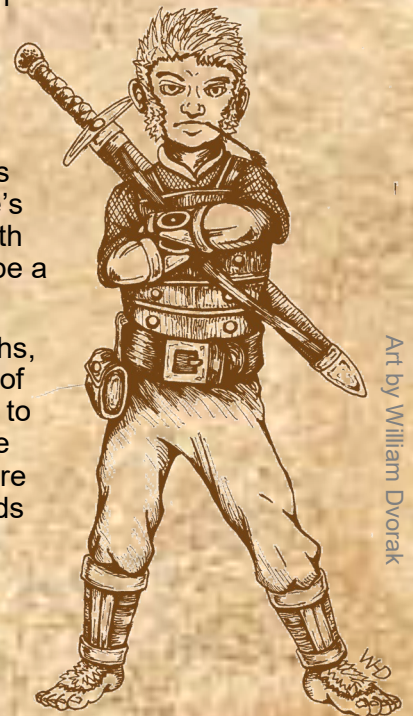
And, in response to the great demand from fans worldwide who wanted to know more about the setting, **James Ward**, the author of *Greyhawk Adventures* (1988), wrote: "I know that I am doomed in my effort to please everyone. I feel I'm about to enter into a love-hate relationship with thousands of GREYHAWK game fans. I truly believe there are sections in this book that everyone will read and love, but the other side of the coin is also true ..."

The point here is to remember they **wanted** us to make it our own, and do all kinds of fun things in Greyhawk. And while you can't please everyone all the time, there's no sense in going on and on about why someone else is playing it wrong. Like both the song and Wil Wheaton say: "It's okay to not like things. It's okay—But, don't be a dick about it."

I fondly remember when I first made up my mind to include samurai, ninja, pharaohs, and *spahi* in my own Greyhawk. It was 3rd Edition. Some of the "Complete" line of sourcebooks had come out, and *Living Greyhawk* didn't allow foreign strangeness to go on. ... and in conversations, I told people I "got it" why they didn't allow it, since Greyhawk is middle European fantasy. ... But then, oh, but **then!** I found out there was a map! It had Egyptian things, and Japanese and Chinese things, and all kinds of other fantasy analogs in Greyhawk outside the Flanaess! I didn't have to "ban" these things from my game! I could let my players be as weird as they wanted! And I did.

They were warlocks from the Celestial Imperium of Shao Feng, they were Touv Spirit Shaman from Hepmonaland, Baklunish Psion/Monks from Zahindi, and they were Olman Shugenja who worshipped Quetzalcoatl (which came out like an Aztec High Priest, essentially). They were different, and that was the fun of it. I made up stuff about where they were from. While it may've been based on a map, there weren't any officially published sources which told me what *not* to do.

What John is showing us here in this first installment is making the character is half the fun. And we should never let what someone else thinks get in the way of having fun in the WORLD OF GREYHAWK.]



Art by William Dvorak

PERSECUTION AND MURDER

Rhennée in the Duchy of Urnst

Finding out who continues old malevolence

By Kristoph Nolen

So, *gadjo*, you have come again to speak to Meritaelin, your good and faithful gypsy friend, eh? Tales of villains and woe, you seek? Of evil-hearted men, eh? Of grudges which last years and fill the hearts of men with venom? Ah, yes, *gadjo* - there are those who resent *The People of the Waters*. I am here to tell you, we see grudges from those outside our community all the time.

So, let me tell you, there is a man who hates the *goro* - the downtrodden people of the world. More than his enemies, more than the lords across the river who oppose him, more than anything ... he hates *us*, the *Rhennée*.

This man, among his own people, is known as a Duke. He reigns over the common folk of his realm, treating them with fairness. But, those for whom he has no care are treated as if they have few rights. To him, they are peasants and plebeians, meant for nothing more than providing for him. But, more than any others, we are exploited and harassed. We are stopped to pay extra taxes, prohibited from trading areas, and even jailed for lacking fishing permits, but are driven away by the illegal fishermen who aren't harassed as we are. We are banned or kept out of places, simply because people recognize us by our clothing or boats. We're accused of being thieves whenever something is missing—whether we were even present, or not. There is a long history of His Grace creating laws which put us at a disadvantage ... it seems to me there's little reason for it other than sheer hatred.

You might reasonably ask why this is, eh *gadjo*? I asked the same question of one of the *vetha*, our Wise Women. She told me a story which makes it seem as though there's nothing more behind it than a man's pride. According to local storytellers, His Grace is a skilled huntsman and woodsman and had gone on a hunt near the

Opicm River, but the hunt hadn't gone very well. So, rather than return to the keep, the huntsmen turned to emptying their cups. While riding, His Grace's horse latched its bit betwixt its teeth and took its head to run far and away. The horse bucked the Duke into the river and ran on. As His Grace struggled in the water, it wasn't the Duke's men who came to find him - for they were no more sober than he - but rather one of us who pulled him from the water. Needless to say, it was his *barikanipé*, the Duke's pride, which was injured more than anything, and his embarrassment led him to blame the *Rhennée* for his fall.

Misunderstandings of the culture of my people, *the Rhennée*, created suspicions and fears, which in turn led to rampant speculations, stereotypes, and biased stories. I'm sure, *gadjo* you may've heard us called thieves, cutpurses, liars, beggars, gadabouts, tramps, vagrants, kidnappers, and worse. And while there's notorious individuals who may have contributed to those stereotypes, that doesn't represent *all* of us.

Unfortunately, too many of these stereotypes and stories are still readily believed today. Karl contributed to many of them, and often made many of them seem even more true by passing laws which outlawed our customs, language, and clothing as well as forcing us to attend schools and churches approved by the Duke.

You see, *gadjo*, Karl uses any means available at his disposal to persecute us. Very commonly, that means the hard-hearted men of his cavalry. They will ride down my people whenever they find them ashore, and destroy their boats and what little property which they may own. Our lives are contained on our tiny barges, and the cavalry, the Bar Rampant, puts every bit of it under the torch. We call them the *Chismesara* because they are known for the tall, hard leather riding boots they wear ... and it is those hard jackboots which trod upon our backs.

There are those of your kinsmen, *gadjo*, who say

Duke Karl is a good man, that he cares for those under him and he cares for his nation. Therein lies the rub. Because we are different, and hold different customs, Karl views the *Rhennée* as not part of his nation. And while it is true we are different than you and we do not hold ourselves beholden to gods like you, we are as a part of any nation as the rivers which run through them. When we are not given a voice when leaders are chosen, we will not follow them. But, The Waters flow through the land, whether men there want a river or not.

Though we may see it may not be all the fault of a single man, Duke Karl is ultimately the man responsible for the actions of those who answer to him. And he allows the persecution of the *Rhennée*. There is a saying amongst your people, I believe ... "If you lie down with dogs, you're going to get fleas". And Duke Karl is *pherde pushuma*, as flea-infested as they come.

[Note from the "gadjo": Upon further investigation, it seems the rumor about Duke Karl drunkenly falling into the river after being thrown from his horse is completely fictitious. At least, as it regards Karl, it is. It seems there was **some** diplomat to whom this happened, but, no one truly seems to know who it was.]



Art by William Dvorak

"WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN?"

This article is obviously from the point of view of a person within the Rhennée culture. The catch of it is that, essentially, they're not wrong – except in the fact it's not Duke Karl who's doing it.

Hadric, former Mayer of the capitol city of Leukish, was a horrible and egomaniacal man, to say the very least. He used all of his political power to meet his own ends, and had managed to have the entire nation's economy under his thumb, and thus controlled nearly every aspect of what happened not just within Leukish, but all of the Duchy.

Since Duke Karl realized the power the man had begun to wield in the Duke's absence, he banished him. Since then, Karl has begun the process of cleaning up the things Hadric had done.

Unfortunately, this included not only the other politicians who Hadric had put in place, and the corruption he'd brought about, but, also, the policies he'd put into effect.

There aren't any official laws which specifically target the ethnic minorities, but, it's often the case that the way laws are written they can be abused by those who enforce them. So, while there's no law which actually says "Rhennée", a small percentage of the Lords, burgomeisters, etc. who are responsible for villages and so forth still use laws prejudicially against the Rhenfolk. Even a handful of military officers, like a minority of the Bar Rampant cavalry, choose to act against the Rhennée, persecuting them.

But, all it takes is a few.

It is unfortunately the way with such things that those who are in power continue to do as they wish, until someone stands up to stop the malfeasance. Duke Karl has had success in doing so in the last ten years wherever he's found corruption.

... but from the sound of Meritaelin's opinion, the time has come to stop the remaining underlying oppression!

THE PIT - GLADIATORIAL FAVORITES

Two Mascots for the Foreign and River Quarters

Oscar the Albino Owlbear & Oswald the Manticore

By Cal Scrivener, with Zuul Ramsey

Illustrations by Zuul "Rurat" Ramsey

The Pit (F8) is the local center of entertainment in the Foreign and River Quarters. It offers gladiatorial bouts, among other things. The River quarter has a favorite mascot, Oswald the manticore, while the Foreign Quarter prefers Oscar the albino owlbear. There's even toys made of them for youngsters!

These two mascots are enormously popular. Oswald and Oscar are mascots, first and foremost. They're not *primarily* combatants in the Pit, but, they do enter bouts for gladiators to fight against them. *Monster combats are always well attended, and for more than the past dozen years the Pit has featured regular fights against Oswald and Oscar.*

When this kind of match is set up, it's something more along the lines of entertainment, like wrestling matches. A match is mostly set up to show how dangerous and formidable the mascots really are, and it's somewhat presumed Oscar or Oswald are going to beat whatever gladiator happens to be scheduled to face them. These bouts are not intended to actually kill the gladiator, and both Oswald and Oscar know not to maul their opponent after they're downed. But, it's not uncommon for less-than-scrupulous gladiators to want to make a name for themselves by being the one to actually kill a rival's favorite mascot.

The manticore's tail spikes have been docked (although he has learned to use a sideswiping, clubbing action with his tail).

There's one main difference between the two and the way they're kept ... Oscar is more of a "natural" creature, and so, has keepers who are like a zookeeper who handle him. Oswald on the other hand, is entirely able to converse with his attendants. So, since he can easily communicate, Oswald clearly has made a deal of some sort, possibly some sort of performer's contract, even. It's not uncommon for a manticore to serve a master, so long as that

master offers him tribute of some kind, usually equaling or exceeding the importance of the food he'd otherwise have. And Oswald is treated superbly! Because of this, Oswald has a disposition slightly better than many manticores, since both Oswald and Oscar have been mascots at The Pit for more than a decade, and he's clearly agreeable to it. He's intelligent, and it would be unlawful to restrain



him or imprison him against his own will, in the City of Greyhawk. Obviously, he chooses to remain at The Pit because he gets something out of it personally.

Oscar is beginning to grow close to what would be "old age" for an owlbear. Some people suggest there's already been more than one "Oscar" over the years.

The delightful little toys and plushies sold at The Pit for youngsters are almost just as popular as the mascots themselves. They're lovingly crafted by some of the children at the City Orphanage (T12). The children absolutely love getting to make them.

Essentially, the children work to qualify to possibly become apprentices of the locally renown toymaker, **Sen Thelamae** (Human male, Exp18, LE) when they're over 14 years old. Sen is the proprietor of **The Grinning Mammet** (A22) in the Artisans Quarter.

The plushies and toys are sold like any other items at an insular venue like an arena. Just like at concerts, sporting events, and shows; they're definitely not cheap, but, the money goes directly

to the children themselves and a portion of the proceeds is given to support the City Orphanage itself. Not unlike a child in school selling chocolate treats for unusually high prices. But, they're popular, and sell well.

There's one apprentice tailor in charge of all the orphans' learning of stitching and making the plushies. A trained tailor or toymaker might have better or smaller seams and such, but, the toys are definitely not poor quality. The children get to visit the tailor's shop while they're "working". It helps the children learn strong work ethics. And, the Orphan Matron certainly appreciates someone else helping take care of the children each day! One great upside for the children is when they go to The Pit, they get to watch the sporting events and gladiator matches there. Sometimes, they actually get to go with the barkers in the stands, to hand out the toys and plushies when someone buys one.

Oswald is a firm favorite with a faction from the River Quarter who cheer him on, and hiss and boo at his opponents.

Rhina the Ogress (human female, F11, N), who runs the very popular **Silver Garter** (R13) brothel in the River Quarter, is a big fan of Oswald. She celebrates him on days he fights and goes to events when Oswald visits out in the city. She has a manticore costume similar to oriental dragon costumes made with bamboo hoops on the inside and covered with a rich fabric. When she is out rooting for Oswald, Rhina jaunts about in the streets near The Pit manipulating the huge manticore costume/marionette making it appear to dance lively through the streets. There are other fans who help her with the display. There's a small group of Rhennée from the Barge Inn (R10) who like to perform with her.



In the Foreign Quarter, Oscar is just as popular. In the small neighborhoods of "Little Ket" and "Burrow Heights", amongst the thousands of other fans, there's small contingents of especially zealous Oscar fans. The *hobniz* of Burrow Heights (F14) have a tradition of wearing hand-painted white beaks and white-feathered hats in support of their favorite mascot and combatant.

The residents of Little Ket (F16) have a tradition during any event where Oscar has a match. They remain standing for the entire event, as a sign of support, if Oscar ever fell in battle, they'd be there, standing at the ready, to fight for him if he needed help. Obviously, this is more symbolic than anything. There'd be absolute chaos if Oscar was ever hurt badly and fans stormed onto the field to help him. Weapons aren't permitted in the seating, either, so, it'd be difficult to do anything. But, some of the Little Ket residents carry toy- or mock-weapons.

All in all, these two mascots are enormously popular, and aren't likely to become any less so. It's not about the individual monsters—they're mascots, and they're both loved and reviled. It's a custom unto itself people enjoy immensely.

Special Thanks to Denis "Maldin" Tetreault, for his assistance with Sen Thelamae, from "Living Greyhawk Journal" 2
Passages in *italics* in this article are drawn from various officially published Greyhawk sources.

WARBANDS OF ULL

The Journals of Tarim Ibn Ismed

Clandestine Missives from an Operative

By Michael "mortellan" Bridges
greyhawkery.blogspot.com

Most Worthy Elders (may Mouqol bring you prosperity), in order to advance the reach of our most holy and glorious Consortium within the heathen land of Ull I have gleaned some most intriguing information on the feuds and rivalries which exist among these uncivilized peoples. Rest assured, as your assigned Agent of Great Trust, this brief study will not delay me in finishing my most imperative audit. Your humble servant – Tarim Ibn Ismed Al-Dajuhah, Southern Exotic Imports

Journal of Tarim Ibn Ismed, 3250 BH, Planting 15th

"My caravan has safely arrived in Kester from Ulakand along the Ulzha Trail. I credit this beneficial journey to the compelling presence of Mouqol behind my negotiations with the honorable representative of the Uli warband, Far Hunters. I have favorably worked with the Far Hunters in the past for they fearlessly cross

Paynim Lands to tread on the frontiers of Ceshra and Antalotol just as comfortably as they do the interior of gods-forsaken Ull. The Far Hunters are true enemies of their distant kin, the Paynim nomads, yet for skill in horsemanship and archery their rivalry with the warband, Black Talons is best-known around Ulakand. The Black Talons boast the best archers in all of Ull, a fact which evidently irritates the Far

Hunters the most, because many from their warband are recruited away to their rivals by offers of finely-crafted bows and thoroughbred horses."

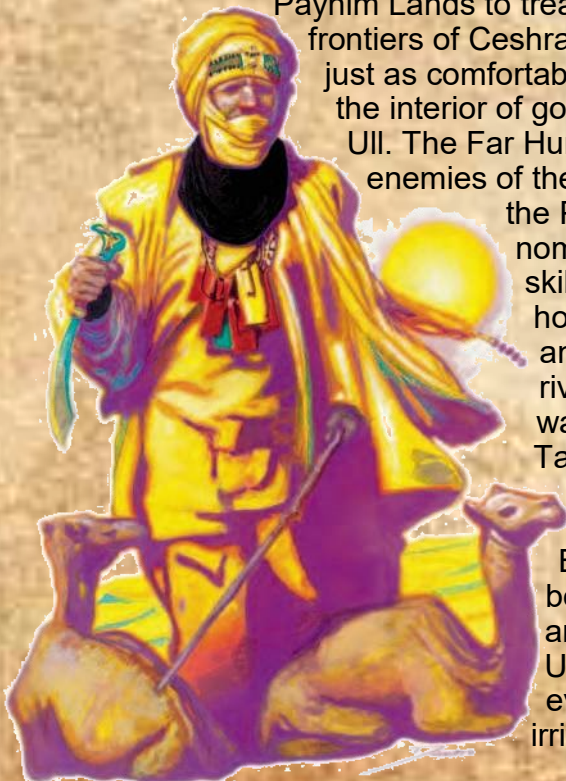
"The presence of the Far Hunters among my caravan proved a boon to my company's mood as Ulakand seems to have grown even more unpredictable in recent weeks since a coup in the capital. The locals say the half-ogre nephew of Orakhan Draske rallied a Misbegotten Horde to his cause and seized the royal title by combat. It is said this horde is a disparate collection of Uli hill-raiders, former slaves, pit-fighters and ogre brutes. Now the Horde comes and goes from the Ulakand Mesa at will to provoke old grudges with slaver groups like the Tamers, the vicious Bloody Maimers who jealously guard their territory in the Ulsprue foothills and even Drashan's Legion, who could have put down the Misbegotten Horde if not for politics in Ull that I do not have time to unravel. Presently, the Far Hunters received their payment and left my caravan to return to the comforts of their wide-open prairies."

Journal of Tarim Ibn Ismed, 3250 BH, Planting 17th

"I have sent messengers to inform the subject of my audit to meet with me upon his arrival. I have gathered that my subject's caravan is currently on the Dust Road, returning from the remote trade-town of Kanak by Lake Udrukankar. I plan to combine our caravans for the journey back to Ulakand, where based upon my ordained observations (may Mouqol give me insight), he will certainly be compelled to return with me to face a full inquiry with the Consortium in Zeir-i-Zeif."

Journal of Tarim Ibn Ismed, 3250 BH, Planting 24th

"I have been staying at Kester's only decent lodging, the Blind Billy Goat Inn (may Mouqol



preserve me). Life in Kester is a dangerous mixture of poverty and luxury. As such, there is no shortage of people looking for work when they see a caravan enter. So far, I have met with representatives of two local Kester warbands specialized at guarding caravans. The Followers of Zhabask are highly respected footmen known for their polearms and great-maces. Their main rival in Kester is Thevun's Gang who appear identical to the Followers, from their weapons-of-choice down to their white and black turbans."

"Luckily, I was appraised of their differences in advance. The Followers of Zhabask often employ vicious halfling slingers, while Thevun's Gang include orcs among their company. More subtly however, in public the Followers wear the ends of their turbans untucked, while the Gang keeps their headdress worn tight. The captain from Thevun's Gang seemed too abrasive for my taste, fortunately the commander of the Zhabask group was overly anxious to prove his value to me and thus agreed to a lower daily wage (Mouqol be praised)."

Journal of Tarim Ibn Ismed, 3250 BH, Planting 26th

"I have finally met with my subject of concern, Sheik Nalah Rarouk formerly of Beit Castan, now of Kester. He is everything I expected; a shrewd, urbane man, who has adapted like a chameleon to live among debauched savages at the edge of civilization. Rarouk is among a handful of merchants in our Consortium whose reach extends deep into the Dry Steppes, bringing the rarest perfumes, spices and gems to our great cities. Indeed, for this reason many families in our network have been too willing to overlook the allegations of his unsavory business practices that have brought shame and misfortune upon our most sacred market-places."

"I shared evening drinks with Rarouk at the Inn. After some perfunctory trades and requests for goods, the merger of our caravans was negotiated successfully, though I could assess his uncertainty in my company's presence in Kester. Most vexing for me however, is that Rarouk is retaining the services of Thevun's Gang despite my employment of their direct rivals. To relax for the remainder of the evening, the sheik indulged me with tales of two minor warbands in the central fastness of Ull's plains."

"The Wildmen and the Broken Scimitars are bitter enemies, but in truth they have much in common, namely because they are hated throughout Ull. The Broken Scimitars are comprised of outcasts, horse-thieves and half-breeds who have renounced the Khanate Council. They are known for exclusively using bludgeoning weapons to inflict the most pain, as they desperately raid caravans on the open trails or in smaller mobs, causing trouble in frontier towns, especially when meeting their foe, the Wildmen. Only the Wildmen are more a nuisance to the peoples of Ull. Wearing faded-red and white checkered raiment, these chaotic raiders use any weapon they can acquire and will incessantly scream war-cries when attacking or fleeing. The Wildmen believe they are the only true Uli, for the khanates have become too civilized. When foreigners speak about Ull, it is often the Wildmen who have given this land its reputation."

Journal of Tarim Ibn Ismed, 3250 BH, Flocktime 1st

"I am gravely concerned. Our caravan is due to depart for Ulakand in the morning and as is customary I went to do a final check on preparations before bed. The first thing I noted as I approached the caravansary courtyard was a strong flowery scent. Discreetly, I spied the subject of my holy audit, Sheik Rarouk, loading a cart with fresh-cut bronzewood from the Ulsprues. The lumber was being delivered by men from a warband I only recognized due to their blood-stained cloaks, the Bloody Maimers. What was even more disconcerting however, is that leaders from both



Thevun's Gang and the Followers of Zhabask were amicably overseeing this strange last-minute addition to our caravan."

"Cautiously, I returned to my room to pen this observation rather than make my presence known. The nature of my mission lends to my suspicion that the bronzewood is perhaps being used to conceal some contraband bound for the north. Indeed, why else would a shipment of bronzewood be brought south only to be delivered back in the direction it was produced? I will have to subtly investigate this development until we are on the trail and I have more leverage on Rarouk."

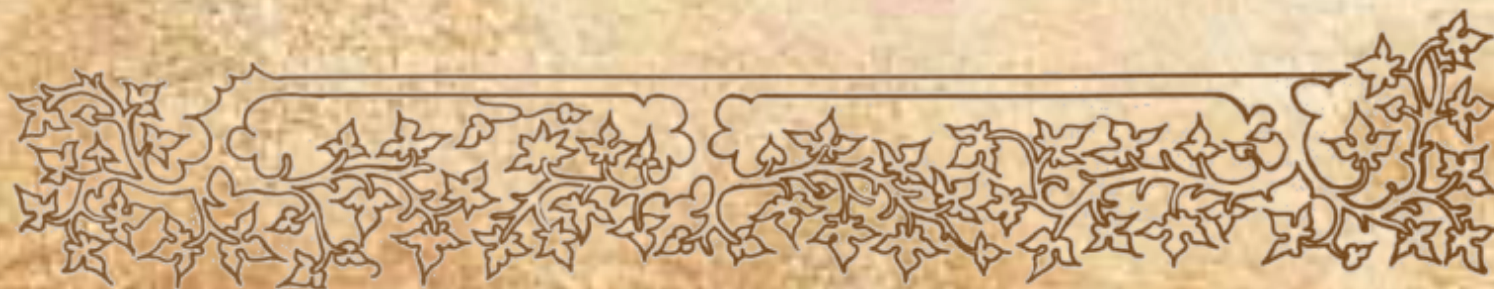
Most Worthy Elders (may Mouqol favor you), I write with regrets that my respected associate, Tarim Ibn Ismed was killed on the Banner Trail during a late-night raid on our caravan by the Wildmen of Ull (I spit on their corpses). Unfortunately, all of his personal bodyguards and trusted caravan handlers perished in defense of their master as well. I too suffered loss, including substantial goods in this raid, so I have decided to personally return to Kester while our caravan presses onward to Ceshra. I present along with this note, the signet ring of Tarim Ibn Ismed and his private journal, may its contents provide you with greater wisdom come next trade season.

Yours in Mutual Beneficence,

**Sheik Nalah Rarouk, 3250 BH,
Flocktime 15th**

Author's Note: For more information on these Ull warbands, the Mouqollad Consortium, and one of their worst rivals hinted at in this story, check out the article, *Gazetteer of the Flanaess: Ull* in [Oerth Journal #19](#).

Editor's note: A great deal of information can also be found at [Greyhbawkery - category: Ull](#), by the author of this article, Mike Bridges. One of the best blogsites all about Greyhawk!



KAS AND VECNA

The Secrets of the Stars of Flanaess

Lamentations of a Gypsy

Story and Illustration by Kristoph Nolen

“Ahh!! So, *gadjo*! Once again you've sought out your good and faithful gypsy friend Meritaelen, seeking information, eh?! As I always have, I shall answer your questions and share tales told by my people, the Rhennée. What story can I tell you this eve? ... Aaiighhh!! Hold your tongue! Don't say that name! The *Whispered One*?! You want to know of **that constellation**?

Why, then, it is good the sky is so clear, *gadjo*, and the stars can be seen from the deck of the barge! Good ol' Meritaelen will tell you!”

The names ring with dread and history at the same time. Betrayal. Loathing. Death.

Everyone knows the end of the tale of **Kas** and **Vecna**, eh? It's known to even children; only shards of their famous rivalry remain. Dismembered body parts, and the weapon which did the deed. ... but, the *catch*, is to know the secrets of how they still impact our lives every single day.

I'm sure you know, *gadjo*, the tale told many ways and by many storytellers. Ah, yes, even my people have retold the tale, just as I am retelling it now. A kinswoman of mine, a little more than three score seasons ago, caught the ears of many when she retold the tale with other, shall we say, *daravno garudino svato* ... *dangerous secrets*, added which had never been spoken aloud before. Many of Vecna's devotees wouldn't even know them - and likely have marked more than one man for death for having spoken them.

Some say the Warrior gained his bloodthirst from a magical relic mask, while others say he didn't fall into undeath and become a vampire until years after he earned the name the “Betrayer”. A few think Destroyer had vanished from our reality and only remained as a vestige treating with those who bind spirits — while still others claim he yet exists, prowling about the planes as an incredibly powerful vampire lord, able to destroy gods.



Art by Kristoph Nolen

Regardless of myriad versions of the tale, there is one inalienable truth: loathing and evil were at the core of their destruction. Vecna's paranoia and hatred brought the *Sword of Kas* to corrupt the Warrior with the same distrust and at the moment of the Maimed Lord's apotheosis into divinity, the Betrayer severed the Lich's hand and gouged out his eye. Those were left behind in the mortal realm as relics of untold power. And more than that, part of their being was cast into the cosmos, imbuing stars with their power.

But, all you have to do is look to the sky, there. You see those few twinkling stars which form connected triangles? ... the Mage watches us, even now; hearing our secrets and whispering them into the void. Each year, the Mage and the Warrior continue their infinite struggle. Some say they are stars only and have no impact upon us. But, believe me *gadjo* when I tell you the ley lines of the world respond and reflect the power of the stars. Each time the Mage is ascendant, magic users across Oerth all attempt to control more power than ever they would otherwise. The highlight of Richfest, as we all know, is Midsummer Day, when priests of Pelor are able to banish and destroy undead like no other. But, it is said that on Midsummer Night, when both moons are full and the constellations are at their apex, dark magic is dangerously more powerful.

Ah, still yet curious? I'm sure there are those who can regale you with descriptions of the stars themselves, *gadjo*. They are doubters, to be sure. See there? Over in the corner? That sage sitting so quietly? Limryl, I believe, is his name. He'll surely tell you these constellations don't affect our lives. Ask him, and see if he believes in the magic of the stars!

[[Find Dean Limryl in the following article!]]

CONSTELLATIONS OF GREYHAWK

Veneficus et Milés — 3 Infamous Constellations of Greyhawk

From the “*Lexicon of Lesser Astrography*”

By Andy Miller; Illustrations by Kristoph Nolen

“The stars which form this grouping of constellations show themselves in ascendancy during Richfest, and that time is known for burgeoning arcane power and is often blamed for betrayal or abject evil which comes while these signs are at their apex.

It has been shown, many times, astrological forces change the ley lines impacting use of arcane formulae during this period.”

- from the “*Lexicon of Lesser Astrography*”
By Dean Limryl, Grey College Observatory, 591CY

The constellations of Veneficus, Milés, and the Fireball Nebula are all closely related, both in lore and history as well as myth and legend. Originally named by the ancient Oeridians long before the formation of Ull by their tribes and the beginning of their own timeline of years, those names have lasted through the millennia.

Veneficus, The Mage, was sometimes called “**The Lich**” or even sometimes, though usually only whispered, “**Vecna**.” The brightest star of the grouping, Invisus, forms the eye of the mage, while the other, lesser stars denote the robes and body of the creature.

Legend has it that Invisus had a sister star which flared and disappeared sometime at the

beginning of the 43rd Century Suloise Dating. Those who believe this story also claim several other stars existed to indicate an extension of the wizard’s left hand. This corresponds with the date the lich Vecna was thought to have been destroyed by the warrior Kas. Some still called the constellation “Vecna” though it is referred to as Veneficus by astronomers.

The Ancient Suloise called the constellation “**The Fallen Godking**” also connecting it to the legend of Vecna. If it had any other Suloise name before the 43rd century of their calendar, they were lost in the Rain of Colorless Fire. The Flan have, for as long as memory records, called the constellation “**Enoch-Tor-Vor**” or “**The Valley Tyrant**” possibly also related to Vecna. The Bakluni called the formation “The Accusing Teacher” and included the star which forms the tip of the sword of Milés, though the origin of that title is lost to history. In their case, that star represents the pointing finger of the unhappy teacher.

Close to Veneficus is **Milés** (pron. /'mēlās/), **The Warrior**. The cluster is sometimes called “**Kas**,” usually by those who call Veneficus “Vecna,” in reference to Kas of Tycheron, the destroyer of



Art by Kristoph Nolen

Venca. The stars represent an armored man holding a sword close to the apparently handless left side of Venificus, much as Kas was said to have cut the hand and eyes from the lich so long ago. The brightest named star in the constellation is **Proditor**, also called the **“Belt Star.”**

The Ancient Suloise actually adapted the Oeridian name of the constellation when they started drawing their star charts. The Flan called the constellation **“Horash Sengle”** or **“The Corrupted Betrayer.”** It is of interest to note Flan depictions of the constellation have the warrior holding a lance or spear instead of a sword. The ancient Baklune called the formation **“The Defiant Student”** though depictions focus on the three triangular sets of stars in the formation more than anything else, representing a young pupil, his chin raised in defiance instead of looking downward respectfully.

The Fireball Nebula consists of numerous minor stars, most of which are red, and a grouping of strange gasses and mists which seem to be prevalent in that section of the crystal sphere itself. Most astronomers connect the nebula directly to Venificus, painting a picture of the lich casting a fireball spell.

Those who revere Vecna, or are convinced Venificus represents that lich, always note the blast is being fired away from Milés (or Kas, as they refer to the other constellation), claiming it as further proof the constellation directly represents the warrior’s betrayal as Vecna must have been facing away from him when he struck.

Legend again makes wild claims the Fireball Nebula didn’t exist until around the time of the Rain of Colorless Fire, noting no Suloise records of the nebula’s existence exist. However, no evidence to this claim has ever come to light and the ancient Oeridians have numerous tales which relate to the nebula from long before the destruction of the Suloise Empire.

Though no records survive from the Suloise Empire indicating what they might have called the nebula, some likely still sit in a dry and musty vault in the Sea of Dust. More than one expedition has gone in search of ancient observatories which might have survived the Rain of Colorless Fire. To date, none have returned with any useful information.

The ancient Flan called the nebula **“tunuck fie”**

or **“Burning Rose.”** The ancient Baklune called the nebula **“The Fissure to Hell.”**

Spelljamming ships which have visited the area insist it is haunted and the stars on that portion of the crystal sphere exude a strange and noxious reddish mist which extends for thousands of miles in the proximity of the stars there.

This entire group of constellations is most prevalent and visible in the night’s sky during the summer months, particularly around the festival of Richfest. Mages are said to be more powerful during this time and those born with Venificus prevalent in their houses, astrologically speaking, are said to gain certain powers unknown to the common mage. Those born with the sign of Milés in their astrological houses are said to be the greatest warriors, though some astrologers whisper that darkness sometimes pervades their being and treachery is likely to be what they are remembered for. Those born with the Fireball Nebula prominent in their houses are said to be drawn to fire. If a mage, they excel at fire-based spells, while those who are not magically inclined are said to often take the roles of smiths or craftsmen who use fire. Some few become arsonists, relishing the way the fire burns and destroys, while they, themselves, seem less harmed by said fires.

[Editor’s Note: This article is the first in a series by Andy Miller, who wrote the original “Constellations of Greyhawk” article in *Oerth Journal* #22 as well as the “Campaign Holidays” in *Dragon* magazine Annual #4 which had a great deal of information on Greyhawk festivals.

Miller’s first article in the OJ contained in it a Star Chart which corresponds to the constellations in the article. At the time, however, there were a few things inadvertently left out of the graphic design of the Star Chart.

This series will be revisiting the Zodiac, constellations, individual stars, et al, and will include a revised version of the Star Chart, correcting it to be more accurate.

Take a look at the new ongoing article series by Andy Miller on GreyhawkOnline.com in the [Constellations category!](#)]

BEGGARS VS. THIEVES

A Longstanding Feud Between Infamous Guilds

By Will "Giantstomp" Dvorak

Art by Karl Kerschl

The Thieves guild of Greyhawk has enjoyed a long history of dominance of the criminal activities within the city, and most would even consider it a stranglehold. The Beggars' Union never really challenged the Thieves Guild for dominance of the city's underworld, but it did cut significantly into its profits for a time.

The Beggars' Union's former Beggarmaster Theobald was not content with the small niche of petty pickpocketing and theft centered in and around the Slum Quarter. He began a campaign of recruitment and training of new beggars skilled in all of the talents required of a member of any thieves' guild under the direction and teaching of his Taskmaster, Haarkon Diardra, a former member of the Ceshra Thieves Guild in the Sultanate of Zief. These recruits were then secretly placed on jobs which crossed over into the domain of the Thieves Guild of Greyhawk. The Beggars' Union saw their numbers multiply as those who were either overlooked or deemed not worthy of membership in the Greyhawk Thieves Guild found a new home.

The coffers of the Beggars' Union quickly grew, and with the added income Theobald expanded even further the Union. Unfortunately, Theobald's greed was greater than his caution in drawing the attention and ire of the Thieves Guild and the guildmaster Arentol. The Thieves guild didn't immediately send its agents into an offensive against the Beggars' Union; instead, Org sought to absorb the Union into the Guild with a promise of avoiding possible retaliation. 'Unfortunately', for Theobald's pride and ego had grown to such a degree he thought he could openly challenge them, a mistake which Theobald soon regretted.

The Thieves Guild's response to Theobald's arrogance was swift and total. The Palace of Trash, as the headquarters of the Union was called, was stormed and nearly all the beggars within annihilated, including Theobald. During the melee a few of the Beggar-masters managed to escape with their lives, including: Haarkon Diardra the Taskmaster; Gaspar, Theobald's second in command; and Siemon Hellwater the Treasurer who was also a Thieves Guild agent in the midst of the Union. Spymaster Diarmid Hesperion avoided the slaughter as he was out in the city itself working, as he usually was. Despite many of their leaders still being alive, the Union was effectively crushed without a base or revenue.

Seizing his opportunity, Gaspar began gathering the remaining beggars who had not been at the Palace of Trash and hiding them away. At the same time, Gaspar reached out to the Thieves Guild to negotiate a truce.

To everyone's surprise, Arentol agreed to a cease-fire and brought Gaspar to the Thieves Guild for negotiations. Despite the urging of his allies, Gaspar went, and a truce was finalized. The Beggars' Union was allowed to continue to exist on stiff terms ... terms which made the Beggar's Union nothing more than a puppet organization of the Thieves Guild. Arentol saw the benefit of allowing the Union to continue in the fact the Guild would take a share of all the Union's profits. The Union could also be their eyes and ears on the streets, freeing up Thieves Guild members for more important tasks. And by letting them continue as servants of the Guild, they would be a constant reminder to others to not oppose the Guild.

Even before the crackdown, the Beggars' Union was well known for their spies and ability to gather

relevant information, a service which even the Thieves Guild had used. Under the guidance of Spymaster Diarmid Hesperion, the Beggars' Union had assembled a small army of beggar spies, spies who go overlooked by those in the city. This was an essential resource which Arentol wished to keep intact. With his mole, Simeon Hellwater, assuring Arentol the intentions of Gaspar were sincere, the Beggars' Union was allowed to survive.

Unknown to Simeon and Arentol, the wily Spymaster Diarmid Hesperion had uncovered that Hellwater was a traitor. During the chaos of the Guild attack, Hesperion followed Hellwater to the Hanged Man Inn where he witnessed him interacting with members of the Thieves Guild. Instead of confronting Hellwater, Hesperion instead took his findings to Gaspar, who was appalled as he considered Hellwater one of his closest associates and a friend. With this discovery, and after Hesperion was able to confirm Haakon Diadra could be trusted, the Inner Circle of the Beggars' Union was formed.

Infuriated by the betrayal of Hellwater, Gaspar, vowed vengeance on the Thieves Guild. Along with his comrades, Hesperion the Spymaster and Diadra the Taskmaster, the three set about trying to undermine the Guild. To help in this new task, Diadra, took under his wing a dozen of the most promising beggars and along with Hesperion, the two trained these beggars to be the agents of the Inner Circle.

Currently, the Inner Circle feeds select false information to the Thieves Guild through Hellwater. The current goal of the Inner Circle is to undermine the Thieves' Guild and to sow distrust and paranoia within the Guild. One of the Inner Circles favorite tactics is to pilfer goods targeted Guild before they can. After stealing the items, they skim some profit for themselves and then plant the remainder of the spoils onto an unsuspecting Thieves Guild agent.

So far, these tactics have been working, and the grumblings of discontent within the Thieves Guild is growing. The Inner Circle knows they can only continue these tactics for so long before a connection is made which leads prying eyes back to them. Now the Inner Circle looks to step up their plans by performing select assassinations of Guild members and then place incriminating evidence on other targeted Guild agents. Ultimately the Inner Circle wants to fracture the Guild into rival groups, groups which will not be strong enough to challenge the Beggars' Union again.



Art by Karl Kershl



RIVALS- A WORTHY ADVERSARY

Introducing Opponents to Feud with your PCs

Using rival adventurers as a nemesis to your players

By Mark Allen (Sollace)

Throughout history there have been heroes who have had to face trials and tribulations on their journeys to legendary status. Often these are fierce monsters, demons, devils and dragons who blight vast swathes of the world wreaking havoc and darkness wherever they go. These arch villains are the big bad evil guys of your campaign and rightly deserve to be in the forefront of an adventuring party's minds.

However, there are others, less powerful than the arch villains who can be so much more of a thorn in the side of an adventuring party than any ancient red Wyrms, their direct rivals – another adventuring party!

While the big bad evil guy is focussed on world domination the rivals are focused on one thing and one thing alone... being the first to stop them before anyone else can claim the glory which belongs to them.

In the film Shaun of the Dead, Shaun and his rag tag band of followers who are, if we are being honest, relying solely on their luck to survive the zombie apocalypse, run into a rival group of survivors led by

his old friend Yvonne, a more successful version of himself who manages to get out with her party and come back to rescue what is left of Shaun and his towards the end of the movie.

There is no real

antagonism between Shaun and Yvonne but there is definitely an implied rivalry there between them and this can be an excellent mechanic when brought into your home game.

How it works

So, once you have decided to put in a group of rival adventurers how do you create them and then get them involved in your plot? A great way to start is to look through your player's backstories. There may well be some rivalries which are created directly by your players which just need to be fleshed out a little by you, add a little meat onto the bones... do they contain a scorned lover? A sibling rival? A childhood friend or enemy? Or someone who they have wronged in some other way? These can be some of the hardest NPC's to integrate into your game, especially if they have a particularly close affinity with a player. It could also lead to weapons being drawn and a fight ensuing before they have even had a chance to get locked into the game as an adversary so be careful which you choose.

Another great option is to generate an entirely new party which has absolutely no connection to your PC's whatsoever other than the fact they are both attempting to complete the same task or are working at odds against one another without really knowing it, for example if the PC's are hired to steal a cache of gems from a halfling deep in the city at the behest of a rival then your adversaries can have been paid to improve his security as he is aware his rival is out to steal his hard won loot!

In order to keep it a challenge it is probably wise to make these foes slightly more powerful than your PC's, not so powerful as to make their task impossible to complete but powerful enough to get them to be inventive with ways to circumvent the measures which their rival NPC's have put in



Art by William Dvorak

place. Making it impossibly hard just takes the fun out of the game for most groups so remember to try to get the balance right.

Let it play out slowly

So, you have gone to the effort of creating NPC's who are in direct competition with your players, seeking the same fame and fortune, the last thing you want is for them to be a flash in the pan. Play them smartly! They're unlikely to fight to the death when they can slink away and nurse their wounds as their dislike of their rivals grows. Success should come to both parties and your player should be involved during some of the celebrations of the successes of their rivals, even if it is just staring at them from across the taproom of the inn as they are toasted by its patrons for their success and good fortune.

As your PC's increase in power try to keep the rivals at the very least on a par with them. The PC's shouldn't be scared of them but should be aware their standing in the community should prevent them from being murdered outright without any consequences.

A great example of a rival band of adventurers were used in Paizo Publishing's Greyhawk-based *Age of Worms* adventure path (found in *Dungeon Magazine*) where we were reintroduced to some old faces from the past of D&D, Auric's Warband. They crop up a number of times throughout the adventure path including being rivals in the very first adventure, The Whispering Cairn and indeed in the finals of the Champion's Games in the free city of Greyhawk itself.

Auric's Warband dip in and out of the lives of the PC's, never as direct enemies but always as competition, seeking the same things for different reasons. At the start of the adventure not only are Auric's Warband famous they are significantly more powerful than the PC's, however they are hampered by a lack of local knowledge. By the time of the Champion's Games however they PC's and Auric's Warband are only slightly more powerful than the PC's leading to a more dynamic conflict between the two groups as they battle for supremacy and then against a big bad evil guy on the blood-soaked sands.

Auric's Warband is described on the following pages.

In Summary

Rivals can add an extra dimension to your game, play them as if they were your own PC's and not just some generic monsters only there to add experience points to the players totals. Use them wisely as plot devices, foils, love interests and ultimately equals of your player characters and get a richer environment in which both GM's and players alike can excel.

Auric's Warband

This trio of adventurers was actually inspired by a much earlier source - they were characters in a series of advertisements by TSR written in comic book format! The three had brief adventures which were mostly complete in about six to ten frames, and hinted all the other exciting things they would get up to "in game".

Khellek

Human Wizard

Initial level – PC +4

Khellek is a balding Human Wizard with black hair and eyes. A pronounced widow's peak bisects his forehead. Khellek tends to dress in a vile-green robe and scarlet cloak trimmed with gold and arcane lettering.

Khellek is wizard of recognized skill and also a member of the Seekers, but he does not advertise this openly and there are no ties between him and the Greyhawk chapterhouse. His knowledge seems to be focused on ancient languages, lost arcana, long-dead history, and the Outer Planes. He is a wizard with a particular focus on enchantment spells, unusual for someone who has so little to endear him to people.

He is known to be a crafter of both scrolls and wands. In previous Champions Games, he favoured the following spells: *haste*, *suggestion*, *charm person*, *invisibility*, *touch of idiocy*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *friends*, *toll the dead* and judicious use of wands of *fear and paralysis*, though in the last tournament he went through the first round without casting a single spell. He is quick to react to danger and seems to possess an uncanny awareness of his immediate surroundings. A wry, pompous, scrawny-arsed bastard prying minds over dragonchess.

Khellek is in fact the leader of Auric's Warband

and is a prime character for development because of his association with the Seekers... should he happen to be killed who can say how powerful the agent would be who replaces him?

Auric

Human Fighter

Initial level – PC +5

Auric is a warrior born and something of a heartthrob to boot, His muscular physique, blonde hair, blue eyes and an ability to play to the crowd have made him a firm favourite with those who frequent the Free City Arena.

His taste for wearing the belt of champions also ensures even those who have not had the opportunity to watch him and his warband fight on the sands of the arena will know of him just because he wears that distinctive belt!

He is relatively good natured but does have a bad habit of deferring to Khellek and abiding by the dark wizards wishes.

Auric is the most famous member of the warband, he is worshipped by his adoring fans and many would come to his aid should he be seen to be beset by foes in public.

He is also more likely to be able to get away with starting something and then blaming it on others, particularly if Khellek has told him that is what they should be doing.

He may not feel great about it, but He knows everything will work out for the best in the end... Khellek has told him it will!

Tirra

Elf Rogue

Initial level – PC +4

Tirra is a vibrant, vivacious dark-haired Elf with a glint in her eye which is matched only by which on the edge of her blades.

She has known Auric and Khellek for some time and there are rumours she has ties within the Thieves' Guild of the Free City of Greyhawk, something she, of course, will neither confirm or deny.

She is the person most likely to become involved with the PC's in any meaningful way as she seeks to try and pump as much information about her rivals,

their plans and who they are working for from them using guile, ale and perhaps the promise of a romantic entanglement.

She may or may not go through with anything she promises depending on how the game is being played and if you as the GM decide to play her as a genuine, warm elven rogue or as a

haughty, Elven maiden who will seduce and coerce without ever actually committing to anything.



Art by Chad DuLac & Jim Zubkovich

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SUEL- BAKLUNISH WAR

Centuries-long Lasting Animosity

By Cal Scrivener, Illustrations by Vince Locke and Erol Otus

Based on work by Leonard Lakofka

Possibly the most significant feud in the history of the Flanaess formed not only some of the civilizations which lasted over the centuries, but also formed and altered the physical geography of the region.

In Suel history texts, the conflict known as the Great War began in – 484CY. There were many stressors preceding the war, but one of the most significant was the fact that the Suloise had conquered the entire region subjugating the Flan, Baklunish and other unnamed tribes west of the Crystalmist Mountains.

About 200 years before things came to their ultimate, devastating conclusion, the Bakluni took up arms against the Suloise Empire to free themselves from control. This lead-up ended because the Baklunish threatened to use the power of one of the “Binders” (items of great power able to control djinn), which they had captured during the *War of Seven Score Nights*. It was almost as if this threat was perceived by the Suel as a test, wondering if the Bakluni would really release its destructive power. In the end, the Empire ceded a great deal of northern territory to the Baklunish people. That deep wound to their pride would continue to fester for years to come. This type of grand ultimatum would be similarly reenacted with catastrophic results, over two centuries later.

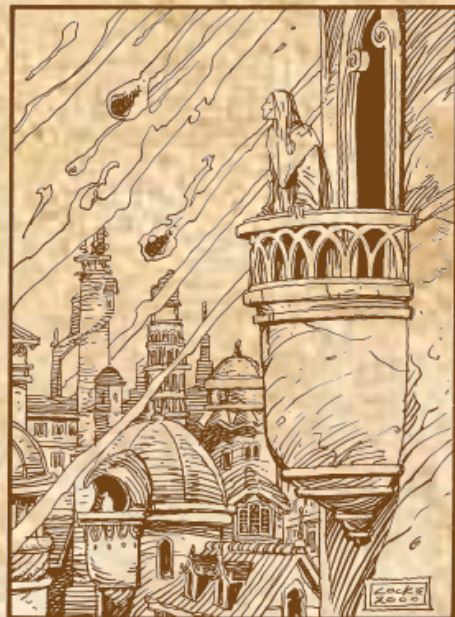
In the short years after, the Suel Empire began to fall to corruption and crime, and it led to internecine fighting amongst the noble houses. Eventually, this allowed for an opportunity to other peoples to rise up against them. At was at this point the Empire began to truly slip and there were “Plague Years” which brought them even lower. The Succession Wars finally led to a distasteful Emperor took the throne, and the Baklunish ambassador was pulled out when he’s crowned. 9,000 Bakluni are slaughtered in Sulhaut Pass.

That was the match that started the fire. Mercenaries were brought from across the mountains, and prophets began telling of the destruction of the Imperium. A break with the royal family leads to Suel fighting amongst themselves and then turn to attacking each other.

The archmage Slerotin, the Last High Mage, turns his considerable might against the mages and members of the great houses, precipitating their attack against the Baklunish.

In the end, the two nations engaged in mutually assured destruction, with the ending of the War with the *Invoked*

Devastation and the *Rain of Colorless Fire*. They wiped out arcane knowledge, cultural identities, entire cities, and even memories of deities once worshipped were forgotten. Even some geography was wiped flat. Never before or since has such terrible magic been leveled on the face of the Oerth.



WHO WATCHES THE WATCHERS?

Gateway to Adventure

A Greyhawk Adventure for 4 - 6 5th level Characters

Story and Cartography by Nathan Doyle — Attention Deficit & Dragons

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INTRODUCTION

A recent increase in undead activity in western Keoland has driven farmers and homesteaders into the city of Flen and created a refugee crisis. Additionally the Knights of the Watch have been spotted less and less in the region and one of the main perceived enemies they've protected the realm against has sent envoys to sue for peace. The envoys claim they were attacked by the Knights of the Watch. King Kimbertos Skotti wants the matter looked into, but because of past tensions with the Bakluni, he can't risk sending people who might be biased.

Who Watches the Watchers is an adventure for four to six 5th-level characters. It works perfectly well as a standalone adventure, or to be a part of your normal adventures. Some of the plot hooks were made to supplement the *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* adventures between *Danger at Dunwater* and *The Final Enemy*. The other two published adventures between them might not put the PCs at a sufficient level to be appropriate level for *The Final Enemy*. Also note: the final encounter in this adventure is very challenging if played correctly.

STORY OVERVIEW

The Knights of the Watch was created several centuries ago on the foundation of an earlier organization based in Gran March. They were tasked with protecting Keoland, Gran March, Bissel, and Geoff from the incursions of barbaric Paynims and "westerlings", which is a Keoish pejorative for civilized Baklunish armies. The Sultan of Zeif has sent a peace envoy to parley with the King of Keoland, but they were attacked by bandits en route while outside of Flen. When the Knights of the Watch arrived, they attacked the envoys and drove the survivors off.

While the Zeif delegation cannot control the Paynim, Ekbir, or any of the other people in the Baklunish Basin, the Sultan of Zeif is eager to make peace with the King of Keoland and to begin trade. The Knights of the Watch have always had a particular zeal when fighting the Baklunish peoples and have even gone so far as to accuse them of both secretly worshipping Iuz and being in league with the Scarlet Brotherhood.

SPECIAL NOTES

The currency of Keoland is as follows: platinum griffon (pp), gold lion (gp), electrum eagle (ep), silver hawk (sp), and the copper sparrow (cp). The currency of Zeif is as follows: platinum magus (pp), gold efreeti (gp), electrum marid (ep), silver djinni (sp), and the copper dao (cp). While these coins look differently and are struck in different sizes, they somehow have maintained a similar weight and purity and have the same value. Traders and shopkeepers in Keoland might give you an askew glance, but gold is gold. All values given except that of foreign coinage in this adventure are in Keoish coins.



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Part 1. FLEN

The journey to Flen can take any amount of time depending on where the players begin, or it could start in Flen. The players can start at 1st-level and have roadside encounters and events in various towns and cities to get the PCs to 5th-level by the time they reach Flen. If they are already 5th-level, consider not taking too much time with overland encounters unless it's what the group prefers. If travel to Flen is part of the story, bandits, highwayman, and overly aggressive wildlife are a pretty common staple. The closer the players get to Flen there is reason to have them fight undead, as well. While shouldn't be a random encounter for every single day on the road, there should still probably have one major encounter about half a day's journey outside Flen. Here are two possibilities:

- Three **thugs** and two **scouts**; one of the scouts mounted on a **warhorse** and wielding a shortbow instead of a longbow. They have turned to banditry and are attacking and harassing twelve **commoner** refugees.
- Six **skeletons**, (two of which are mounted on **skeletal warhorses** and wielding spears and shields instead of the short swords) ride out of a grove of trees near the road and the twelve commoner refugees panic and scatter in all directions, they might be able to outrun the skeletons on foot but not the two on horseback.

In either case, the commoners have nothing of value to offer the players other than their thanks. Eventually upon arriving at Flen the players should already know to meet the delegates at the Flen-Flam taphouse. If they don't, casual investigation will let them know, since everyone in town knows the foreigners from the Blaklunish Basin are staying at a villa near the taphouse. They also know those who weren't grievously injured spend their time recovering from the attack at the taphouse, which is usually popular with travelers.

THE FLEN-FLAM TAPHOUSE

The Flen-Flam taphouse is a bar which primarily

caters to out-of-towners looking to eat and drink at someplace other than the inn they are staying in. Which isn't to say the locals don't come by as patrons too. But, the proprietor prides himself on having better food on average than the fare offered at most inns which offer rooms as well, but for the same price. The inn is run by Sil Flamehand (NG Keoish human male **Veteran**, but without any of the equipment listed) during the day and his daughter Brie Flamehand (CG Keoish half-elf female **Noble**, but without any of the equipment listed) during the evening. Sil employs fifteen people to work various shifts. If there's trouble the workers typically will take cover. Sil is quick to throw out people as he is an imposing figure despite his advanced years, and Brie will also throw people out as she does bring a rapier and keeps it beneath the bar if she has to threaten people. If talked to, Sal will talk about how he used to be an adventurer after his time in the military; and Brie will talk about how she wishes she could become an adventurer like her father, but then who would run the Flen-Flam for him?

TAPHOUSE LOCATIONS - MAP I

1. Cobblestone Path - Outside

"The Flen-Flam is a single storied half timber building with whitewashed plaster over the outer walls, the front door stands open and none of the music and mirth one would expect of a drinking establishment can be heard, instead the sounds of grunting and the clatter of metal dishware hitting the floor. The stable is off to the east, it is also half timbered but has no whitewash, the sounds from the stable is one of spooked horses. In front of the taphouse an old stump has an old distinctive looking battleaxe on it whose fighting days are past it as it is now used for cutting firewood. In front of the stable are more posts to tie off animal reins to."

The gate to the stable (area 2) is closed but is only half height and can be seen over, the stable appears to be full. The doorway inside (area 3) is open and bright light extends out 10 feet from the doorway and dim light for another 10 feet if it is nighttime.

Treasure. The axe on the stump is the Woodcarver (see appendix A).

2. Stable - Inside

"The stable is currently occupied by several Paynim riding horses and a single impressive looking Zeif Warhorse. Something has the animals spooked and it may be whatever is happening or has happened inside the taphouse. The smell is what one would expect of a stable which is kept relatively clean."

If there was a stablehand or a porter they have left, only the spooked horses and animal feed can be found here. There are six **riding horses** and a single **warhorse**. In the stable, they are not hostile to the players unless the players try to mount them.

If the players wish to calm the horses they need to succeed at an animal handling check (DC 14 Wisdom) this check is made with disadvantage if the **invisible stalker** in area 3 is still alive.

3. Common Room - Inside

"The common room is currently in disarray, a few random servers and patrons cower behind chairs or make for the door just after you enter. But several of the other patrons have scimitars drawn and are circling around one another and look like they will come to blows, but then you see a shift in the air which disturbs some of the food and plates on the ground, something invisible is between them all."

The common room is currently the scene of a battle between the Baklunish delegates eating here and a would be assassin of sorts. The two tables and several of the chairs near the bar are overturned and

damage.

4. Bar - Inside

"A bar without stools is on the far end of the simple building, two large cabinets are on the far wall presumably filled with wines and liquors. An untapped keg is on the floor behind the bar while a tapped keg rests in a position to be poured from on the end of the bar which is open and leads to the kitchen. The head of a stag is mounted upon the wall just above where the bar meets the wall near the stables outside."

This is where Sil or Brie will start when the players first enter the Flen-Flam, as Sil doesn't bring a weapon to the bar like his daughter does his weapon of choice will be an empty wine bottle (improvised weapon, 1d4+Str bludgeoning damage for first hit, 1d4+Str piercing damage thereafter) or a barstool (improvised two-handed weapon, 1d8+Str bludgeoning damage, breaks after being used to deal 10 or more damage) both of which there are plenty .

Treasure. Sil keeps his life savings inside the mounted stag's head. It consists of 10 gold lions, 60 electrum eagles, 80 silver hawks, and a peridot worth 25 gold lions. additionally the cabinets behind the bar contain 5d12 bottles of fine wine and 4d10 flasks of assorted liquors total. And the untapped keg is a 40 gallon barrel of cheap wine.

5. Kitchen - Inside

"The kitchen area is dominated by a large open pit cookfire with several pots sitting in the coals as well as skewered meats on metal spits over the flames and over the coals. A single table on the east wall is covered with foods in various stages of preparation as well as several bowls and a pitcher of water and a towel for handwashing. Barrels line the far wall

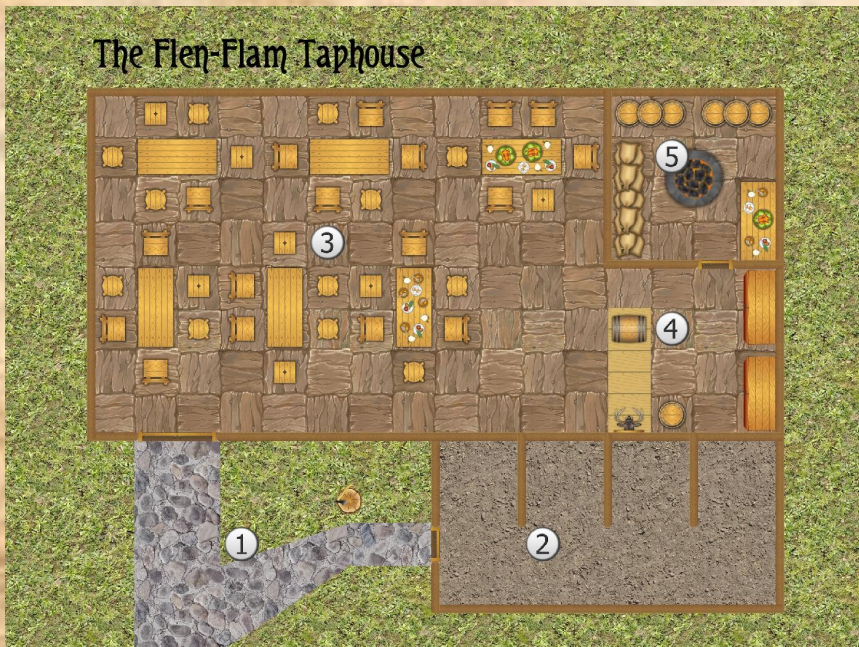
from the door and several burlap sacks are stacked up on the west wall."

If the fighting is still going on the cook in here will be clutching a knife and hiding behind the table, if the players enter with weapons drawn the cook will attack them in fear as they don't know what the attacker is. The six barrels in the room are: one of cider, one of perry, one of ale, one of salt pork, one of salt beef, and one of salted shad. The sacks are: six of rice, six of wheat flour, and three of rye flour. Under the table is a barrel of water, and several baskets of vegetables.

A single **commoner** cook is in this room, either hiding or preparing food.

AFTERMATH

If the players were seen stealing Sil's life savings, Sil



the place is the site of a bit of a commotion.

Six **Paynim guards** without their bows and spears and Aytak Ismail (LN Zeif male **spahi of Zeif**, see appendix B) without his bow and lance are doing battle with an **invisible stalker**.

There are eight other **commoners** present but they are non-combatants, Sil or Brie, depending on whomever is present, will try to help the Baklunish patrons but will likely not be overly helpful; If combat reaches the sixth round they will run to the kitchen (area 5) and grab a sack of flour, then on the seventh round they will run back and throw flour everywhere, which will outline the creature making it no longer able to benefit from invisibility until the flour settles. The invisible stalker is here to kill the Spahi but will use one of its two slam attacks on whatever melee attacker other than the Spahi dealt it the most

or Brie will both be hostile to the players to the point of demanding they return the money and leave with the threat of summoning the city guard, the Baklunish delegates will also be wary to trust the players but will only help them insofar as it helps their goals.

If the players helped save Aytak and most the Paynim and other patrons survived then the Spahi will pay for meals and drinks for the players and work with them to solve the problem they are having.

If the players helped save Aytak but most the Paynim and/or the other patrons died then Sil or Brie will close the Taphouse for the night and regrettably tell the players they and the remaining people need to leave.

If Aytak didn't survive, but any of the Paynim did, they will tell the players to come to the villa where Aytak's son is in recovery after the initial attack which led to them being sequestered here in the first place.

If Aytak didn't survive, nor did any of the Paynim, the players will discover a letter summarizing a formal complaint against the Knights of the Watch and the letter will detail where on the road the Baklunish were camped at when they were attacked, the players will be able to head there to investigate and continue the adventure path if they don't check in at the villa.

If Sil or Brie survive and a player used the Woodcarver during the battle and it went well enough most people survived, Sil or Brie will tell the player with it to keep it and put it to good use. If it didn't go well and the player was seen with it or seen using it then Sil or Brie will ask for it back.

TALKING WITH AYTAK (or his injured son Altair at the villa)

The players are predominantly here to learn the side of the story of the Baklunish delegates from Zeif and to investigate without bias if they speak the truth as the Knights of the Watch have long been the protectors of Keoland and the surrounding nations.

The conversation can be summarized with the following points. These are from the point of view of the father, so if they hear this from Altair, the son, then 'son' needs to be changed to 'I' and 'daughter' needs to be changed to 'half-sister.'

1. We set up camp for the evening.
2. Bandits came out of the nearby woods to attack us.
3. While fighting off the bandits, the Knights of the watch arrived and attacked us instead of the bandits.
4. We gathered our horses and fled fearing more

knights would arrive.

5. Several were killed and others including my son were grievously wounded.
6. My daughter Mitra is missing but she did mount a horse and begin to ride to Flen with us.
7. This happened a while ago and we haven't been allowed to leave Flen until the King decides it's safe for us to resume course for the capital.

Aytak (or his son) believes the best course of action would be to head back to the camp and investigate it, and to facilitate that will give the players detailed directions. The Zeif delegation and the Paynim guards have been instructed not to leave Flen during the investigation and as such they cannot send anyone with you to investigate the campsite. If the players wish to rest first the delegates will offer to let the players stay at the villa to do so.

Part 2. THE CAMPSITE

After several hours of walking or riding, with or without a random encounter (your choice if one is needed or not) the players will arrive at a campsite. Several tents still stand and there are bodies to the northeast where the fighting took place. If the players approach stealthily they will arrive to see several men going through the camp and scavenging supplies off of the dead bodies. If the players are not trying to be quiet the scavengers will hear them and watch from the woods. The scavengers, which consists of five refugees and three deserters from the Knights of the Watch, aren't particularly hostile but will defend themselves if they believe the players mean them harm or if the players mean to prevent them from looting the dead to get by.

They can be bargained with and reasoned with and to have information the players might find useful. Notably the location of the small fort known as "The Manticore's Nest" and if the players are particularly skillful in gaining information they can learn of the dangers which might await them if they were to go to the Nest to investigate the local chapter of the Knights of the Watch who reside there. If at any point the players do talk to them or it seems they might you should look further ahead (see **TALKING WITH ELI**).

CAMPSITE LOCATIONS - MAP II

1. Road - Outside

"The dirt and gravel of this side road shows signs of having been used recently by people on

foot, despite not having seen anyone travel it for much of your journey..." If the players weren't quiet."

...the place seems eerily quiet and looking into the middle of the campground you can see a pot over a burning fire."

Or, if the players were quiet.

"...you can see in the middle of the campground a poorly dressed person in leathers stirring a pot with a wooden spoon or stick. Also you can hear voices to the northwest and northeast."

There isn't much to see or do from the road unless the players decide to attack the man in area 2 (if he is not hiding) with ranged attacks, if that is their line of play then unless they are exceptionally stealthy they will attract the attention of the people in areas 3 and 4 as well.

2. Fire Pits - Outside

"Four fire pits sit in a circle between the tents which have been set up, one of them is in use with a pot bubbling above the flames. A stack of firewood is to the southwest of the pits while tents are on the other sides. Three tents to the north, two to the east, and a single nicer looking tent to the west. There are ruts which show evidence there was at one time a wagon or a cart here and..."

If the players weren't quiet.

"...to the northwest you can see some random piles of equipment which look like someone intentionally gathered them to that location and to the northeast you can see several bloated bodies lying in trampled grass, some of them are missing some clothing or armor."

Or, if the players were quiet.

"...to the northwest you can see some people with bits of equipment in their arms gathering them to a few piles and to the northeast you can see several bloated bodies lying in trampled grass, being stripped by some other people."

The pot contains two pigeons and a crow being stewed whole in ale with whole parsnips after being gutted and defeathered, it smells like it needs nutmeg.

A single scavenger (**bandit**) is here, the scimitar on their hip is similar to those worn by the Paynim seen at the Flen-Flam, if they see the players before the players subdue them they will shout to the others in areas 3 and 4.

3. Gear Pile - Outside

"Someone has piled up gear and equipment of varying degrees of usefulness, most of it looks foreign to Keoland. Paynim shields, scimitars and shortbows. Chain shirts and suits of scale which while totally still functional, aren't made in entirely the same manner as those you'd see on a Keoish

city guard."

The gear which has been piled up here is as follows: 6 daggers, 2 scimitars, 2 handaxes, 2 battleaxes, 1 greatclub, 5 shortbows, 57 arrows, 4 quivers, 2 chain shirts with Paynim helmets, 1 suit of Zeif scale mail with a matching helmet, 4 shields (3 Paynim, 1 Zeif), 6 pairs of riding boots, 2 pairs of exquisite riding gloves (worth 15 gold lions per pair), 3 military saddles, and 1 padded armor barding for a riding horse in Paynim colors.

The people sorting the gear here which the people in area 4 are gathering are two scavengers (**bandits**) and a **stalwart vigil** (see appendix B) the knight's armor looks like it has seen better days and the two scavengers are wearing Paynim scimitars with the scabbards tucked into their belts. If they are still here and confronted by the players they will try to retreat to

area 4 or get the attention of the people there.

Treasure. The stalwart vigil has an electrum ring set with moonstone worth 150 gold lions on their left ring finger.

4. Field of Battle - Outside

"This was the site of a small but pitched battle not more than six weeks ago, several bodies, in different stages of decomposition lie strewn about and stripped of most of their decent gear. A few horses lie bloated and one of them even appears to have had its stomach eaten out. A cart is here and someone has begun piling some of the bodies in it."

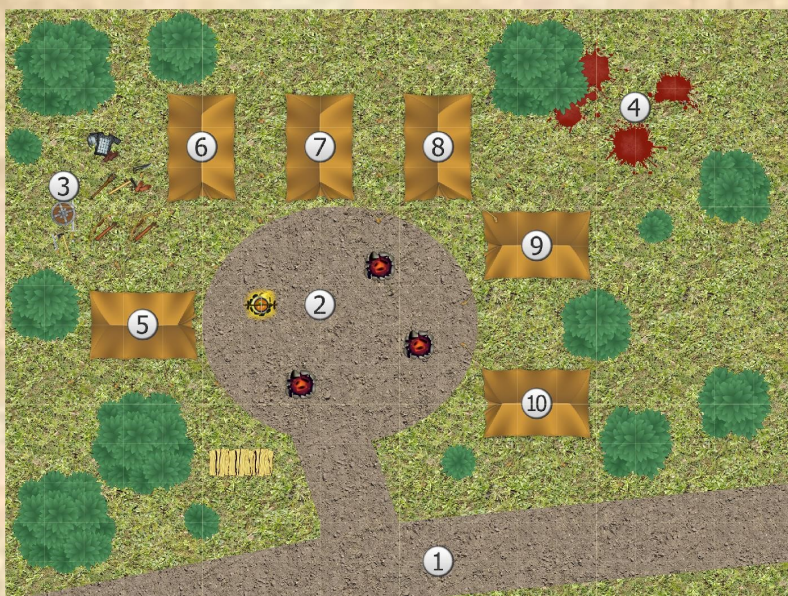
The bodies here weren't all killed in the battle with the bandits and the Baklunish, some of them were undead. The Baklunish Zeif and their guards didn't notice some of those who attacked them when the Knights of the Watch arrived were undead, they also didn't notice the Knights who attacked them were undead as well. The Knights of the Watch corpses here no longer have their armor, having been looted by scavengers even before this current group, but can be identified by a successful DC 14 Wisdom (medicine) check. Succeeding on the check tells the one performing it some of the bodies were dead before the attack supposedly happened, and the Zeif never noticed in the short amount of time before they were forced to flee. Succeeding on the check by 19 or higher also lets the players know some of the dead Keoish bodies appear to have no wounds on them. These bodies are Ephraim Argent's bloodguards and they are almost ready to rise again. If the players cast or are already under the effects of a detect magic spell or something with a similar effect, they will detect the strong trace of necromancy on the bloodguards, and a faint trace on the bodies which were ordinary zombies. Gathering up the remnants of the gear are two scavengers (**bandits**), a **stalwart vigil**, and Eli Cooper (CG Keoish human female **radiant vigil**). Eli leads these vagabonds and is able to be bargained

with if the players do not wish to fight.

Treasure. One of the Paynim swallowed 16 golden efreets, another swallowed a sardonyx worth 50 gold lions, and one of the bandits has a gold tooth worth a single silver hawk.

5. Officer's Tent - Inside

"The interior of this tent looks like it was nice at one time, three bedrolls are laid out but look haphazardly ransacked. And a table is overturned with debris and writing implements strewn about. Empty bottles and wineskins lie open and reeking of vinegar. Muddied, soiled, and trampled clothing is cast everywhere. It seems like anything of value has been taken until you see a brazen colored glint from beneath the



overturned table."

If the players are so inclined to clean the things in this tent: there are three bedrolls, two sets of traveler's clothes and a brass oil lamp in here. The lamp is ordinary, no matter how much the players rub it. If they search this room with a DC 14 Intelligence (investigation) check they will find a note, likewise, if they take a bedroll they will have a collectively increasing one in three chance to find the note. It reads: "Father, I am well, I have found those who were responsible for this betrayal, but I cannot hope to assail the stronghold head on alone. Follow my trail. Mitra."

6.-10. Tents - Inside

"The interior of this tent seems like it was the kind of a setup some unruly soldiers might have had. Everything seems more or less in place, or it would, were it not for the fact that this place has been turned practically inside out by looters."

6. Westernmost Tent in North Row - Inside

Despite having been pretty thoroughly looted, there

is a scimitar here, buried amidst the strewn about bedding.

7. Middlemost Tent in North Row - Inside

Because of how neat and tidy this place was kept before the looting happened, everything of value was found and has been taken already.

8. Easternmost Tent in North Row - Inside

Treasure. Someone buried some items in a sack in the northwest corner of this tent. A passive perception of 18 will spot the difference in the soil, whereas a DC 15 Intelligence (investigation) or Wisdom (perception) will spot it if someone is looking for things out of place. The sack contains 13 gold efreets, 27 silver djinn, and the Embrace of Istus, all wrapped up in an exquisite al-mi'raj pelt worth 10 gold lions.

9. Northernmost Tent in East Row - Inside

Treasure. Whomever looted this place thus far has an unrefined palate and a sack with several metal jars of spices can be found here. Oregano, red pepper flakes, mint, allspice, cinnamon, cumin, sumac, paprika, sesame and nigella seeds. Each jar has a tenth of a pound of a spice and collectively it's all worth 10 gold lions.

10. Southernmost Tent in North Row - Inside

This tent contains the broken pieces of a wooden crate in the middle of the rest of the debris, inside that is a mundane curved dagger in a scabbard which seems to have been intentionally placed beneath the pieces. Unlike a normal Keoish dagger, doesn't have the

"thrown" property or have a range other than melee. If the players ask about the peculiarity of it before looting it or leaving, mention its tip is pointed northwest.

TALKING WITH ELI

If the players decide to parley with the scavengers without attacking them (or at least before attacking them) then Eli is willing to deal with the players provided they promise not to report her and her comrades desertion to the Knights of the Watch or the authorities in Flen, as well as agreeing to let them keep most of the equipment which they already found so they can start new lives when they get away from the undead troubles here. If the players agree to these terms or come to other terms Eli will talk about how her and her other friends in the watch were returning from patrol to arrive at the Manticore's Nest just in time to witness Ephraim and those knights most loyal to him turn on the others in the order. She distinctly remembers him calling the others "cowards" and "traitors" and then began attacking the knights and other non-combatants who were present. She will give the players directions to

the Manticore's Nest and will warn the players that as a magnificent arcane manticore Ephraim Argent is skilled in both melee combat and well versed in magic. If pressed for more information Eli will share that Ephraim always carries a plain wooden staff in his left hand and has an eyepatch over his left eye, and for months before the attack would always mutter about lords and secrets and conspiracies, and also the upcoming peace with the Baklunish was a bad idea.

ATTACK OF THE LIVING DEAD

Whether or not the players fought the scavengers or not, before they get underway several **bloodguard knights** (one per player character) who were amongst the dead bodies finish regenerating and attack the players (and any scavengers who are still alive). Because of the looting the bloodguards have no armor or weapons and are in various stages of having been stripped of useful gear. If no one is watching area 4, only players with a passive perception of 15 or higher will notice the approaching undead. If there are any weapons or shields on the ground (such as if the players killed the scavengers) then the bloodguards will pick them up and use them. If the players spotted the uninjured dead bodies and/or the necromancy auras they could have burnt or dismembered the bodies to prevent this attack.

AFTERMATH

If the players have learned the location of the Knights of the Watch fort known as the Manticore's Nest they may decide to investigate the cause of the attack on the Zeif delegation.

If the players found the note from Mitra they might decide to go back to ask Aytak or his son about finding Mitra's trail, they will tell them she would leave a dagger pointed in the direction she intended to travel. If the players found that dagger they might be able to put it back on the ground unless someone remembers which way it was pointed, if they left it behind thinking it not worth much and any of the scavengers survived the dagger will be gone, with only the indents in the dirt to guide them.

If the players have neither of these clues they can still track the hoofprints from the horses which the Knights of the Watch used, they are faint but trackable. Have the players roll a Wisdom (survival) check, regardless of the roll they will be able to follow the horseshoe marks in the clay-like soil and the grasses which are more trampled than the rest. However if their survival check was higher than 15 they are able to find a second, more recent set of tracks which is from a lone horse and a pair of boots on foot. If they follow that set of tracks they will find Mitra's camp.

Part 3. THE MANTICORE'S NEST

Eventually the players should make their way to the intact but somewhat decrepit and run down looking Knight of the Watch fort known as "The Manticore's Nest" unless they followed the tracks to Mitra's camp. Mitra's camp is to the south of the fort close enough to see the fort and people coming in or out of the entrance but is pretty well hidden if you don't know it is there requiring a passive perception of 19 to spot it from the tracks left by the knights. If the players wish to reconnoiter around the perimeter they will need to beat opposed skill checks (player stealth vs enemy perception) to avoid the skeleton arbalesters in the towers, instead of rolling for each skeleton individually just roll with advantage for the whole group, the towers have alarm gongs to alert the castle of intruders. If they are particularly observant they might discover which tower Ephraim is in (although there's no guarantee he will stay put, especially if the fort is on alert) when the players make their way inside, seeing Ephraim through the arrow slits grants him the same +5 bonus to not being seen from the three quarters cover from the arrow slits as one would expect to get to their AC. If the players are so inclined they can attempt to scale the walls, the castle is old and crumbling and there is no second story anymore; the six towers have trapdoors and ladders down to the inside. If they wish to gain entry this way they will need at least one rope which is 30ft. long and a way to secure it on the crumbled walls.

MITRA'S CAMP

If the players found the dagger and went the direction it pointed, they would eventually come across several telltale and unnatural looking markers which continue to point a specific direction. If the players follow this they will come upon Mitra's camp from the direction she assumes her father would be coming from. Her camp is small and makeshift, Clutter, her warhorse waters by a stream nearby while Mitra watches the fort. She will not be expecting the players but will not be hostile unless any of the player characters displays the markings of the Knights of the Watch (sable, an owl displayed argent), if someone does, she will be verbally hostile but wont attack. If the players explain why they are here then she will want them to help her infiltrate the castle and get to the bottom of this and will be willing to join the party. Or she can be convinced to head to Flen and rejoin her family. Mitra (CG Baklunish Half-Orc female) is a **spahi of Zeif** (see appendix B) like her father, although she lacks the experience and discipline which he has, with the following changes:

- Her Intelligence is 10 and her Wisdom is 14, because of this change her Insight checks

are made at +5 instead of +3

- She is proficient in Wisdom (survival) checks and has a +5 bonus to her rolls.
- She carries the *spahi's kilij*, because of this change her attack rolls with this weapon are +7 (+9 while mounted) to hit and deal 7 (1d6+4) (9 (1d6+6) while mounted) slashing damage.
- She doesn't have a lance with her.
- She has been living off the land here for a while now and is itching for a fight to get revenge for what happened to her family, and instead of going to find them has waited for them, not realizing they had been sequestered to a villa while things got sorted out.

GENERAL FEATURES

The fort, used by the local chapter of the Knights of the Watch, has seen better days. Much of the upper structure has crumbled and has not been maintained, the lower level has been however and is still in use. The floors are light colored wood planks over stonework and gravel and the walls are masonry.

Roof. The rooftop wasn't originally a rooftop, it can be traversed but it counts as difficult terrain, additionally bloodguards and Ephraim inside an area where the players are walking above have advantage on perception checks, the skeletons aren't listening for intruders, only looking for them.

Ceilings. Within the towers the ceilings are 15 feet high and within the hallways they are 10 feet high.

Light. Much of the keep is dark at night as the skeletons and bloodguards do not need light to see. Ephraim is pretty familiar with the layout of the keep so the single rushlight (treat as candle) at each door on the interior halls is more than enough for him. The rushlights in the hall are lit at all times, while the rushlights in the four corner towers and the guardhouses are only lit at night.

Doors. The doors connecting interior rooms to interior rooms are unlocked and the doors connecting interior rooms to the courtyard are locked. The doors are made of wood and need a DC 14 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to pick; DC 18 Strength (athletics) to force open; they have an AC of 15, and 12 HP to break down. The trapdoors on the towers are not locked but are made of the same strength of wood.

Windows. Other than the arrow slits on the towers, the keep is devoid of windows and relies on candles for light if the doors aren't opened. If skeletons in the towers spot the players outside they will attack them with their crossbows and sound the alarm.

Ephraim Argent. Ephraim Argent (LE Keoish male Human **magnificent arcane manticore**) is a knight first and foremost, but with a great deal of arcane prowess added on top of that. He has been corrupted by Vecna in his search for more arcane power into believing the Baklunish peace delegation is in league with the demigod Iuz and secretly planning to murder the king of Keoland and believing the only way to stop them is to sacrifice the men under him and incite a war with all the peoples of the Baklunish Basin. He has already sacrificed most of his soldiers and is currently in the process of desecrating the keep. During the players' ingress he will probably start in a random tower (areas 9-12), during the players' exploration of the keep he will spend five minutes in the tower before heading through the hallways at a

normal pace to another tower, he will also head to the kitchen (area 8) around mealtimes, he has an unnatural stamina about him, and will not rest until he completes the ritual. The appendix contains the stat block for a magic using knight but Ephraim has a few more tricks up his sleeve and those changes are listed here as Ephraim can be encountered almost anywhere in the castle. The desecration ritual he is performing is one which will make it harder to turn undead within the desecrated area.

Ephraim Argent is a **magnificent arcane manticore** with the following changes.

1. He does not fight fair.
2. He wears plate instead of chain, making his armor class 20 instead of 18.
3. His left eye is covered with an eyepatch, giving him disadvantage on Wisdom (perception) checks relating to sight.
4. His left hand is severed, in its place is the staff of Vecna's chosen which has his severed hand attached to it and he has it appear as though his hand is not severed until he needs it for combat.
5. If he is forced to fight in melee combat he will prefer to cast shadow blade; if he does so, it visually manifests as himself growing a shadow skeleton hand which then manifests the illusory blade, additionally if he throws the blade it appears as if the skeletal hand is still holding the blade while thrown.
6. He has animate dead instead of counterspell on his spell list.
7. He doesn't carry any of the weapons listed in the stat block and if it does come up; his bonded weapons which he can teleport to his hand are a pair of heavy crossbows which he keeps loaded,

wherever they may be.

8. He is a ritualist and has the following spells in his ritual book, they can't be used to transcribe spells into a spellbook but anyone capable of casting wizard spells as rituals can use his book to cast these spells as rituals: comprehend languages, detect magic, find familiar except the ritual can only summon a left **crawling claw** which is a fiend and when you perceive what it does you only can see what it sees through your right eye and are blind in your left, identify, unseen servant, gentle repose, feign death, phantom steed, as well as the desecration ritual he is performing which requires fifteen pints of sacrificial blood as a material component and gives undead advantage on saving throws versus turning, followed by several blank pages and then if the players keep reading, on the last set of pages there is an image drawn in blood of a severed hand holding an eye, the eye will look at whomever is reading it and then the last sets of pages will burst into flames, with only the title of create bloodguard left to tease the players of what Vecna doesn't want them to glean. Attempts to repair the book with the mending cantrip will fail. The ritual book is otherwise unharmed.
9. He is the bloodbond of all the **bloodguards** in the keep, so their abilities will tie off of his presence and survival.

Ephraim is a skilled fighter and a brilliant tactician and you should play him as such, if he is alone he will not try to fight enemies with a numerical advantage head on. He can teleport up to 30 feet once per short rest by using his action surge and he will not hesitate to use this to escape. While in combat if he is willing to stand and fight he prefers to use that ability to get close to spellcasters without armor as soon as it is feasible to do so. Also his ring makes him immune to his own fireball spell. When the players fight him in one of the towers he will have his staff of Vecna's chosen beat the gong in a particular manner which will signal to all the undead (except the ghosts in 2B, they aren't under Ephraim's control, but don't attack him out of fear) in the keep to come to his aid. Keep a note of how many are left and assume they travel to his location without taking dash actions. The players should assume he will be receiving aid unless they've killed everything else. Also attacking with the staff of Vecna's chosen does use up his bonus action but considering it is essentially a ranged weapon he will use it whenever he can. If the fight goes particularly poorly for the players, consider having Ephraim call off his undead for a few rounds to monologue to the players about things like, "the westerlings are plotting to kill our king and only I can see it,"

"only I have been given the proper vision by the lord of secrets," "the real enemy is luz and we cannot allow these Baklunish interlopers to pollute our society with their influence," "the Scarlet Brotherhood has sent these heathens who follow other gods into our midst to corrupt us with their backward ways."

During his monologue he would be so engrossed in his own speech to notice the players quaff a few potions and his undead don't act without orders. Obviously if the players attack him before he is finished then the fight ought to continue, with Ephraim concentrating on the player who attacked him.

Ephraim's Treasure. In addition to his equipment; Ephraim has the staff of Vecna's chosen (see appendix A) and a ring of improved fire resistance attuned to him, as well as his ritual book. Any NPC with a knowledge of bloodguards might be willing to pay for the ritual book to try and learn how to replicate it even if the players already triggered the burning of those pages.

Additionally he will have a journal on him detailing his actions for the past several years but most importantly for the players current mission, it will confirm Ephraim did order his undead bloodguard Knights to attack the Baklunish delegation, giving them the evidence they need to resume their peaceful diplomatic mission.

FORT LOCATIONS - MAP III

1. Broken Gatehouse - Outside

"As you walk up to the entry to the Manticore's Nest you see the doors and portcullis for this gatehouse look like they haven't worked in ages, why they've not been maintained is a mystery for another day. The two towers for the gatehouse stand to either side of the broken gate and the dirt path between them. Many arrow slits line the walls of the tower."



Art by William Dvorak

If the players enter during the day or are spotted entering at night by the skeletons in the guardhouses (area 3) then they open fire with their crossbows as soon as the players are in range and sound the alarms in their respective towers.

2. Courtyard - Outside

"A large patch of gravel and soil is just within the bailey of this small fort. To the north and south of the entrance are the doors to a pair of guardhouses which flank the way inside. Beyond each of those entrances are several troughs for watering horses which sit empty of fluid. To the north, attached to the outer wall is a building, and a similar building on the south wall. The western wall likewise has a building built directly into the wall of the fort, albeit larger than the north and south buildings. There is also a narrow alley of sorts between the central building and the two to the north and south leading to two areas which are within the bailey but still not under the cover of rooftops."

There are doors on the north and south walls into the north and south halls (area 4), there are doors to the north and south guardhouses (area 3), the central building has three doors leading from the courtyard to the hallways there (area 4), the north and south buildings have doors which lead to their interiors (areas 8 and 7 respectively); all of these doors are locked. The alleyways to the north and south lead to areas with wells (areas 2A and 2B respectively). Even though there is no way into the corner towers directly from here, unless a creature is tiny and can fit into

an arrow slit the players could look into the slits to see what is inside the towers. Or get shot from them. If the players haven't dealt with the skeletons in the guardhouses then the skeletons will climb the ladders inside the guardhouse towers to shoot down at the players in the courtyard, also it should be noted each of the corner towers has an arrow slit looking into the courtyard as well.

2A. Firewood Pile - Outside

"Along the east wall of the northernmost building within the bailey is piled an inordinately large amount of firewood near a door to the north wall, there is also a large cistern to catch rainwater



which is currently half full such that the water is a solid 10 feet from the rim of the reservoir. A stump for cutting firewood sits to the south of the space, but no woodcutting axe can be seen nearby."

While there is an arrow slit here there is a great deal of cover if the players want to force their way into the north wall from the door here as there aren't any enemies other than those who lie beyond the arrow slit. If the players look into the cistern it is empty other than the water.

2B. Corpse Pile - Outside

"Along the south wall of the central building within the bailey is piled over a dozen corpses, the bodies

are wrapped in linens and burlap and tied with ropes and twine, there is also a large cistern to catch rainwater which is currently full within a few inches of the brim. There is also an empty wheelbarrow here just in front of a door to the south wall.”

The wheelbarrow was recently used to move the bodies so if the players use detect magic to see it they will see faint traces of necromancy as well as on two of the corpses and traces in the cistern as there are ghastrs here. The cistern is deep enough PCs can't make out the bottom without darkvision. Two of the wrapped bodies and the cistern contains a **ghast**, the one in the cistern will climb out and attack the players if they either look down the well or if they try to open the door, the two who are wrapped will spend the first round of combat tearing their way out and climbing out of the corpse pile.

Treasure. The bottom of the cistern conceals a small wooden chest with a rope tied around it and a five pound brick on the other end of the rope, someone obviously had some means of retrieving it. The easiest method would be to use mage hand to grab the brick and then hoist the chest up. The chest contains 220 copper sparrows, 140 silver hawks, 50 gold lions, and the following semi-precious stones all worth 10 gold lions each: azurite, banded agate, eye agate, lapis lazuli, malachite, moss agate, obsidian, tiger eye, and a turquoise.

3. Guardhouses - Inside

“The interior of this gatehouse has a few racks with weapons and shields on the wall which defenders would use to defend the keep from attackers however the true danger to this place was time and neglect. A door connects the guardhouse to the bailey courtyard and a set of double doors lead into a hallway inside the walls, there is a single rushlight by each door. A ladder heads up to a trapdoor which would have led to another floor of the guardhouse had the upper level not have crumbled away. Several arrow slits give those inside the room a good bead on those approaching from outside. Additionally there is a large brass gong to sound an alarm.”

Both guardhouses contain the same things and the same enemies. Creatures inside the guardhouse have three-quarters cover while shooting out the arrow slits while people shooting from the outside gain no such benefit. In addition to the equipment carried by the skeletons in here, the equipment on the racks and walls are as follows: six spears, four shortswords, two longswords, two halberds, two heavy crossbows, and three quivers with twenty bolts each. The walls have eight shields mounted at regular intervals between the arrow slits and on the opposite wall. The shields are heater shields with the black field and the white owl with wings outstretched of the Knights of the Watch, or some variation on that theme.

The inside of these crumbled towers have four **skeleton arbalesters** (see appendix B) which keep watch out for intruders, if they spot someone, one of the archers will try to sound an alarm. The remaining skeletons don't have orders to sound the alarm if the one dies, potentially allowing the players to prevent an alarm from sounding if they can take out the skeleton, keeping in mind the other guardhouse has one also. It should be obvious to the players which skeleton is heading towards the gong and not attacking if they are in the tower.

4. Hallways - Inside

“The hallways of this keep are spartan and undecorated, with only a rushlight by each door.”

As each hallway has a different number of doors in them, the burning rushlights will let players know where the doors are, but there will be darkness in between the wells of light. A detect magic spell or similar magic will allow the caster to see the skeletons in the darkness.

Each hallway has random amounts of denizens, all former members of the Knights of the Watch. 1d4 **skeleton arbalesters** and 1d6+1 **skeleton sentries** (see appendix B) patrol each hallway, intentionally avoiding the light from the rushlights. There is no alarm to sound in the halls and the skeletons attack as soon as they are aware of the players presence.

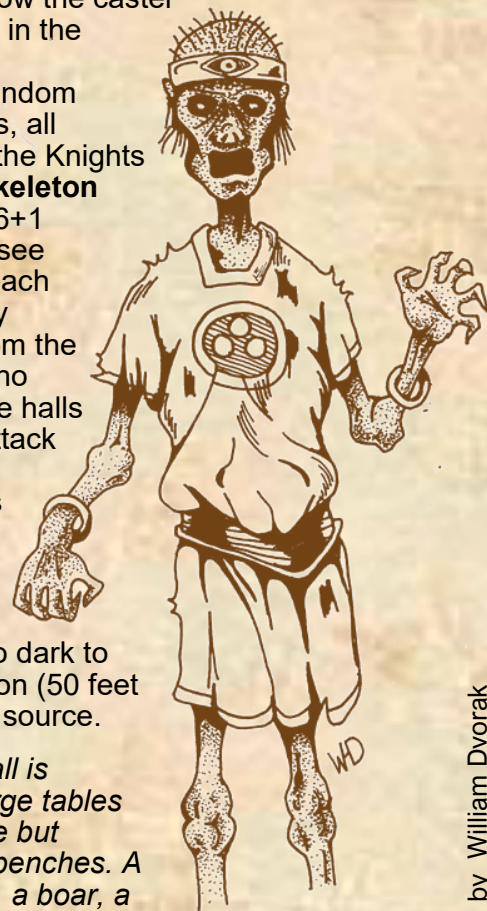
5. Dining Hall - Inside

The dining hall is too dark to see without darkvision (50 feet to far wall) or a light source.

“This large dining hall is dominated by six large tables surrounded by crude but efficient chairs and benches. A trio of animal heads, a boar, a bear, and a stag, are mounted on the north wall, the only decoration you've seen in this castle with a circular rug beneath them, the tables are empty and an unlit rushlight hangs in a special sconce by the door.”

The dining hall is empty as Ephraim, being the only keep occupant who needs to eat, takes his meals in the kitchen (area 8).

Treasure. Under the rug is a loose stone, under that stone is a wooden case which has four potions of



Art by William Dvorak

healing and two potions of greater healing.

6. Armory - Inside

"This room contains an armory a forge and a workroom. At one time this room would be used to make, maintain, and display weapons and armor which the Watchers would use to carry out their vigil. Now it seems quiet, although there are signs someone does still use the forge as there are some glowing embers within it bathing the place in a dim light. Beside the forge and its bellows there are a total of twelve tables with various bits of tools and equipment on them.

Three anvils in various locations, as well as a pair of suits of full plate with visored helmets on display in the two northern corners mounted on small pedestal daises holding spears and shields used by the Knights of the Watch."

Upon closer inspection the weapons and armor on the tables is all Paynim and Zeif in origin, it seems someone is trying to mimic the style while making new equipment. To what end? In this room can be found the following items: two sets of smith's tools, two sets of tinker's tools, one set of leatherworker's tools, four chain shirts, two shields of Zeif make, two scimitars, two handaxes, and two longswords with handles more like the Zeif and Paynim scimitars than a Keoish broadsword.

If the players take anything or if they get too close to the suits of full plate the players will discover they are both actually **skeleton footknights** (see appendix B) and they will attack the players.

Discovering it from afar requires a Wisdom (perception) check of 16 to realize the visors slowly move to watch the players, if they players don't have a light source this is with disadvantage because of the dim light.

7. Barracks - Inside

The barracks are too dark to see at night without darkvision, during the day the sunlight allows dim light into the room.

"This room contains many beds, several cramped looking triple bunks are set up in this room. It functions as the sleeping area for the entire fort, or it did before they were all made into the walking dead."

This room is dark and contains no enemies, under each bunk is a small footlocker containing the personal effects of the knights who once lived here. There is no shortage of common and traveler's clothes.

Treasure. It will take an hour (divided by the number of participating players) to search all the footlockers, if they choose to do so they will find: 10 electrum eagles, 15 silver hawks, 14 copper sparrows, two bottles of fine wine, one flask of a colorless gnomish spirit called Nilwick which would sell for 15 gold lions, a bottle of high quality fish sauce from

Saltmarsh worth 5 gold lions, and a silver candlestick which resembles a female merfolk worth 25 gold lions.

8. Kitchen - Inside

Depending on the time of day, this room will either be empty or occupied. If empty, the kitchen will be too dark to see at night without darkvision, during the day the sunlight allows dim light into the room.

"This room is obviously the kitchen, a pair of fireplaces for cooking are flanking both sides of the door, each with a preparation table far enough away to not catch fire. The north and east walls are lined with barrels and bags of provisions, enough to feed an army. In the southwestern corner a large basin full of water sits ready to be used. And in the outtheastern corner, a trapdoor leading to a root cellar."

If the players have come at a time when it is occupied by Ephraim preparing a meal for himself. "This room is obviously the kitchen, a pair of roaring fireplaces for cooking are flanking both sides of the door, each with a preparation table far enough away to not catch fire. One table has a knife moving on its own to cut vegetables for a simmering stew. While the other table has some bread kneading itself. The north and east walls are lined with barrels and bags of provisions, enough to feed an army. In the southwestern corner a large basin full of water sits ready to be used just as a pitcher lifts itself out of the basin. And in the southeastern corner, a trapdoor leading to a root cellar."

The nine barrels on the north wall are filled with salt pork, salt beef, and salted herring, three barrels of each, the twelve sacks contain flour. The seven barrels on the east wall contain dried beans and lentils. The root cellar contains nothing but carrots, parsnips, beets, turnips and rutabaga all stacked in boxes, well preserved because of how cold it is.. If the players encounter Ephraim here he will order the three unseen servants he has ritually summoned to distract the players, they can't do much to help him other than give him advantage by taking the help action and throwing things at the players. Additionally, he will not choose to fight the players here and will try to retreat to a tower he believes still has his undead servants present. Assume whatever door he came through to get to the courtyard is still unlocked and he should proceed to that door to regroup with his minions.

9.-12. Towers - Inside

"The interior of this tower has a few racks with weapons and shields on the wall which defenders would use to defend the keep from attackers. A set of double doors on the (directions) walls connects the guard tower to the hallways, there is a single rushlight by each door. A ladder heads up to a trapdoor which would have led to another floor of the

tower had the upper level not have crumbled away. Several arrow slits give those inside the room a good bead on those approaching from outside as well as a single arrow slit which looks into the courtyard. Most prominently however is the large arcane sigil painted on the floor in what can only be humanoid blood, runes in each of the seven points appear to be glowing, bathing the room in a dim reddish light wherever it is not lit by the rushlight. Additionally there is a large brass gong to sound an alarm."

For players using detect magic or a similar effect: in addition to the aura of necromancy on any of the undead or their remains, the sigil on the floor radiates an aura of evocation magic, the ruby in the skull eye socket radiates divination, and the diamond radiates necromantic energy.

Treasure. In the center of the large sigils in each is a humanoid skull, in each of the skulls eye sockets are two uncut gemstones: the right eye contains a ruby worth 500 gold lions, and the left contains a diamond worth 500 gold lions.

The equipment in each tower on its racks and walls are the same as in area 3.

Curse. If a PC takes the diamond before they take the ruby, that player must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become cursed. The curse lasts until it is dispelled or removed and the effect of the curse is that undead will always deal an additional 1d8 necrotic damage with any weapon attack they make against that player. This curse can stack multiple times if the player does this each time. Taking the ruby first will not curse a player. Consider doing this roll in secret as the player will have no way to know they are cursed.

9. Northwestern Tower - Inside

In this room assisting Ephraim and keeping an eye out through the arrow slits for interlopers is a **bloodguard halberdier** and four **skeleton arbalesters** (see appendix B) like in the other towers and guardhouses one of the skeletons will try to sound the alarm in the first round.

10. Northeastern Tower - Inside

In this room assisting Ephraim and keeping an eye out through the arrow slits for interlopers is a **bloodguard shieldbreaker** and four **skeleton arbalesters** (see appendix B) like in the other towers and guardhouses one of the skeletons will try to sound the alarm in the first round.

11. Southwestern Tower - Inside

In this room assisting Ephraim and keeping an eye out through the arrow slits for interlopers is a **bloodguard halberdier** and four **skeleton arbalesters** (see appendix B) like in the other towers and guardhouses one of the skeletons will try to sound the alarm in the first round.

12. Southeastern Tower - Inside

In this room assisting Ephraim and keeping an eye out through the arrow slits for interlopers is a **bloodguard captain** and four **skeleton arbalesters** (see appendix B) like in the other towers and guardhouses one of the skeletons will try to sound the alarm in the first round.

AFTERMATH

If the players entered the Manticore's Nest and fought with the undead, but had to flee before defeating Ephraim. Whether killing him or him fleeing, and then choose not to return to finish the job, then upon returning to Flen they will be able to report the source of the undead problem and the Flen guard and members of the Keoish military will travel to the fort to put down the problem. Regardless of which members of the delegation survived, the players will not be given any reward by the Baklunish, and will only receive the Letter of Recommendation weeks later.

If it becomes obvious the PCs will defeat Ephraim, he will attempt to flee, claiming, "The Lord of Secrets will make me stronger and I will come back to find you no matter what!" If he successfully flees, he will drop his journal and leave behind the Staff of Vecna's Chosen (see Ephraim's treasure and appendix A) as he gets further and further away the grip of his severed hand on the staff will open and eventually the hand will shrivel up and wither away leaving only a skeletal hand behind as the staff rolls harmlessly to the ground.

If the players defeat Ephraim but neither Mitra or Aytak survived, Altair will thank them for allowing them to continue their mission and will reward the players with 100 gold efreets for their troubles.

If the players defeat Ephraim but only one of Mitra or Aytak survived, Altair and the other surviving member of the Ismail family in Keoland offer their gratitude, rewarding the players with 200 gold efreets and 40 platinum magi, additionally they will offer hospitality should the players ever find their way to the family estate in Zeif.

If the players defeat Ephraim and both Mitra and Aytak survived, they all offer their gratitude, rewarding the players with 500 gold efreets and 50 platinum magi, Mitra will offer her sword, the spahi's kilij to the party as well, additionally they will offer hospitality should the players ever find their way to the family estate in Zeif.

Eventually they will also receive a Letter of Recommendation from King Kimbertos Skotti himself (see chapter 7 of the **DMG**) in several weeks from a courier.

THE VILLAGE OF ELMSHIRE

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