



Game Master's Screen

"The Erebus Cross Part One: The Lady's Favor" Written by Rob Vaux

The Explorer's Society Written by Jennifer Wick, Patrick Kapera, Kevin Wilson and Ray Yand

Screen Artwork: William O'Connor

Screen Design: Steve Hough

Interior Artwork: Cris Dornaus, Dærick Gröss, Raven Mimura

Interior Layout: Brendon Goodyear, Steve Hough

Artwork Prepress: Brendon Goodyear

Line Editor: D.J. Trindle

Editing: D.J. Trindle, Rob Vaux and John Glenn





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The Erebus Cross, Part One: The Lady's Favor

Chapter One: Introduction

Montegue du Montaigne is in danger and only the Heroes can save him! From the back alleys of Montaigne's capital to the howling wilderness of Mother Ussura, they must journey across the length of Théah to deliver him from his enemies. Along the way, they will face constant peril, supernatural dangers and the sinister intrigues of Montaigne's Imperial Court. Do they have the strength to survive?

Welcome to *The Lady's Favor*, the first in a trilogy of adventures for the *7th Sea* roleplaying game. *The Erebus Cross Trilogy* gives players and GMs an overview of the world of Théah, and the people and creatures who occupy it, and provides a compelling storyline to take them through it. Each section explores a different segment of Théah, from the political maneuvering of royal families to the mysterious islands in the far western seas. When it's over, the Heroes will have had the opportunity to shape the fate of nations, and learned the truth about an artifact as old as time itself. We hope you enjoy the ride.

The Lady's Favor is divided into three chapters. The first (the one you are reading now) contains instructions on how to run the adventure and an overview of the basic storyline involved. The second contains details on the

adventure itself: both the set elements of the plot and the variable elements that the GM and players will use according to their whims (see "The Structure," below). Finally, we've included detailed descriptions of the Major NPCs the party will meet and the way they fit into the adventure. GMs can refer to them as they go along to get an idea of who the Heroes are meeting.

The Structure

The Lady's Favor doesn't run the way typical adventures do. That is, it doesn't follow a set progression of encounters which lead from the beginning of the story to the end. At the same time, however, it isn't so free-form that the GM will have to organize everything just to have a workable story. In truth, it lies somewhere in the middle. When we first discussed *The Lady's Favor*, we talked a lot about story rigidity. We didn't want to force the Heroes to follow a set path where one event inexorably follows upon another. On the other hand, we needed to have some structure, or else it wouldn't be an adventure at all; it'd be a sourcebook. The story would therefore need to be flexible without compromising the coherence of the plot.

In addition, we didn't want the module limited in terms of the Heroes' experience level. A group of advanced, highly skilled Heroes should be able to participate in *The Lady's Favor* as much as a group of beginning Heroes and vice versa. That meant that the threats and encounters would need to be tailored to fit different Heroes: new as well as experienced. First-timers should have some exciting adventures without getting their Heroes killed, while older, experienced players should be able to have the same adventures without becoming bored out of their skulls.

That's a tricky balance to maintain. Eventually, we settled on a solution that landed somewhere in the middle of all of these elements. The adventure lists several "hard point" events that need to occur if the players are to reach

their goals (for example, at some point in their journey, they need to travel down a river; it's impossible to get from Montaigne to Ussura otherwise). But the exact placement of those hard points, and the way the Heroes will reach them, depends upon the course they wish to take. In addition, we've offered the GM a large group of events and encounters from which to choose. They're not necessary to run the adventure, but they enhance the value of the drama and can make the experience more enjoyable. Unlike "random" encounters, most of these are firmly connected to the overall storyline; they're just not as vital as the hard points are. The GM is free to place them wherever they're appropriate or ignore them depending upon his or her whims.

To incorporate Heroes of different powers and experience, we've assigned a point value to each encounter; the higher the value, the more dangerous it is and the better suited it is to powerful Heroes. GMs can leave out the difficult ones if they feel they are too challenging, or ignore the easy ones if they think them a waste of time. As long as the hard points are eventually reached, the GM can use the remainder of the book in any manner that fits his or her campaign.

This sort of format requires a little effort on the part of the GM. You need to read through this book carefully, and determine beforehand which encounters would best suit your Heroes. You need to decide how much they can handle, and what they'll find most exciting and stimulating. And you need to be prepared to roll with the punches, to take a different direction if the Heroes do something unexpected. But with a little preparation, that shouldn't be too difficult. The format is intended to help you gain the most enjoyment out of *The Lady's Favor*, and to help tailor the adventure to fit your unique campaign.

Basic Outline of the Story

The Montaigne General Montegue has led his armies into the vast steppes of Ussura in an effort to expand the

Empereur's presence across the known world. He's been having a difficult time of it; the spirit of the land has fought the invading army at every turn. The offensive has bogged down, and casualties have risen as animals, trees, and the air itself seems to conspire against them. Montegue, a strategic genius and fiercely proud soldier, has refused to back down.

Unbeknownst to Montegue, forces back in Montaigne are plotting his demise. Empereur Leon has come to hate the popular general, whom he feels is stealing the spotlight from himself. He sent Montegue off to Ussura to be killed, counting on the brutal weather and savage natives to do what he couldn't (not without inciting a revolt, at the very least). As Montegue struggles across the icy steppes, Leon waits impatiently for word of the general's death.

The general has help, however. Lady Dominique du Montaigne, Leon's youngest daughter, developed a rapport with Montegue despite their politically-motivated arranged marriage. Recently, she learned of her father's intentions towards the dashing young military leader and vowed to stop it. As the adventure opens, she has contacted the Heroes and asked them to deliver Montegue a message for her, revealing the duplicity and begging him to return to Montaigne. They must reach him if he is to abandon the Ussura campaign, and save his own life (not to mention the soldiers under his command).

Naturally, it won't be easy. The Heroes will be pursued at every turn by the forces of the Empereur, loyal men who believe that the Heroes plot treachery. They must make their way across hundreds of miles of hostile countryside, dodging military patrols and heartless bandits alike. They must confront the horrors of the uncivilized forests, creatures of supernatural malevolence who will stop at nothing to destroy their very souls. And at the end, there is Ussura, where the land itself has turned against the invaders. Even if they find Montegue, there may be a few nasty surprises waiting for them at the end of the line. But

don't worry. With a good sword and a few friends at your side, anything is possible.

Adventure Outline

Point One: The Heroes are contacted by Dominique Montaigne, who asks them to deliver a message to her husband, General Montegue. She gives them a mystic artifact which will allow them to locate him. Before they can leave Charouse, however, they are pursued by a misguided contingent of the King's Musketeers, who believe they are plotting treason. The Musketeers continue to chase them throughout the adventure.

Getting the Heroes Involved

Dominique can't trust anyone in the Montaigne government; though odious, Empereur Leon commands absolute loyalty, and will doubtless hear of any messenger she employs. Nor can she depend on any foreign governments, who will seek to use her plot to further their own ends. It will take a private source, one with no higher agenda and who can be trusted to keep his or her word. The Heroes are the ideal resource. The party's make-up will depend on your players, of course, but it is highly probable they will be from different nations. She feels more comfortable employing a diverse group, who are apt to follow individual goals instead of national or political ones. She also knows that they will keep their word if she asks for it (or at least stay loyal if enough money is thrust under their noses); her fate witch Anna has told her as much. Finally, she knows that they are highly skilled, and can withstand the hardships of the road between here and Ussura. In a dangerous environment, they are the safest and most logical choice.

Point Two: After a journey east across Montaigne (and experiencing whatever adventures the GM sees fit to insert there), the Heroes come to a large river — the best means of transport if they wish to continue their journey. In the port city, their pursuers catch up with them, and they must think quickly if they are to escape. A penniless member of the Explorer's Society and a crew of clever smugglers may provide a way out. Along the river, they have an opportunity to get to know their new companions, laying the seeds for future installments of *The Erebus Cross*.

This point can be switched with Point Three if necessary.

Point Three: Getting closer to Ussura, the Heroes must abandon civilization and travel into the wilderness. There, they encounter all manner of supernatural creatures bent on their destruction. The Musketeers continue to dog their trail, and they must decide whether to help them through the wilderness — or abandon them to the terrors that lurk there.

Point Four: The Heroes finally arrive in Ussura. The Montaigne army is suffering daily from crippling weather, maddening geography and local shapeshifters determined to wipe them out. Here, the party finally reaches Montegue, and has a final confrontation with the relentless Musketeers who have pursued them for so long. Just when they think their mission is completed, an unseen enemy strikes, forcing them once again to set out for parts unknown. Where they end up, only Fate can tell.

Chapter Two: The Adventure

This chapter is divided into two segments — the Hard Points, describing events in the storyline which must take place, and the Variable Encounters, which you can insert

where you wish or ignore according to the dictates of the plot.

Hard Points

There are four solid events in the course of the Lady's Favor: the introductory scene, which first involves the Heroes in the adventure, the finale, where they achieve their objective, and two obstacles in between, which must be crossed in order to succeed. How they handle these four events will determine the nature of the rest of the adventure.

Part One: A Matter Most Urgent

Dominique Montaigne has been ignored most of her life. The youngest daughter of the Empereur, her gender and lack of magical ability has gravely disappointed her father. He married her to General Montegue to keep tabs on him and to get her out of his way. As far as he is concerned, she no longer exists.

The young Dominique has a few surprises for the Empereur, however. Not only is she a strong and capable young woman, but she's amassed some contacts of her own. She has recently learned that her husband was sent off to Ussura to die: the Montaigne court drummed up an excuse to go to war with the boyars, and Montegue was more than happy to lead the invading army. The Ussuran steppes are harsh and merciless; no foreign army has ever crossed them and survived. Montegue is too confident of his own abilities to realize that; once he enters Ussura, the king believes, his life can be measured in days. With the popular young general out of the way, the peasantry will no longer be distracted from the glory of the Sun King, and any potential political problems he represents will vanish in the Ussuran snow.

Dominique was horrified to when she discovered her father's cruelty, and has determined to put a stop to it. While she doesn't love her husband, she knows what a great asset he is, and refuses to sacrifice him on the altar

of King Leon's vanity. A carefully worded message, placed into Montegue's hands, will be enough to get him to turn around and come back to Montaigne where he belongs. All she needs to do is find someone to deliver it...

The party begins the adventure in Charouse, the capital of Montaigne. Their reasons for being there will vary according to the specifics of the campaign, and how Dominique contacts them depends upon their nationality and circumstance. If they aren't attached to any formal body, she will send her maid, the fate witch Anna, to make them an offer: a considerable reward and the chance to help a noblewoman with a dire problem. This should be straightforward and to the point. Anna will approach them in whatever manner they are accustomed to, as surreptitiously and unobtrusively as possible. She won't reveal who she's working for and she won't do any direct bargaining herself; she merely makes the offer and asks if they're interested.

If, on the other hand, they have some official government capacity, she will have someone from their own nation approach them: a superior, if possible, or someone else the Hero respects. He or she will explain that a "high ranking" Montaigne noble has called in a favor and requested the Heroes' services for an important mission. "The ambassador believes that your assistance in the matter would benefit our interests here," the Hero is told, "and if you perform well, you will doubtless gain notice at the highest levels." That should be enough to get them to meet Dominique and hear what she has to say.

A Hero from Montaigne presents perhaps the most difficult quandary of all. Approaching him or her runs the risk of alerting the king, and Dominique will move very cautiously before making contact. She will send Anna to speak to the Hero, swearing him to secrecy and implying that the fate of the nation may be at stake. If he wishes to help stave off a disaster, he should come and listen to the proposal. As before, Anna will not mention

her mistress's name, and swears the Hero to absolute secrecy before trusting him. If he balks, or appears disingenuous, she will subtly threaten him with her cursing power, noting that those who cross a fate witch have been known to meet horrible fates. That should be enough to prod them in the right direction.

In any case, the party will be given instructions to meet Dominique at sunset the following day, in a clandestine locale within the city's catacombs. The location should be enough to raise the Heroes' eyebrows: the catacombs aren't the sort of place for a quiet chat. Nevertheless, they receive detailed directions to the rendezvous point and should have little trouble reaching the location.

Charouse and the Catacombs

Charouse is one of the most beautiful cities in the world: many consider it the center of civilization itself. Its tree-lined avenues are clean and well paved, lined with gorgeous parks and beautiful townhouses. The elaborate grace of its architecture blends seamlessly with the natural landscape while well-dressed nobles frequent its brilliant galleries and salons. The paragons of the art world frequently visit, while the halls of government house the most powerful men in the world. It is a shining light representing the best humanity has to offer.

But its bright streets and gilded beauty hide darkness in the shadows. While the nobility basks in luxury, the underclass is slowly starving to death. Disease and poverty are rampant in the lower quarters, claiming dozens of victims every day. Crime has risen as the desperate peasantry turns on itself in an effort to find enough money to stay alive another few days. The poor neighborhoods

— carefully avoided by the main thoroughfares — are filthy and cramped. The back alleys and slouching tenements swarm with vermin both four-legged and two-legged. A wrong turn in this city could cost you your life.

The catacombs beneath the city are lengthy and confusing, comprising the civic sewer system, vaults and burial crypts, and countless subbasements where all manner of activities are performed. The Heroes can enter



them almost anywhere they wish; there are grates and manholes on almost every block and full-size gated entrances along the river side. They should take care to enter cautiously, however. Swordsmen don't generally venture into the rat-laden sewers, and onlookers are apt to give them some strange stares as the Heroes pry open an entranceway and trundle into the passage beneath.

The catacombs are wide, marked by gothic arches and stout stone pillars to hold them. The walls and floor are constructed of rough stone worn smooth by centuries of running water. Waterways are carved down the center of the passageways, washing detritus down towards the river. Every now and then, a yawning doorway opens along one wall, blackness the only thing beyond. Rats and other vermin skitter among the shadows, and strange noises can be heard in the distance. The party should feel that they are not the only ones down here.

The passages are dark and will need to be lit by an outside source. Nevertheless, their directions were quite explicit and they should have few problems getting to where they need to go. As they progress, the waterways and open passages slowly dwindle off, replaced by sealed stone vaults inscribed with family crests. The past aristocracy of the nation is buried down here, beneath the mansions and townhouses where their descendants now revel.

At last, the directions bring them to a turn in the passages cunningly hidden and easy to miss if they aren't looking. It leads to a small antechamber, some twenty feet square, sparsely lit by a pair of lanterns. A trio of exits lead out into the catacombs while the room's occupants stand demurely in the center. Both are dressed in flowing black velvet cloaks, the hoods pulled over to disguise their identity. The first is Anna, the woman who contacted them, dressed in her fate witch's finery. The second throws back her cloak once the Heroes have entered, revealing the face of the Empereur's youngest daughter. The party should be taken aback by the sight of the

delicate and mousy Dominique in this squalid environment.

The Offer

Dominique speaks to the party personally while Anna watches from the side. The Heroes should feel very uncomfortable in the fate witch's presence, and as the conversation continues, they can feel her studying them with her eyes. Anyone who knows anything about fate witches will be suitably unnerved by the attention.

The young Montaigne thanks them for coming and apologizes for meeting them under such mysterious circumstances. "There are elements in my government who do not wish me to speak with you," she explains. "It is better for all our sakes that we keep our contact clandestine." Quickly, she will tell them what she needs done. "My husband, the General Montegue, is in terrible danger. Forces plot his destruction and I know that he is not expected to return from Ussura alive. He must be warned before he — and the brave army he leads — falls victim to this terrible scheme.

"I have here a letter, sealed with my personal crest, informing him of the danger. I am certain that once he reads it, he will realize the folly of pressing onward and return home. I need brave men to deliver it for me; men who are unafraid of danger and willing to travel far in order to reach their goals. I have heard of your exploits and believe that you can be trusted with this burden. What say you: will you take this letter to Ussura and ensure that General Montegue receives it?"

If they push her for more details, she becomes evasive. She refuses to implicate her father, and doesn't want the Heroes knowing too much about her plans. The letter itself has been sealed and she doesn't want them to read it

From a political perspective, it should be in the Heroes' best interests to help keep Montegue safe. For supporters of Montaigne, depriving the country of such a military genius would be a terrible blow indeed. For foes of the

nation, Montegue can serve as a destabilizing element, drawing support away from the Empereur to his own banner. Either way, his death would be a tremendous blow, one which should be avoided at all costs. Emphasize this if the players need convincing.

In addition, there are countless personal advantages to accepting Dominique's offer. She holds enormous sway in Théan politics and can help gain them fame and recognition in the highest circles. A favor from a member of the Montaigne royal family could come in handy in the future. If politics don't interest them, she has the resources of the Imperial family at her disposal; she'd be willing to pay handsomely for their services. Of course, the nobility of coming to a lady's aid and the honorable task of warning a good man that his life is in danger should be enough for most Heroes. But these are role-players, after all. Let them haggle for whatever they want; if they get too greedy, have Anna fix them with a chilling gaze and remind them whom they're dealing with.

Assuming they agree to her request, she sets several conditions on the mission. Most importantly, no one must know they are working for her. The repercussions of discovery would be deadly, both for them and General Montegue. They must also move with deliberate speed; she can arrange for them to leave tonight, as soon as they are ready. The longer the letter remains undelivered, the greater the threat to the General's life. Finally, they must not have any dealings with the Montaigne government or other members of the King's Musketeers. "As honorable as they are, they may merely be pawns of our enemy, and will stop at nothing to intercept you and the message. If you fall into the hands of Montaigne's authorities, you will be signing your death warrants."

On the positive side, she's willing to provide them with whatever they need to complete their journey. She has access to documents of passage marking them as "agents of the King," which will not be questioned within Montaigne's borders. An unmarked coach can be

provided if they wish one, as well as horses and supplies. She can have them ready within the hour, at any location the Heroes wish. Once they pass east into Eisen, her influence will be more limited, but she is willing to provide pay for the journey – both in Montaigne gold and Eisen currency.

Most importantly, however, she will give them a means of finding Montegue once they reach Ussura. It is an ancient and very valuable artifact, discovered long ago by explorers in the outer isles. Bound in brass and in the shape of a mariner's compass, it has a companion piece which Montegue carries on him at all times. Strange inscriptions are carved into the compass's bottom, forming symbols in an unknown language. Each compass will point unerringly to its mate, the needles turning to direct the holder in the right direction. While most of the Montaigne court knows that Dominique has these artifacts, almost no one knows that she gave one of them to Montegue before he departed. He promised to carry it with him at all times. When she gives the party the letter, she will also give them the second artifact and explain how it works. It should lead them directly to the general. If Montegue agrees, the party may keep both artifacts as part of their reward.

"Halt! In the Name of the King!"

Just as the Heroes have completed their business, and Dominique hands them the letter and compass, the sounds of running footsteps can be heard in the passage behind them. "The guards!" Anna cries through her veil. "Madam, we must flee!" Dominique hisses any last-minute instructions to the Heroes and urges them to make themselves scarce before vanishing through one of the open passages. Seconds later, a group of the King's Musketeers rounds the corner, spots the party, and orders them to halt.

The soldiers were alerted to the party's presence by a diligent citizen who noticed them climbing into the sewers. They followed them at a discreet distance, in



order to discover what they were up to. Their leader, Charles du Chevalier, overheard snippets of their conversation with Dominique – distorted and echoing badly through the passages, but still audible. He is now convinced they are plotting against the king and has ordered his men to apprehend them at all costs.

There is one Musketeer for each Hero, plus five more. Their stats are listed on page 44. How things proceed from there is up to the Heroes, but flight is encouraged. There seem to be more Musketeers than Heroes and they can't afford to be captured or killed down here. The GM should remind them of the task they have just undertaken and that killing a Musketeer is a hanging offense. Beyond that, let the chips fall where they may.

Should the Heroes flee, the musketeers pursue them, which leads to a running fight through the Charouse sewers. Emphasize the dramatic nature of the chase: splashing water, shouts and cries, and the like. Have one of the pursuers fire a pistol at the Heroes every now and then. It shouldn't hit any of them, but don't let the players know that; roll the dice as if you were making a legitimate combat roll and stress that that bullet "just misses them," ricocheting off a nearby wall and spraying stone fragments everywhere. Make them feel like they're running on the razor's edge.

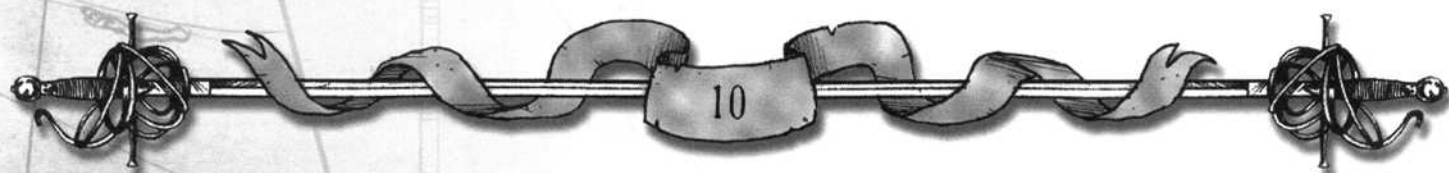
The players are free to use whatever methods they can devise to lose their pursuers, including splitting up, hiding, or exiting the sewers. The musketeers won't disturb any of the crypts or sarcophagi in the area so the party can hide there if they manage to open one of the doors. Hiding beneath the streams of sewage is a viable, if unpleasant option, as is blocking the passage (the stone walls are weak in points and can be brought down with a little effort). Allow them to try anything within reason and reward imaginative ideas.

Fighting can take place anywhere the Heroes wish to make a stand; their foes will be more than happy to return any violence in kind. They will try to take the

Heroes alive and won't use any lethal force until one of their own is taken down. Then the gloves come off. Innovative players can delay or disarm them without resorting to lethal force, but every round that combat continues, more soldiers are pouring into the catacombs. Speed and deftness should be the order of the day if the Heroes wish to escape.

Exiting the sewers should be a problem. Guards patrol the streets regularly in this area and will notice any subterranean activity – especially if it involves combat with the Musketeers. Only one manhole in the area emerges in a private location; it's a small access in the basement of the Columbe d'Or theatre, one of the largest and most prominent in Charouse. Lead the Heroes to it once the chase is beginning to wear, unless you wish to bring them up through an unguarded street access and let them scamper off. The theatre is hosting the world premiere of Anger Helven's new opera *Das Drachenfeld*, which has just gotten underway, but it's free of guards for the moment. It's the best option for making a clean getaway. The Heroes will find themselves in a small subbasement, packed with props and costumes. A stairway leads up to the backstage area, and sounds of the opera can be heard through the walls (the diva has just begun her first solo).

Of course, the Musketeers will pursue them into the theater and do whatever it takes to keep them from escaping. If the Heroes wish to fight them off, this is probably the best place to do so: there's plenty of activity and places to hide, and the party can easily scatter. The theatre is full of ropes to swing from, catwalks to engage in risky sword-fighting, and endless other sources of swashbuckling fun – as well as a cast of several dozen dressed in faux mythological armor. A particularly mischievous GM may want to push some dueling Hero and her opponent onto the stage – right in the middle of a big production number (the review tomorrow will mention the sword-fight as an "awkward" part of the



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play!). Thankfully, the party only has to worry about the musketeers here. The cast and audience won't fight, and will do their best to get out of the way if it becomes apparent that the mayhem isn't being staged.

There are numerous exits from the building which the party can use at any time. Once they clear the theater — assuming the guards aren't right on their heels — they should be relatively safe. The cry has been raised, but only a small handful of Musketeers actually saw the Heroes, so they have some room to maneuver. Even so, they ought to get clear of the city as soon as they can.

How they escape Charouse is entirely up to them. The Musketeers are looking for them, but they can't be everywhere, and it shouldn't be too difficult to slip out.

Dominique can have a coach and/or horses prepared at any location they wish (assuming they discussed it before being interrupted). If a hue and cry has been raised, she can provide a discreet alternate escape route: a rope suspended between the city wall and a townhouse bordering it, away from any regular patrols. It takes a Finesse TN 15 roll to cross, but if they succeed, they're home free.

Once they have slipped out of the city, they're on their own as to how to proceed. They will need to cross the Montaigne frontier and get over the Weissberg Mountains to Eisen, using whatever means at their disposal. There are two generally accepted routes into Eisen: they could travel overland and use the passes through the Weissberg mountains, or they could travel south to the Dechain river and book passage on a barge. The river route is easier and much quicker, avoiding the dangerous passes of the Weissbergs. But overland is more direct and may



appeal to “the shortest distance” types. It's up to the players to decide how to proceed.

Unfortunately, the King's Musketeers will be following them. Captain Chevalier is incensed that the party got away (and killed some of his men, if bloodshed occurred) and has vowed to stop them before they can complete their dastardly mission. Once it becomes clear that the party is no longer in Charouse, he assembles a company of twenty musketeers and gains permission to “pursue these enemies of the state” to the fullest of his ability. He's an adept tracker and will be on their trail in a matter of days. As the Heroes proceed, they will find their path dogged by a driven and relentless foe.

If the Heroes are somehow captured, or turn themselves in, they will be tortured for information, tried, and executed as enemies of the state. Dominique Montaigne will claim the letter is a forgery and the compass was stolen in an effort to frame her. She will deny having any



contact with the Heroes, and leave them to their fate. The moral of the story is “Don’t get caught.”

The GM is now free to insert whatever random encounters he or she feels is appropriate while on the road in Montaigne. See the “Changing Elements” section, below, or use encounters of your own devising. The next hard point depends on the route the party takes out of Montaigne. If they reach the Weissberg mountains first, go to Part Three. If, on the other had, they traveled south to the river, go to Part Two.

Part Two: On the Waterfront

Where this event occurs depends upon the Heroes’ movements, and the course they have chosen to reach Ussura. Eventually, they will need to make use of a river, no matter where they go. Rivers are the lifeline of Théan economy and traffic along them is swift and (relatively)

safe. If the Heroes traveled south of Charouse, they will eventually find themselves in the port town of Manche along the Dechain River. If they headed east over the mountains, they will either end up in Gottkirchen on the Roth or Südlachenburg on the western shore of the great Südlache. In any case, they will find themselves in need of passage east and dearly pressed for time. The solution is passage on a boat — one whose crew won’t ask questions.

Captain Chevalier has dogged the party relentlessly up until this point, and they should feel him pressing down on them (they may have encountered him earlier; see “Random Elements,” below). Several hours before they enter the town, the party will spot the Musketeers on the road behind them — riding at a hard gallop. They will need to make arrangements for passage quickly or else risk confrontation within the town. If Chevalier reaches the local constabulary, he can enlist them against the



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players (even in Eisen, the Musketeers hold authority), which could be big trouble. There are no sewers to hide in here.

The Heroes reach the town just before sunset; their papers should allow them entrance and a few coins can avert the gaze of even the hardest guard. Once inside, they'll want to find a ship quickly. The GM should adjust the particulars of the port based on where the Heroes are (they won't speak Montaigne in an Eisen town, for example). Certain elements remain consistent, however: the docks are packed with ships of all varieties, from military cutters to simple fishing boats bringing in hauls of trout. Cargo from all over Théah is loaded and unloaded into portside warehouses, and the lower quarters are packed with inns and other rough establishments. Sailors are a common sight along the streets, usually drunk, escorting a jenny, or both.

The party may use whatever methods they can think of to secure a boat. There are many captains along the docks, and plenty more in the inns and alehouses. The problem is, none of them are willing to hire on. Some have full manifests and don't need the money. Others just got in after a long haul and aren't keen to ship out again. More than a few just don't like the party's looks: people desperate to ship out are usually on the run from big trouble. Allow the players to talk to as many crusty boatowners and craggy bartenders as they wish. None of them will agree to book passage for tonight, no matter how much money is offered.

Finally, when it seems they have exhausted every option, they will come upon a small establishment just off an alleyway. No sign hangs above its door, but the words "Food and Spirits" have been painted on the wall next to it, along with an ornate arrow pointing the way. Conversation and laughter can be heard within.

The establishment has no name; regulars simply call it "The Place." Wooden benches and tables have been scattered across the floor of the main room, occupied by

all manner of adventurers and vagabonds. Pipe smoke wafts to the ceiling from a dozen sources, and a well-dressed steward passes bottles of wine (or ale if in Eisen) between the tables. But the most interesting part of the room is the décor, which is unlike anything the Heroes have seen. Odd knickknacks crowd into shelves and corners. Ornate masks, knives and staves, even a few shrunken heads hanging from pegs. All of the objects look strange and unearthly, not of Théan manufacture at all. They seem old, far older than the bar which houses them. Characters who have been to the western oceans may recognize a few of the designs from islands they may have visited. It comes as quite a jar in the midst of this unassuming and otherwise normal establishment.

The Heroes can approach whoever they wish to ask about a ship, but none of the customers will be able to help them. The steward, however, is another story. His name is Jean (Waldorf if in Eisen) and he's wearing an expensive crimson waistcoat that belies his humble position. In truth, he's the owner of the establishment filling in for a sick employee. The party can approach him during their queries. If they don't, he overhears them talking to a customer and beckons one of them into a nearby nook.

"You know, a fellow came in here a while ago, looking for money to pay his crew. Name was... Coson, I think. Avalon. If you've got cash to spend, I imagine you could reach an arrangement with him."

If the Heroes are interested, he gives them directions to a seedy townhouse seven blocks away. The steward is an Explorer, a member of the secret society dedicated to uncovering and restoring the ancient artifacts of the past. Most Explorers spent their time traveling to the farthest corners of the globe seeking ruins and other locations that might hold such valuable treasures. Jean/Waldorf, on the other hand, is a fence, someone who stores the artifacts once they're found and helps transport them to their final destination. He's built up the restaurant's décor

from minor items acquired over the course of many years.

The Avalon he mentions is actually named Coleson, another member of the Society who has recently arrived in town. Coleson is staying at a safehouse while he desperately tries to gather enough money to move on. When Jean/Waldorf heard the Hero mention that they needed a boat, he thought he'd help his fellow Explorer by sending them Coleson's way.

The Heroes should have no problems following directions to the safehouse. Night has fallen when they emerge from the restaurant and lamplighters are busy igniting the street lamps. Midway through the journey, one of the Heroes spots the Musketeers, several blocks up and heading for the docks. They won't notice the party as long as no one draws their attention, but their presence should make the players' hearts race a little faster. Chevalier is here.

The Explorer's Safehouse

The location Jean/Waldorf directed them to is a tottering heap of a townhouse lying just north of the wharves. It slouches against a nearby hostel, unpainted and showing its age. The roof is missing shingles in numerous locations and the chimney looks ready to collapse at any instant. Despite that, the front door is stout and reinforced, capable of holding off a large number of people. It would if it were closed, that is; at the moment, it stands wide open, spilling light and human voices into the street. A strange symbol has been mounted discreetly on the stoop; the sign of the Explorer's Society.

Inside, the building is threadbare yet tasteful, with dark rugs and a few framed maps on the wall. The foyer opens into a good-size living room, where a fire blazes merrily in the hearth. A small, excitable-looking Avalon stands in one corner, shouting at a taller man with an imperious gaze on his face.

"But they're going to dump the bloody cargo overboard for Fist's sake! I spent ten years gathering those and if we don't come up with their money, it's gone! How can the society refuse... who the deuce are you?"

At this point, the Heroes should introduce themselves.

The Avalon is Reginald Coleson, the man they were sent to find. His companion is Antonio Scalessi, a Vodacce member of the society in charge of moving supplies through this port. The two became so engaged in their argument that they failed to realize their front door had blown open. Considering the secretive nature of their work, it's quite embarrassing and the pair will go to great lengths to cover their gaffe.

After formal introductions have been made, the Heroes can explain their purpose. Coleson will listen to what they have to say, then warily ask why they think he can help them. In truth, they're the answer to his prayers; he just doesn't want the Heroes knowing that until he's had a chance to size them up. Coleson's dilemma is this: after ten years of gathering artifacts from the far western islands, he has returned to Théah with a considerable shipment. He's trying to get them to a nobleman in northern Eisen who funded the expedition and agreed to study the artifacts in detail if they were returned to his estate. But now, Coleson has run out of money; the crew he hired is holding the shipment at the docks until they are paid for the remainder of their journey (their back wages come to some amount of money within the Heroes' means). They're threatening to dump the entire load in the river if they don't get their money, and Coleson has come to the Society to beg for funds. Scalessi, unfortunately, doesn't have nearly enough on hand; it will take time to send for the money, and the crew is growing restless.

The Heroes represent a fast solution to his problem. They have money and need a ship. He has a ship but no money. If they pay the crew and save his cargo, he'll take them up the river as far as they wish to go. Negotiations

should be role-played out. Coleson's character description can be found in Chapter Three, while Scalessi remains silent during the discussion. Coleson doesn't trust the players initially, and will try to bargain for as much as he can. But in the end, he'll agree to whatever the Heroes wish, as long as the ship's crew gets paid and he's free to continue to his destination.

The ship Coleson hired is called the River Mist (at least today it is), and stands moored at the far dock. The

current captain, "Ringer" Gutwold, is ready to pull up and leave at any moment — either because he's been paid and can move on or he's dumped Coleson's crates and wants to put as much distance between them and him as he can. As the party approaches, he'll look up and tense — for a moment, he thinks the Heroes are thugs sent to take the shipment back. His mood improves dramatically with money in his hand, and he'll take the Heroes to Eisen (if they're in Montaigne) or the Drachenberg Mountains (if they're in Eisen). He has no problems with the party being fugitives; he's smuggled human cargo before.

For more details on the River Mist and its crew, see "The Three Captains" description in Chapter Three.

Once the party is on board, the crew moves rapidly to depart, releasing the mooring lines and weighing anchor. The river (regardless of which one) is quite wide, and the ship has plenty of room to maneuver out of the slip. As the current catches it and the ship slowly pulls away, the Musketeers appear at the far end of the docks. Shouting at the top of their lungs, they gesture frantically at the departing barge and scream at bystanders to get out of their way. Harried Heroes are treated to the sight of a furious Chevalier, shaking his fist as they slip through his fingers once again.

The Musketeers can't catch the River Mist, but that won't stop them from trying. They'll form a firing line on the dock and unload their muskets in the Heroes' direction until the ship is out of sight. Bullets slam into the side of the barge and some whiz uncomfortably close to the crew's heads; the GM can decide whether any of them has a chance of hitting someone. The Heroes are welcome to dive for cover, return fire, or blow kisses as they see fit. Once they pass out of range, they can take comfort in the fact that the Musketeers won't find a boat any more easily than they did...

The Heroes can now relax a little and get to know their new companions. Reginald Coleson is considerably more cheerful, and will chat with them about whatever they



wish. The crew is a little surlier (they have work to do) but can still answer questions if their passengers wish. There is an opportunity here to make some first-rate contacts. The trip down the river takes about a week, and ends either in the town of Stark in southern Eisen, or at the Ussuran border near the Drachenberg mountains. Coleson will continue traveling north with his cargo, while the crew of the *River Mist* – money in hand – goes on their merry way. The Heroes can be set on shore wherever they wish along the line. The ship won't travel further east; there's too many threats to make the excursion worthwhile.

The GM can throw any number of random river encounters to make the journey more exciting. Use the samples in the “Changing Elements” section, or create your own, as you see fit. The crew, including Coleson and Captain Gutwold, will assist as best they can. We recommend that the party have at least one clash with the Musketeers or their allies along the way; it lets them know that the chase is still on.

Somewhere in the middle of the trip, Reginald asks to examine the artifact Dominique gave them. As an Explorer, he has a great deal of expertise in these things, and might shed some additional information on its origin and powers. He won't be prying about it – he's just curious, as is his nature, and will bring it up as part of a normal conversation – but is eager to take a look and share what he knows with them.

If the Heroes acquiesce, he produces a polished monacle and scrutinizes the compass carefully. After several moments, he clears his throat.

“Well, it's obviously very old; from before the fall of the Old Empire at least. I'd wager it wasn't formed by human hands, although I can't say for sure. I assume it has a companion piece, yes? From what I can tell, the two have a different function, in addition to serving as locators. See the indentations here—?” He points to the bottom of the compass “I've seen similar inscriptions on doorways and



monoliths in the western jungles. Smaller objects like this are inserted and turned the same way: they're keys. Your compass, and I suspect its mate, once unlocked something somewhere. I wish you had the other one here – I've never seen a dual set like this..."

Coleson is quite excited by the find, and will jabber on about it at length. He doesn't know what the compass opens or even exactly how it works, but is eager to study it further. He has notes at his destination that might help translate the inscriptions, and perhaps explain the object's true purpose. As a favor, he asks if they can bring it (and its counterpart if possible) to the castle of his sponsor. The Baron would be happy to board them, he promises, and will pay handsomely for the opportunity to examine the artifacts under controlled conditions. Should the party agree, he will thank them ecstatically and tell them he looks forward to seeing them again at the Baron's castle.

Once the River Mist has dropped the party off (assuming it isn't destroyed en route), they may continue east.

Part Three: Through the Forest, Deep and Dark

There are a pair of large wilderness areas between Charouse and Ussura: the uninhabited border of the Weissberg mountains in Montaigne and the legendary Schwarzen Forest in Eisen. Traveling by river allows the players to bypass one of these, but not both. No matter which one they enter, they will find something dark and dangerous waiting for them.

The woodcutter Fleischwulf is in the party's vicinity and takes notice of their arrival. This ancient and malevolent creature hunts the souls of living men, trapping them within wooden figurines he carves in their likeness. Once the party has entered the woodlands, he will approach them surreptitiously, posing as an ordinary forest woodcutter. When the opportunity presents itself, he plans to add them to his collection.

The exact atmosphere of the wilderness depends on where the Heroes are. The Montaigne woodlands leading up to the Weissberg mountains are imposing, but not difficult to navigate. Birch and larch trees grow thick on the foothills. Passes and valleys mark the way towards the mountains, forming countless trails into Eisen territory. (The Heroes will doubtless wish to avoid the larger travelways, which are patrolled by Montaigne soldiers alerted to their presence; see Encounter 3, below.) The Heroes won't meet many fellow travelers in this lonely place. As the hills grow into mountains and the pathway rises along steep cliff-sides, the woods gradually disappear, replaced by imposing peaks of stark grey granite. It will take about ten days to pass through this territory.

The Schwarzen, on the other hand is one of the most fearsome places in all of Théah. Huge trees tower above the traveler, blocking out all sunlight for miles at a time. Woodland creatures of every variety haunt its boughs, and the cries of unknown things echo through the lonely hollows. Even the great Südlache in the middle of the forest isn't enough to civilize it. Mankind has no place here; it is the realm of savage nature.

There are numerous paths through the forest, but most are overgrown and poorly maintained. Sensible travelers go around the Schwarzen or make their way across in well-armed caravans. The beings within its confines value their privacy and do not wish to be bothered. A few villages have sprung up along the lakeshore, bands of woodcutters eke out a living there, and the occasional monster hunter braves its borders, but they all stick close to established trails. One can become lost by straying only a few yards. Party members new to Eisen receive horrible stories of the Schwarzen from the local peasants. They can't bypass it, not without adding almost a month to their journey (if they consider going around, remind them that Chevalier is still on their tail, and question their courage if necessary), but they should be on their toes when they cross its foreboding border.

Fleischwulf (he will use the name Leblanque if the party is still in Montaigne) awaits the party a few hours inside the forest. He's cunning and very experienced at disarming his prey. He won't come at them with smiles and honeyed words; in this environment, that screams danger. Instead, he'll come off as surly and suspicious. He's cutting wood with a large axe by the side of the road as they come upon him, and loading the branches into a small, hand-pulled cart. As they get near, he'll "notice" them and spin around defensively, brandishing his axe. "I have no money, you thieving rascals, so leave me be!" When they explain to him that they aren't bandits, he relaxes somewhat, then gruffly ask what they're doing out here in the middle of nowhere.

Upon hearing that a well-armed band of fighting men is traveling through the forest, he will offer himself as a guide, provided they protect him from any dangers that spring up. "These old bones aren't as strong as they used to be, and I worry about being out here alone." He claims to know all of the safest trails and can lead them clear out the other side if they wish. All he asks in exchange is protection.

Assuming the Heroes agree, Fleischwulf will wait several nights before commencing his attack. He works slowly to assuage their fears, aiding them in any way he knows how. The GM may want to stage a random encounter here and have him assist them out of it, in order to stress his status as an ally. He can even show them how to dodge the Musketeers, and to hide their tracks so Chevalier can't follow them; if you like, have him help them into the boughs of a tree one afternoon as the Musketeers go thundering beneath them, completely oblivious of their hiding place. He works to keep their guard lowered with just the right combination of distrust and friendship. The only vaguely abnormal aspect of him is a penchant for carving; he has several blocks of polished wood in his cart, which he whittles each night by the campfire. As time goes on, the carvings take human

shapes. "Dolls for my niece," he explains to anyone who asks.

All the while, however, he leads them deeper and deeper into the wilderness; not so much as to draw attention to it (they will still be moving the desired direction), but away from traveled areas where help may be forthcoming. When enough time has gone by, and they are far enough into the wilderness to keep from escaping, he makes his move.

It starts one evening, when the party has bedded down for the night. Presumably, someone will stay awake to keep watch, and Fleischwulf will stay up with him or her awhile, talking (if two Heroes are standing watch, he'll speak to both of them; one of their carvings will already be complete). Role-play the encounter. He speaks of many things, whatever interests the player the most. As time goes on, the shadows slowly grow longer and the carving in his hands becomes more precise and detailed. It is as if they slip slowly into a nightmare; things change subtly and gradually, noticeable only over time. The Hero's unease should grow, until finally he or she looks over the fire and sees Fleischwulf quietly change. His hands are clawed and his eyes burn an inhuman red. Needle-sharp fangs gleam in his mouth as he smiles maniacally at them. Most of his features are still human; the monstrous qualities are small but infinitely unsettling. As he completes the carving, he holds it up in the firelight. It is an exact likeness of the Hero, right down to scars and clothing type.

"Tell me, son (or daughter), do you fancy yourself a bright young thing?"

The woodcutter has had enough time to sink his hooks into the Hero's soul. Now all he needs is a break in his or her willpower to claim it forever. He challenges him or her to a contest of riddles: he shall pose a question (or three), and if the Hero cannot answer it, he or she becomes his. If, on the other hand, the Hero can match his wits by correctly solving the riddles, he will depart

The Lady's Favor



and search for prey elsewhere. He means what he says: the riddle contest is a way of measuring his victim's worth, and he relishes the chance to test his will against theirs. If they prove up to the challenge, he leaves them be.

The contest can last for anywhere from one to five questions, depending upon how good the player is at answering riddles. If they don't have the knack for it, be merciful, and only make them answer one. Attacking Fleischwulf does no good; the woodcutter shrugs off physical damage, and even magic cannot harm him. Nor can they wake the other Heroes; the woodcutter has placed an enchantment over the others to keep them asleep until he's ready for them. (Alternately, the GM can allow the other Heroes to wake up, in which case the riddle contest becomes larger; the entire party can debate them, and the number of questions is increased dramatically; of course, if they're all stumped by one, then Fleischwulf gains all their souls in one fell swoop.)

If the first Hero fails, he will set the carving aside and wait for the second to awaken and relieve him. One by one, the Heroes awaken and one by one, Fleischwulf carves their images into the wood. At this stage, there are two ways to defeat him. One is to correctly answer the riddle he poses. If a Hero manages to outsmart him, he will laugh evilly and vanish, transforming into smoky essence before their very eyes. This banishes the woodcutter, but won't restore any Heroes who failed the test previously. Canny Heroes may challenge Fleischwulf with their own riddles in order to gain their comrades back; he will be intrigued by such a proposition and readily agree to it. He's willing to offer whatever stakes they wish if they can stump him, ranging from releasing fellow Heroes from his carvings to transporting the party to the other side of the forest. He won't offer material goods or any sort of lengthy servitude. However, a one-time favor may be possible (if the Hero wishes to have continued contact with such a creature, that is).



In role-playing terms, this is a tricky situation to play. It's safe to assume that the GM isn't as proficient at riddling as Fleischwulf is and won't be able to knock them down the way the woodcutter can. Nevertheless, an epic riddling battle à la *The Hobbit* might be too tempting to resist. You'll have to play things by ear and proceed with whatever feels most appropriate to the situation. As a rule of thumb, Fleischwulf should answer the first three or four, to build dramatic tension. After that, if the player can come up with a riddle that both stumps you and makes you say "that's cool," he's won. The woodcutter bows in mock respect to the victor before acceding to their terms and vanishing. The captured Heroes reappear in a puff of smoke, the campsite is transported to the outskirts of the forest with a flash of light, etc. The woodcutter's evil laughter echoes through the trees, then slowly fades away, replaced by the ordinary sounds of the forest.

The second means of defeating him involves his wooden carvings. While his body is impervious to harm, the dolls/prisons he uses to trap the Heroes aren't. He spends a great deal of energy maintaining them, and if one were to be destroyed, it could cause him a considerable amount of harm. A quick Hero might be able to snatch one from his grasp, provided they time it right; Fleischwulf is quick and won't be taken by any clumsy lunges. The player should state quite carefully how his Hero goes about snatching the object away before attempting it. Finding a way to distract Fleischwulf (through magic or some other means) may help immeasurably.

If one of them takes possession of the carving, the woodcutter immediately becomes angry, threatening to destroy the Hero utterly unless he gets "his property" back. Destroying the carving — by throwing it into the fire, or perhaps even breaking it if the Hero is strong enough — causes him to double over in sudden pain. He screams as agony lances through him, his face turning for the briefest instant into something utterly inhuman.

Looking at the Hero in utter malevolence, he vanishes in an explosive cloud of wind and fire (no damage). Any Heroes he had previously captured will be instantly restored to the scene, with images of a horrifying prison and a sense of smothering paralysis. The camp stinks of sulfur and brimstone, and the party's possessions will have a slightly infernal stench for the next week. A small price to pay for escaping damnation.

The Hero whose wooden image is destroyed receives a special advantage, and an unsettling drawback. The destruction of his or her intended prison leaves a "soul scar," a mark seared across his or her essence that those attuned to it will notice. The scar allows the Hero to sense supernatural monsters like Fleischwulf, up to a distance of fifty yards. At the same time, he or she becomes "touched" the way Sidhe victims are only much darker. He or she radiates a disturbing aura and finds that fate witches will shy away from him, and seek to avoid being touched by him or her.

Despite the pyrotechnics, Fleischwulf survives the injury. In his nether-dimensional home, he licks his wounds and looks balefully towards the humans who hurt him so. The party now has a new and powerful enemy...

Riddles

In case you don't have a passel of brain-busters at hand, we've provided a short list of riddles and their answers for Fleischwulf to dole out to the Heroes. If you need more, consult your local library or bookshop; there's many books of similar riddles out there

Question: No sooner spoken than broken. What is it?

Answer: Silence

Question: I pass before the sun, but make no shadow. What am I?

Answer: The wind





Question: This is as light as a feather, but no man can hold it for long. What is it?

Answer: Breath

Question: The maker doesn't want it, the buyer doesn't use it, the user doesn't see it. What is it?

Answer: A coffin

Question: What is open when it is closed and closed when it is open?

Answer: A drawbridge

Question: At night, they come without being fetched, and by day, they vanish without being stolen. What are they?

Answer: The stars

Question: I never was, am always to be. No one ever saw me, nor ever will. And yet I am the confidence of all who live and breathe on this terrestrial ball. What am I?

Answer: Tomorrow

Question: Give me food and I live; give me water and I die. What am I?

Answer: Fire

Question: I look at you, you look at me. I raise my right, you raise your left. What am I?

Answer: A mirror

Question: A rich man wants it, a poor man has it, a dead man eats it. What is it?

Answer: Nothing

Once they escape Fleischwulf, they may proceed with their journey (and face whatever additional encounters the GM wants to toss at them). If the Heroes are traveling over the Mountains, they emerge on the western end of Eisen and will now need to cross that troubled state. (A river journey is the most expeditious way to accomplish

this and the players should be encouraged to explore this option; go to Part Two, above.) If they crossed through the Schwartzen, they have reached the eastern Eisen frontier; only the Drachenberg mountains stand between them and their final goal: Mother Ussura.

Part Four: Mother Ussura Enraged

After a long and harrowing journey, the party has finally reached the Ussuran steppes, where General Montegue and almost 100,000 soldiers wage a desperate campaign of conquest. What was projected to be a simple rout of the savage Ussurans has bogged down into a nightmare, as strange weather and scorched-earth retreats take their toll on the Montaigne army. Montegue is fighting more than just natives here: he's fighting the spirit of the land itself.

After the Heroes pass over the Drachenberg mountains, signs of the invasion become omnipresent. Houses and villages have been burned to the ground, the smoke from the timbers forming a permanent cloud. Fields lie trampled beneath iron-shod boots, crops pillaged or destroyed. Corpses line the roads, unburied or dumped into mass graves; the crows and wolves feast with impunity. At least once, the party passes an entire company of soldiers, frozen to death at their posts. Their eyes bulge horrifically and icicles hang from their teeth. It takes several days before their visages fade from the Heroes' dreams.

Oddly enough, there are very few travelers here. In most major offensives, thousands of refugees choke the roads, struggling to get as far away from the carnage as possible. Not here; the Heroes run into the odd peasant family carrying their meager possessions, or an occasional straggler from one of the two armies, but nothing more than that. For any veteran of a major conflict, it's decidedly eerie.

But the strangest quality of the area has nothing to do with the detritus of war or the lack of human contact. It's





the weather. On the Eisen side of the mountains, the skies were clear and the temperature warm. Now, it's as if the party was dropped onto a polar ice cap. Snow piles up in drifts, while the screaming wind drops temperatures below zero. The skies are always cloudy, blotting the sun behind an angry mask. It's only early fall and the countryside looks like the dead of winter.

This aberrant weather is a result of Montegue's invasion. The Ussuran land has always been a force of its own: a unique power, partly spiritual partly magical, that manifests the hopes and beliefs of the natives there. "Mother Ussura" is not just an expression; she's an entity with moods and emotions and the ability to express them. If Mother is pleased, crops flourish and the weather is bright. If she's unhappy, harvests are poor and rain drenches the countryside. And if she's invaded, she'll turn all her fury towards expelling the hated foreigners.

Montegue has been dealing with Mother Ussura since he crossed the border. The Ussurans haven't put up much resistance; their army is disorganized and ill-equipped. Theoretically, the Montaignes should have been in Pavtlow within a week. But their General is used to facing flesh and blood forces, not a landscape gone mad. Bad weather has hindered his army constantly; mud clogging the roads, snow and wet destroying gunpowder, and freezing temperatures killing more each night. As if that weren't enough, landmarks have changed as they progress, leading to lost units and terrible logistical snarls. A company will bed down near a grove of trees, only to wake up and find the trees moved to the other side of their camp. Bushes claw at them as they try to move forward, small animals get into the food supplies... all of it as relentless as winter itself. Add fierce attacks from partisan bands and the scorched-earth retreat of the locals, and the Montaigne Expeditionary Forces are in near-chaos. Desertions are rising, morale is at an all-time low and an air of gloom pervades every army camp.

Yet somehow, they have refused to give up. Through a combination of military genius, personal charisma and sheer force of will, Montegue holds his force together. He has pitted everything he has against the powers buffeting him, and though Mother Ussura has taken her toll, he's resolved to fight on. He believes that if he can take Pavtlow, the punishing weather will cease and he can return to Montaigne with honor.

It's that very resolve which his enemies in Montaigne hope will destroy him.

The compass/artifact points them unerringly northeast, towards Pavtlow and the Montaigne army. Along the way, signs of the occupation grow worse, as does the weather. Rear unit forces become more prevalent as they desperately try to keep the main body supplied. Frozen soldiers' bodies line the roads, and countless abandoned siege equipment — cannons, supply wagons, etc. — block passage at certain points. They point the party toward General Montegue's tent, even if their compass couldn't.

The party's own difficulties with the weather depend solely on what Mother Ussura thinks of them. When they first enter the territory, she believes they are delivering important information to Montegue (they are, but not the kind she thinks). She therefore bedevils them with the same horrors inflicted upon the army. They'll have to progress through roads transformed into bogs by mud and snow; camp each night will be drenched with freezing rain. Hills and flora subtly change each night, seeking to confuse them into becoming lost (luckily, they have the compass). If the Heroes didn't bring warm clothes (and they should have, since they knew they were going to Ussura), they should take mild damage from frostbite and other maladies. Their gunpowder becomes sodden and ruined, and they can't get more than an hour or so of sleep a night.

If at some point, however, they let their true motives slip — through conversation with others, for example, or a vocal wish to "get the General out of this hell" — things





will abruptly change. The skies around them clear, the temperature warms and the heretofore clogged roads become smooth and passable. Mother Ussura now realizes that they are the key to expunging Montegue from her soil. The sudden change should alarm the Heroes, but will ultimately be quite beneficial in completing their task.

Assault of the Musketeers

Somewhere in Eisen, Captain Chevalier realized the party's final destination. He used Porté magic to teleport across the mountains, appearing (with the remains of his command) in an anchored Montaigne army camp. It shouldn't take him too long to pick up the trail again, and this time, he intends to stop the Heroes once and for all. He catches up to the party soon after their meteorological problems vanish, and engage them with all the forces at his command – twenty-five musketeers, augmented by a few members of Montegue's army.

When the Heroes draw close to the Montaigne encampments (within a few miles), Chevalier and his men ride towards them. He gives them one opportunity to surrender, calling upon them to throw down their arms. With the men behind him, he has a right to feel confident: 25 or 30 hardened soldiers versus a handful of Heroes are grim odds indeed. Luckily the players should have Mother Ussura on their side by now, and she won't take kindly to anyone standing in their way. As Chevalier approaches, her influence becomes obvious: the party stands on firm ground, with sunlight poking through the clouds down on them, while the Musketeers – just a few yards away – are in the midst of a raging storm.

The party is welcome to point out the inclement weather (or engage in any other repartee they wish), but Chevalier isn't listening – he's come too far to let them go now. As combat ensues, however, the Heroes' edge becomes overwhelming. All of the Musketeers fight at a -1 Finesse due to slippery mud, twigs and branches flying in their faces, etc. Missile weapons fired at the Heroes

automatically miss, and even solid hits seem to glance off them harmlessly (minor damage penalty). The Heroes, meanwhile, fight at full capacity; ice patches which sent their opponents flying seem as firm as bedrock, and the winds which howl around the Musketeers never so much as ruffle their clothes. It should be a thoroughly surreal combat all around.

Honorable Heroes will no doubt wish to warn Chevalier away, or at least discourage him from fighting further. If they don't take undue advantage of Mother Ussura's help, and/or show mercy to their foes (disarming them instead of killing them, etc.) he will eventually listen. Once half the Musketeers become removed from combat, he grudgingly orders a retreat. Confusion and frustration play in equal parts across his face, but it's clear – even to him – that fate is on the party's side. He waits until his men have pulled back, then tips his hat to the party in a gesture of honorable defeat. The anger still burns in his eyes, however.

"I'll be waiting for you in Charouse," he cries above the wind. Then he's gone, disappearing into the blowing snow.

Montegue's Message

Following the encounter, the Heroes have no more difficulties reaching the general. They pass through the rear ranks of the army, where medics tend the wounded and exhausted soldiers try to make themselves as comfortable as they can. The final steps of the party's journey are wrought with surreal awe. The general's forces, used to unrelenting snow-storms stands dumfounded as calm skies follow the Heroes to Montegue's tent. The party appears beatific to them: angels sent to save them from the horrors of Ussura, and immune from the forces which have harried them unceasingly since the campaign began. Word passes from one end of the army to the other that their deliverance is at hand.

A breathless messenger informs Montegue that the party is coming and of their "miraculous" passage through the ranks. The description immediately puts him on edge: they sound like Ussuran sorcerers to him. He emerges from his tent as the party approaches, armed to the teeth. He greets them stiffly and expects proper courtesy from them at all times; his hands never stray far from his weapons, and an entourage of bodyguards remains close at hand.

His suspicions melt after he reads the letter. He recognizes Dominique's handwriting immediately, and is quite disturbed by the warning she gives. He knew he had enemies back home, but never dreamed they would go to such lengths to dispose of him. The arrogance of the Empereur... his eyes harden as he pores over the words.

"My friends, you have my thanks," he tells them after finishing. "I was prepared to stay in Ussura until the Fourth Coming, but now I see it would have meant my death. You've saved my life and the lives of countless thousands of my men. I doubt the Montaigne government would feel as grateful – you've defied the will of the Sun King in bringing me this. But you are clearly men of honor and principle, and my wife and I owe you a great debt."

After the Heroes have responded, Montegue calls his chief counselor and tells him to begin preparations for an organized retreat. As if on cue, the storm lightens, and the snow falls a little less harshly. He takes no notice of it.

As a reward, the Heroes may ask for anything within the general's power to give. At this stage, that isn't much, but remember that Montegue holds great sway in Montaigne; his goodwill could raise their political fortunes immeasurably. He will happily provide them with an escort back to Montaigne (the entire army, in fact), and supply them with any food or equipment they need. If they ask for money, his regard for them will lessen considerably, but he will dutifully write them a cheque for

any reasonable amount. Montegue's cheque will be honored by any reputable merchant in Théah.

The Vanishing Compass

Canny Heroes will remember Reginald Coleson's interest in the compass artifacts and his offer to examine the pair if brought to Eisen. Montegue will give them his compass as part of their reward if they wish; he has no attachment to it save that he promised his wife to wear it throughout the campaign. Now that the campaign is over, he has no compunctions about bestowing it upon the Heroes. It's an exact match for the one the party carries in all respects, save that the inscriptions on its underside are slightly different.

Even if the party doesn't ask for the compass, what happens next still affects them. As Montegue hands it over to them (or as he bids them farewell if they didn't ask for it), it vanishes in a brilliant flash of light. For the briefest instant, the Heroes see a hand reach out of a bright crack in space to snatch it from the general, then vanish in a puff of smoke. Someone has used extremely powerful teleportation magic to steal the compass.

As the artifact disappears, the Hero carrying its twin receives a powerful vision. The real world falls aside and she falls to her knees as the images engulf her. She's suddenly surrounded by a wild jungle somewhere on the western isles; the sounds of exotic birds and dangerous beasts can be heard in the distance, while the scent of blood and earth assaults her senses. A man stands in a wide clearing, surrounded by strange stone and metal outcroppings. He's dressed in sweat stained explorer's gear and has a look of unparalleled cruelty on his face. A large box stands in front of him, with an indentation that matches the compass exactly. In one hand he holds Montegue's artifact, and his feverish eyes turn towards the Hero with malicious intent. A single thought flashes through her mind, carrying a strong sense of danger with it: *He's going to open the box.*

Then he's gone and the Hero returns to the present. Her companions are gathered around her and she's clutching the compass hard enough to draw blood. Its needle points inexorably southwest.

With that, the events of The Lady's Favor come to an end. The party is free to pursue the compass, follow Montegue back to Montaigne or seek their fortunes elsewhere. Pursuing the stolen compass leads to the second adventure in the Erebus Cross series, Scoundrel's Folly. If they choose another path, the campaign moves in a different direction, a destination that is ultimately up to the GM.

For successfully completing the Lady's Favor, each Hero gains 3 Experience Points. If they failed, they gain 1 XP and lose an unconscionable amount of face. Other rewards (tangible and otherwise) are up to the Game Master.

Changing Elements

The following encounters are designed to be placed in between the four hard points of the adventure. They aren't necessary to the overall plot but provide plenty of excitement and intrigue as the party makes its way across Théah. All of them are at least peripherally connected to the main plot, either directly through the Heroes' movements or indirectly as distractions from their mission. NPCs they've met elsewhere (such as the crew of the River Mist or the relentless Chevalier) often pop up in these encounters. We've provided suggestions as to where they may be inserted, but their ultimate placement is up to the GM. You may use as many or few of them as you desire, and center them anywhere deemed appropriate. Certain encounters may require some adjusting, depending on where you finally put them.

In addition, we've assigned a number of points to each encounter, based on how difficult the encounter is. A particularly deadly threat will have a high point value,



indicating that inexperienced Heroes might have a tough time with it. A less threatening encounter will have a lower point value, suggesting that powerful Heroes may want to skip it. Again, which ones you use is entirely up to you.

1. *Soldiers on the March*

This encounter should preferably take place somewhere in Montaigne; otherwise, it happens on the Eisen frontier. The Heroes run across a garrison of Montaigne soldiers on the path to one battlefield or another. Their communication with the commander is interrupted by a teleporting Musketeer, and they must flee or else risk arrest.

Ussura isn't the only front Montaigne is fighting on; they've occupied a large chunk of the western Castillian peninsula for over a year now. Fresh soldiers move to the

front often, as weary veterans are cycled back home, so the roads of Montaigne are filled with trails of combat regulars moving to and from the front. Similar trains can be found in Eisen, although they are much more rare (the locals don't like foreign troops tramping through their roads. Soldiers in Eisen have a more haunted look than their western counterparts; Ussura hasn't been kind to them. (See Part Four: Mother Ussura Enraged for more details).

The Heroes cross a garrison checkpoint along the road, a semi-permanent base used as a marshaling grounds and resupply depot. It consists of several rapidly constructed cabins, a barn commandeered from a local farmer, and multiple rows of pitched tents. Large groups of Montaigne soldiers stand in formation, walk guard duty, or relax in small clusters around the tents. A pair of them hail the party, and ask their business along "*l'Empereur's*



The Lady's Favor

road." It's up to the Heroes to handle this. They should have papers from Dominique permitting them passage through Montaigne. If they aren't in Montaigne, the soldiers may try to shake them down for a little bribe. Surrounded by their fellows, they feel confident that the Heroes will acquiesce.

Regardless of how the Heroes react, the guards want to take them to their commander, "to answer a few questions." It's rare to see mixed groups traveling about, and on a supply artery like this, it becomes quite suspicious. They'll pocket the bribe (or swallow the abuse, or accept the transit papers, whatever angle the Heroes play) and escort them to the garrison leader's office in the barn. Supplies of every kind have been stacked inside the building, ranging from blankets to barrels of gunpowder; quartermasters run hither and yon, trying to fill their quotas while keeping track of what is taken and when. In the midst of this, the captain's sparse desk stands as an ocean of calm.

Captain Luc Galliard is a no-nonsense career soldier with little time for frivolities. His blond hair is kept tucked beneath his collar, while his uniform bears little of the usual Montaigne pomp. As his underlings snap-march the players to him, he looks up irritably from his paperwork, scowls and asks why they're bothering him with "transients." If the party produces their papers, he explodes at the soldiers. "These men are doing the King's business, and you treat them like common thugs! (To the Heroes) I cry your pardon, sirs. The generals have seen fit to populate my command with idiots. (To the guards) Get out, the both of you!" The troops rush off with a clatter of rifles and mumbled apologies.

Galliard apologizes again, and offers them the hospitality of his camp for the evening. He allows them to resupply themselves with whatever they wish, and will have tents prepared if they wish it. Then, with another apology for his men, he asks to return to his work. "An officer's work

is never done," he explains, "and I have much to do before the next company arrives."

As the players pass back through the barn, (either gathering supplies or heading for the exit) a brilliant white light forms near Galliard's desk. Those familiar with portal magic recognize it as the sign of imminent teleportation. As they look on, a Musketeer from the streets of Charouse — one who had chased them in the sewers, perhaps even Chevalier himself — steps through. He points at the Heroes and screams "arrest those men!" as the exasperated Galliard begins yelling at him to identify himself. The party's pursuers recognized the garrison as a hard point, and sent a man there to intercept them. His timing, it seems, is impeccable.

The party now has a few short minutes to exit the barn. Nearby soldiers try to detain them (there's twenty-eight in the barn, plus Galliard), but they're mostly quartermasters, without much combat experience. They'll come after the party in waves of four or five: not enough to really threaten them, just enough to keep them boxed in and unable to reach the exit. Numerous escapades can ensue as the party weaves its way through the piles of foodstuffs and stacked supplies. They can knock stacks down behind them, hurl barrels at pursuing soldiers and anything else that enters their minds. Like the Columbe d'or, this scene should be played for fun. When you feel you've milked it of all its potential, have them reach the exit.

Once clear of the barn, the party should be home free — provided they keep moving. The Musketeer is busy explaining himself to a very cranky Galliard, who isn't going to release any of his soldiers until he receives a thorough explanation. None of the troops outside will stop them, even if they're moving quickly (there's too much activity to really notice) By the time Galliard's convinced that they pose a threat, the party should be long gone.

Point Value: Low





2. *Burning Down the House*

This encounter can take place whenever the Heroes feel the heat of the chase. They've been on the road for awhile, and the Musketeers are getting closer. Whether it occurs in Montaigne, Eisen, or Ussura is up to the GM; adjust the specifics according to the geography. In any case, the party has been on the road for awhile, and feel the Musketeers growing closer. Captain Chevalier and his men can't be more than a few hours behind them.

As they journey on, they spot a small village in the distance. A thick plume of smoke rises from one of the buildings; drawing closer, they can see a group of farmers frantically waving them down. One of their homes has caught fire, and if they don't act quickly, it will soon spread to the entire community. They're fighting the blaze as best they can, but they need more bodies to help – and possibly a leader to direct their efforts. The party has come along just in time; the farmers beg them to help save their tiny town.

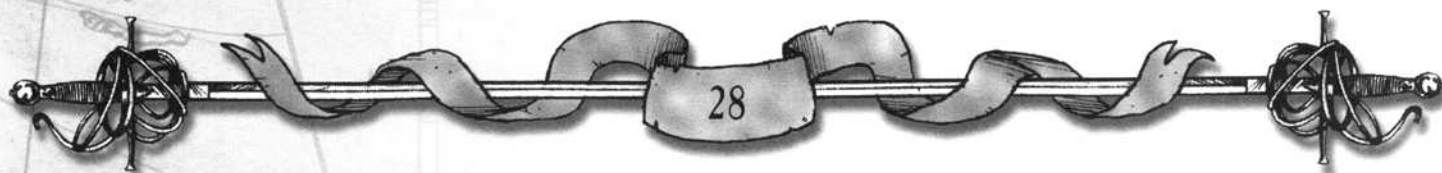
The village consists of some twenty or thirty buildings with thatched roofs and white-washed walls. Most are homes for farmers who work the fields in the area. A few serve other purposes: a two-story inn, and the home of the mayor, which doubles as a meeting hall. The burning house sits on the edge of town, and has been completely consumed by flames. Approximately fifty men are working to bring water from the town pump; it's slow going and isn't doing much to stem the blaze. It's going to take something more if they want to keep the fire from spreading.

The Heroes have two options here: they can ignore the locals' pleas and ride on, or they can stop and take precious time to help. If they abandon the village, the fire soon spreads and they can see the smoke plume grow larger even as it fades into the distance. If they ever come back, they find the village destroyed: a few blackened timbers are all that remains.

If, on the other hand, the Heroes stay to help, they stand a good chance of stopping the fire in its tracks. The solution to the problem lies in forgetting the burning building: it's a lost cause. Rather, they should focus their attention on keeping the fire from spreading. Water can be poured on nearby buildings to make them more resistant to the flames. Trenches can be dug or crude firewalls built to keep the blaze in check. If necessary, they can even destroy the surrounding buildings and cut off the fire's path; it will do more damage, but keeps the town itself intact. Whatever they decide upon, the farmers will enact it; they've been too panicked thus far to do anything but throw water on the blaze. With the party's (hopefully) objective judgment guiding them, they should be able to find a real solution. Magic-wielding Heroes can be particularly useful here: conjuring water or using other tricks to quiet the blaze. Even if they don't, the farmers appreciate whatever help they can lend.

Once the fire is under control, the party can move on. Chevalier must be very close now, and they'll doubtless feel the need to flee before he arrives. They receive the breathless thanks of the villagers and an invitation for any aid the town can provide. Clever Heroes may ask them to help delay their pursuers, something the farmers will gladly do. They can drive a heard of goats across the road to cover the Heroes' tracks, set similar tracks on a different road out of town (using a wagon if they're in a coach, oxen if they're on horses, etc.), and giving the Chevalier the worst directions they can think of when he arrives. Even if the players don't think to ask for help, the villagers will still try to slow the Musketeers down – instinctively aiding their mysterious saviors. In the end, helping the village extends the Heroes' lead much more than abandoning it would.

GMs wishing for a cinematic encounter with the Musketeers can have them arrive while the fire still blazes and the Heroes work to put it out. A sword fight in the midst of a burning town – with the shocked farmers



trying desperately to work around it — has tons of dramatic potential.

Point Value: Low-Medium

3. Musketeer Patrol

At some point or another along the trip, Chevalier catches up to the party and initiates a battle. This encounter is intended more to establish the nature of the Heroes' foe than to pit them against the Musketeers one more time; if you feel the players have seen too much of Chevalier, feel free to ignore it.

The Musketeers can reach the party nearly anywhere: on the roads of Eisen, along the river-ways, in a town or village (see Encounter 2, above)... wherever you feel works well dramatically. A narrow bridge over a steep gorge can be a fine place for a sword fight, as can a flatbed barge crossing a wide river. The only cardinal rule is that the surroundings must lend themselves to the conflict: it shouldn't be dull or boring. Why have a fight on the side of a road when you can hold it at the edge of a cliff or across a city wall?

The party becomes aware that the Musketeers are closing the distance and will catch up to them before dark. They'll have to stop and make a stand if they wish to continue. Chevalier is pushing hard to catch up to the party, and as

a result, has left some of his men behind (their horses need rest before they drop dead). There's only one Musketeer for each Hero, plus Chevalier. Allow the players to make whatever preparations they wish, but be sure they understand that they cannot outrun the Musketeers this time: they'll have to fight him off.

As Chevalier rides up, his generally honorable and good-hearted nature becomes clear. He bows low before them, and asks them if they'd like to surrender and spare everyone the bloodshed. Assuming they decline, then he'll fight as cleanly as possible under the circumstances: straightforward, no dirty tricks, etc. When playing him, think of Inigo Montoya fighting Wesley in *The Princess Bride*: he'll give them all a good clean fight. (Of course, if they reward his fairness by fighting dirty, stabbing men when they're down, etc. the gloves come off. He visibly angers and tells his men to "slaughter the dogs where they stand." From that point until the end of the



adventure, he won't try to arrest them: he'll try to kill them.)

Should the players prove too tough for his squad (more than three are killed or incapacitated), he'll fall back and wait for reinforcements. Should they manage to separate themselves from him — cutting the bridge over the gorge, dumping him over while crossing the river, or otherwise using the local geography to their advantage — he shakes his fist angrily and shout vague threats after them. Perceptive Heroes will catch a hint of respect in his voice.

Again, the purpose of this encounter is to let the players size up Chevalier as a foe. While implacable and dedicated to bringing them in, he's still a very honorable man, and the Heroes should become aware of that here. For more information on Chevalier and his men, consult his character description in Chapter Three.

Point Value: Medium

4. The River Beast

The Dechain River is wide and deep, one of the most powerful in Théah. Although constantly used for traffic and commerce, parts of it can be quite wild. Bordering countries patrol it, but even they can't be everywhere, and most barges are expected to fend for themselves. There are caves and grottos along its bottom that no man has ever seen. Something lives in one of them, something very, very big...

The Beast of Dechain has been a legend along the River for millennia. It's reportedly several furlongs long, a huge serpent with a fanged maw and scales tough as steel. Every shipmaster on the River claims to have seen the Beast, but no one has ever been able to prove it exists. Whenever a fishing boat disappears, however, or a pleasure sloop mysteriously vanishes, the seamen shake their heads and say the Beast has claimed another victim.

The Beast indeed exist, although it hasn't destroyed half the ships people blame it on. It travels up and down the

length of the Dechain, feeding mostly on carp and other fish. Occasionally, however, it likes to tackle larger prey, and surfaces to feast on a small ship or rowboat. Little remains after these attacks: it swallows any human on board whole. Unfortunately for the party, the *River Mist* is next on its menu.

Obviously, this encounter takes place while the Heroes travel with Reginald Coleson and the crew of the *Mist*. If they aren't on the Dechain, they'll encounter a similar monster on the Roth or the Südlache. It won't be as large or well known as the beast of Dechain, but should provide adequate diversion for them. It starts slowly; one of the Heroes spots something rise out of the lake about five hundred yards in front of them. It glistens grey-blue in the sunlight, like the body of a giant snake. As they continue, the water beneath them becomes choppy, as if something had just passed. Finally, a gigantic scarred fin brushes up against the side of the boat, rocking the deck and sending crew members sprawling to the ground. Anyone who looks just beneath the murky surface can see a pair of huge glowing eyes and what could be a mouth...

At this point, the crew flies into a full-blown panic. The three captains bark orders and manage to keep things under some kind of control, but fear can be seen in every eye. As they struggle to load their weapons, another shudder wracks the boat, this one much larger than the last. The Beast is attempting to hole the hull beneath the surface and send the *Mist* to the bottom. It crashes its massive head against the boards, hoping to break through. Heroes below decks can see the boards buckling under the pressure, and watch the water beginning to squeeze in.

The party is free to take whatever steps they wish to stop the Beast, although most will be ineffective. Small arms fire causes only nicks and scratches on the thing's hide, and melee weapons are an invitation to being swallowed whole. There are no other ships in sight to lend aid. The

Mist has a pair of cannons, but they face outward and cannot be pointed at the water (there's usually no need). However, there is a considerable supply of gunpowder on board, packed into wooden barrels. If the party lights one and tosses it over the side, they might succeed in hurting the Beast. The gunpowder will have to be lit at the proper time, so that the barrel explodes just as it sinks beneath the water. Drop it too early, and the fuse will go out; too late and the barrel takes half the ship with it. It takes a Finesse roll (TN 15) to successfully pull this maneuver off; otherwise, the fuse is timed too late and the barrel sinks without exploding. It takes three precisely dropped barrels to drive the beast away; the ship has a store of twenty.

Other options include lowering the Mist's single lifeboat as a diversion (in which case someone must volunteer to pilot it), hurling the sails into the water as an impromptu fishing net, and even diving head first into the monster's gullet and cutting your way out. Such a case of indigestion will be enough to convince the Beast to move on. Anyone who chooses this option will have to deliberately dive in – those who don't get torn to pieces by the Beast's teeth, then suffer Small number damage each round while being subjected to its digestive acids. It takes five rounds to cut out of the Beast with a saber, eight with a knife. After that, they're clear to swim to shore, or back to the ship, while the horribly injured beast retreats.

The crew cannot kill the Dechain Beast, no matter how hard they try. It's simply too big to be taken by anything less than an armada; even a bullet-cutter can only succeed in wounding it. The most they can hope to do is fight it off, which grants them their lives and a hell of a story to tell. With the Beast, that's reward enough. The sailors of the River Mist thank them heartily for any assistance they can render; anyone who dives into the Beast's mouth and cuts his way out has friends for life.

If the ship sinks, the Heroes can swim to shore while the Beast devours other members of the crew. It shouldn't go

after any of the party members (there's little they can do once in the water). Coleson manages to swim to shore, as well as about forty percent of the crew (Hampford alone survives among the three captains); the rest become hors d'oeuvres. Eventually, he manages to salvage a few crates of his cargo, and will continue overland towards the Baron's castle. Some of the crew follows, in the hopes of receiving compensation from the Explorer's society. The rest head back to port. The party is free to proceed overland from here.

Point Value: High

5. River Patrol

The Dechain River borders no fewer than six nations: Montaigne, Eisen, Vodacce, Castille, Ussura, and the Empire of the Crescent Moon. Military patrols along the river are omnipresent, as each power dispatches its forces to watch the others. In the northern rivers of Eisen, a similar pattern emerges among its small fiefdoms. Sloops and military cutters sail back and forth across the waterways, eyeballing their foreign counterparts and stopping "suspicious" boats to search for contraband. The *River Mist*, unfortunately, qualifies as suspicious.

While on the river, a small patrol ship rounds the bend and signals for the *Mist* to heave to. If they're on the Dechain, the ship is from Montaigne; otherwise, it's from one of Eisen's semi-independent *königreichs*. In any case, they're definitely unwelcome: Coleson has carried undeclared contraband from the western isles, and many of the crew members have criminal records (to say nothing of the Heroes' current troubles). The general opinion is to fight it out. The *Mist's* crew outnumber the military ship's by almost two to one, and while better-armed, the patrol will have to come aboard in order to take them. If the Heroes wish to bluff their way through without a fight, however, the Captain will listen.

If a fight occurs, run it accordingly. The patrol ship unleashes its cannons at the first opportunity, while the



Mist steers directly into its path. With only two guns, the party's boat must close with its foe in order to beat them. Play out the combat as you like, using the stats for the *River Mist* in the Character section, and the patrol boat below. With numbers on their side, the *Mist* should make short work of them; the privateers concentrate on spiking their cannons and holding the patrolmen at bay. The patrol will retreat when things become more than they can handle (30% casualties or more). The three captains let them go; they don't want a murder record on their hands if they can avoid it.

If the players can avert a fight (by fast-talking the leader of the patrol, perhaps, or flashing the papers Dominique provided for them), they'll still find suspicions turned against them. The patrol may want them to reveal their

cargo, in which case they'll try to arrest the whole lot. Or they may want to take the passengers in custody as "undesirables." A few veiled threats or prodigious application of Dominique's papers get them to back off, but not before promising to "check on you buggers before you get to port." With those ominous words, the patrol leaves the ship and proceeds on their way.

Regardless of the nature of the encounter, once the patrol ship rounds the bend, the crew of the *River Mist* leaps into action. The sails are lowered and new ones — colored differently — are raised. The ship's carpenter clammers out to the carved mermaid on the prow, and with a twist of his hammer, detaches it. Two other crew members perform a similar maneuver on the ship's plaque. Meanwhile, a new carving and plaque (depicting the West Wind and bearing the title *Windy Bough*, respectively) appear from a small hidden hold, and are fitted into their respective position. Finally, the Captain Gutwold shaves his beard and

changes clothes while Lars Ostrom produces an eyepatch, loses his bandanna and begins barking orders at the crew the way Gutwold just did. Within an hour, the ship has a new name, a new look and a new captain... and the crew takes it all in stride.

The *River Mist* has used this ploy for years to fool the authorities. Soon, a large number of patrols will be looking for the *Mist* — but none of them are looking for the *Windy Bough*. They pass a few more patrols en route, who hardly blink an eye at them. When they arrive in port (assuming they're not wrecked; see Encounter 4, above), a prissy-looking dockmaster takes a long gander at the ship before declaring to his subordinates "It's not



the one we're after." The crew of the *River Mist* has fooled them again.

Point Value: Medium

6. Rock Stop

This is a fairly low-key encounter while aboard the *River Mist*, emphasizing problem-solving over action. While traveling through an unmapped section of the river (whichever it is), The boat runs aground on a shoal of rocks just beneath the surface. The ship shudders and a tearing, grinding noise works through it (quite a shock for those who have encountered the Beast) before it comes to a halt. The rocks have embedded themselves in the hull and hold it fast.

Getting the boat unstuck requires some ingenuity. If they unfurl the sails and try to power through them, or ask a passing ship to pull them, they may rip the hull to shreds and sink the boat. If they wait for the current to dislodge them, it could take months. That means they either have to destroy the rocks somehow, or else lighten the ship enough to allow it to slip free.

How they accomplish this is up to the Heroes; you should allow them to try anything reasonable. The rocks are all underwater, but can be destroyed with enough effort. The gunpowder on board can help, if they can keep it dry and figure out some way to trigger it without blowing the ship up in the process. Lightening the load might help, too; the crew can ferry cargo to the river bank in the life boat, and post guards to make sure it stays put. This works, but only if every piece of extraneous materiel is removed — including the whole crew. No one can be left to pilot the boat.

They should be faced with this decision before. A party which has brought the load down to only two or three crew members will find themselves close to breaking free... if only they could lose a few hundred more pounds. Once the last person leaves the ship, it will slowly drift free, only to be caught by the current and propelled

forward. They had better move quickly if they want to reboard; otherwise, it careens away to break apart against a rocky shoreline some two miles up the river. The crew will kill them if this happens. Let them do whatever they want to catch it; it takes two strong oarsmen (combined Brawn of at least 7) six rounds of exertion to catch the ship, and a Finesse roll of TN 15 to clamber aboard. Lower the time if the party plans this before leaving the ship. NPCs will row if asked, but one of the Heroes will have to board; no one else is deft enough. Someone who manages to pull off this maneuver should gain a significant experience bonus. It's not everyday something so simultaneously stupid and ingenious comes off without a hitch.

Magic might come in tremendous handy here; someone powerful enough to lift the whole ship a few inches can solve the problem in a manner of moments.

GMs who find this encounter too dull may want to spice it up, by having a patrol or the Beast of Dechain show up while repairs are underway (see encounters 4 and 5, above, for details). Nothing speeds up an engineering effort like a giant fanged river monster threatening your workers...

Point Value: Low

7. Refugee Army

This encounter can occur almost anywhere in Eisen, on land or water. The terrible wars being fought across the continent have produced large numbers of refugees. These poor souls flee the fighting as fast as they can, carrying their meager possessions on their backs in hopes of escaping. It's almost inevitable that the party will encounter some of them.

If they're on the road, they are met by a huge mass of tired and frightened peasants heading the other way. If on water (the *Südlache* works extremely well for this), it's a flotilla of rowboats, fishing boats and hastily-built rafts, moving westward in an amorphous blob. The train of



people stretches for miles; at times it's so thick that the players have to fight their way through. The faces they see speak to these poor souls' suffering. They're haggard and drawn, worn down with what they've seen. Even the children look old. Most carry heavily-loaded packs. A fortunate few have carts drawn by mules or oxen.

Those who notice the Heroes beg them to help, asking for food, money, protection, even information on a lost loved one. They grasp their coats tightly (or shout up to the *River Mist*), pleading with them for aid. Smart Heroes brush them aside. No matter how pitiful they appear, if one of them receives aid, then the others will pack around the party in a desperate wave. They can hear screams as a few of them trip and are trampled by the mob. Others begin tearing the Heroes' clothing, trying to rip their purses away, pulling their boots off, etc. It takes a gunshot or similar threat to get them to back away.

On land, an altercation like this produces a serious problem. Once the peasants have scattered, the Hero carrying the compass realizes that it's missing; someone in the throng has stolen it. Finding the compass will be nearly impossible in such a mess, but without it, they have little hope of locating Montegue. The peasants around them profess ignorance; in fact, they ignore the Heroes until physically accosted (they've learned not to trifle with them).

Most can't help them; it takes a few minutes of serious intimidation and some luck to discover someone who can help. She spotted a known thief fleeing the Heroes' positions just after the altercation.

The thief himself is named Gregor Vogel, a pickpocket and con artist who's been taking what little these people have. He appears better dressed than most refugees, and won't be difficult to pick out once the party knows who to look for. He'll flee if he can, but the Heroes will most



likely be able to run him down. What they do with the thief once they catch him is entirely up to them.

If they don't catch Vogel, he reappears to them that night, claiming to have buried the artifact nearby. If they pay him, he'll tell them where it is. He's canny enough to keep his distance and will flee if threatened. If they pay him up front, he'll give them false directions and try to run. They'll have to strong-arm him into showing them the way if they wish to get it back. Gregor's slippery, but if they can keep him from running, he'll do anything to save his life. Pounding the compass's location out of him shouldn't be difficult.

Of course, if the Heroes took precautions for securing the compass (blooding it, carrying it beneath one's clothes, etc.) they shouldn't lose it at all. In fact, they might even catch Gregor attempting to filch the item, and can then deal with him as they please.

The train of refugees continues for several more hours until finally dying down to a few stragglers. Before the party stops for the night, they will be gone completely.

Point Value: Low

8. Gargoyles of the Weissberg

Fleischwulf isn't the only peril of the Schwarzen Forest, and the Weissberg Mountains have more than their fair share of beasts. One type, in particular, concerns the Heroes in this situation. The Eisen call them "gargoyles," fearsome beasts which have plagued them for millennia. The stone creatures placed on church steeples are based on them; the architects felt their terrible visages would protect the building from evil spirits. With leathery grey wings, gaping maws and an incurable hatred for other forms of life, gargoyles are a bane to Eisen life. They're fiercely territorial and rarely wander from their chosen haunts, for which the civilized parts of Eisen are thankful.

A flock of them spots the Heroes in the midst of their travels, and decides to attack. This encounter should take

place sometime after the Heroes have bested Fleischwulf; a lesson of the dangers this part of the world presents. If they're in the mountains, the attack comes just as they cross a dangerous pass, with a steep cliff descending into nothingness. The air is cold and clear, and banks of snow cap the peaks. The gargoyles fly down like pieces of the mountain itself. In the forest, the attack comes just before they bed down for the night. The gargoyles are dark as the wood of the forest, and have killed every other creature in the area; there are no normal woodland sounds. In either case, they swoop out of the night sky, howling inhumanly at their foes. There will be one for each Hero in the party.

A gargoyle's standard attack is to grasp its prey with its great lower limbs, lift him high in the air, and drop him to crash on the ground below. Add 10 to a Hero's TN to be Hit for a gargoyle to grasp a Hero in this manner, at which time they'll lift him or her at least a hundred feet before dropping. Canny Heroes will grab the gargoyle's legs and hold like hell; it takes a contested roll between the monster's Finesse and the Hero's Brawn each round to hold on. If the Hero can make a successful raise, he'll get low enough to drop safely (within a few yards of the ground). A Hero dropped from a height of a hundred feet or more will be killed when he hits the ground (although a generous GM may want to give the Hero a jutting rock or tree branch to grab onto with a Finesse roll; TN 20.) In addition to this attack, gargoyles have teeth and claws to rend their prey. In the mountains, they might just drag the Heroes off the cliffside instead of lifting them in the air.

Fighting the gargoyles off is difficult, although they retreat if seriously injured (suffer more than half damage). Outrunning them may be a better option: they're maneuverable in the air, but not very fast. A wagon or swift horse can outdistance them within a few minutes, and even sprinting will work if they can clear the creatures' territory. It takes ten rounds on foot or five on

horseback to outrun the creatures; this can provide an exciting chase sequence as the Heroes fend off their airborne assailants. It also leaves them hopelessly lost when it's over. They'll be off the beaten trail and it will take several days to regain their bearings (the compass may appear to help matters, but bee-lining through an unexplored forest or wild mountain range is not recommended).

Depending upon how merciful the party is, they may want to try and get word to their pursuers of the gargoyles. Chevalier may be relentless, but he deserves better than death at the hands of these creatures; his respect for them will rise considerably if they should somehow warn him of danger.

Point Value: High

Gargoyles: Brutes

Threat Rating: 4

Usual Weapons: Claws (Small)

TN to be hit: 25 (15 on the ground)

Skills: Footwork: 2

Special Abilities: Gargoyles can fly.

9. Ussura's Children

While the main Ussuran army retreats and lets the weather deal with their foes, numerous bands of partisans lurk behind enemy lines. They strike approaching companies, supply lines and whatever else they can, harassing the enemy to the best of their ability. As messengers from Montaigne, the party makes a tempting target.

The ambush comes as the Heroes move along the empty Ussuran countryside. What appear to be snowdrifts on the side of the road suddenly explode to life. Five ragged but vicious-looking partisans emerge from foxholes. They carry muskets and broadswords, and know how to use both. After discharging their guns, they wade in with weapons, showing no fear and less mercy. They're led by a minor noblemen, a great brute of a man wearing the skin of a bear. He transforms at the beginning of combat





and bellows his rage at them. Roll for surprise when the attack begins; failure means the Ussurans get a free round to act before the party does. Surprise is increased if Mother Ussura is still against the Heroes. Conduct combat as normal.

Ussuran players or someone who speaks Ussuran can try and reason with them. If they explain their mission and indicate that they're not part of the Montaigne army, the partisans may see reason and cease their attack. Let the players make their arguments in character and play it by ear; the Ussurans are angry, but not blind. If a Ussuran is among the Heroes it becomes easier, and a party of many nationalities suggests to the partisans that they may be allies. The presence of Montaigne Heroes makes it much harder, however. Under no circumstances will the partisans listen to anyone in a Montaigne uniform. Beyond that, GM should judge for himself whether the party makes a convincing case.

If the battle continues, the weather makes its presence felt. The snow falls in blinding drifts, and the wind whips into a frenzy. If the party has Mother Ussura on their side when the partisans strike, she is trying to warn her children away. If not, she expresses her continued outrage at the invasion. Either way, it makes for a difficult fight, as whiteout conditions and snowdrifts hamper the combatants. See "Assault of the Musketeers" in Part Four for combat penalties. Which side is affected depends upon Mother Ussura's disposition towards the party.

If you like, you may have the partisans attack just as the Musketeers close with the party, creating a tension-filled three-way battle. Will the players join with their pursuers to beat back the partisans? Or will they use the Ussurans to finally rid themselves of Chevalier's attention?

Point Value: Medium

Chapter Three: Characters

Major NPCs

Dominique du Montaigne

Brawn: 2, Finesse: 3, Resolve: 2, Wits: 4, Panache: 3

Reputation: 30

Advantages: Noble, Servants, Connections, Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W)

Arcana: Altruistic

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 3, Oratory 4,

Diplomacy 3, Politics 5, Scheming, 4, Sincerity 3

Scholar: History 3, Math 1, Philosophy 2, Research 1

Artist: Singing 2

Rider: Ride 3, Mounting 1

Archer: Attack (Bow) 2, Fletcher 1, Snapshot 1, Horse Archery 1

The Empereur's youngest daughter is more dangerous to the current regime than any would now suspect. Ignored and ridiculed by her father, Dominique has grown into a cunning and capable young woman and has plans for her country that the Empereur could scarcely conceive of. Unlike her father, Dominique cares about more than her own vanity. She sees the people of Montaigne suffering and her heart goes out to them. With every starving child she sees, her anger towards the Sun King grows a little more. When she learned he was planning to kill Montegue – the greatest general Théah has ever seen – over sheer ego, her temper snapped. The Heroes have been hired to save Montegue, an action with important ramifications for the future of the country.

Her maid, Anna, is a Vodacce fate witch who has pledged her powers to Dominique's cause. She is unshakably loyal to her mistress, and knows that





Dominique's interests may coincide with that of her home country. Through her abilities, she hopes to serve both equally well. She's headstrong and no-nonsense, refusing to be intimidated by anyone. She likes the mystery and fear her powers grant her, and uses them to gain the advantage in every situation. She always defers to Dominique when the two are together.

Dominique is a young woman just coming into her own. She's learned to play the part of the shy, mousy girl well, and few suspect the depths her plain face hides. She dresses in fashionable clothes and hides her brown hair beneath a wig while at court. When the Heroes meet her, she will be considerably dressed down, with none of the pomp that usually accompanies her. Her pregnancy is unnoticeable to all but the most observant onlookers.

Anna is a dusky young Vodacce with liquid brown eyes and a seductive smile. She dresses in the traditional black of the fate witch order and always keeps her head hidden beneath a veil. She's several inches shorter than her mistress and always walks a step or two behind her while in public. (Privately, the two girls are the closest friends, with no pretensions of rank between them.)

Dominique has numerous other plans afoot, but none of them concern the party at this time. For more information on the Empereur's daughter, see the *7th Sea GM's Guide* (p. 75) and the upcoming Montaigne sourcebook.

Anna (Dominique's Maid)

Brawn 2, Finesse 3, Resolve 3, Wits 3, Panache 2

Reputation: 14

Advantages: Indomitable Will, Dangerous Beauty, Small, Linguist, Vodacce (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castille (R/W)

Arcana: Loyal

Sorte (Adept): Coins 4, Cups 4, Staves 4, Swords 5

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Oratory 2, Scheming 4, Seduction 3

Servant: Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Menial Tasks 2, Unobtrusive 3, Seneschal 3

Spy: Shadowing 2, Stealth 3, Poison 2, Bribery 2, Sincerity 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 2

Captain Charles du Chevalier

Brawn 3, Finesse 3, Resolve 3, Wits 4, Panache 3

Reputation: 76

Advantages: Swordsman's Guild, Musketeers, Noble, Citation, Commission (Captain), Patron (Jean Marie Reines), Montaigne, Théan

Arcana: Arrogant

Valroux (Journeyman): Double Parry 4, Feint 4, Tagging 4, Exploit Weakness (Valroux) 4

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 3, Fashion 4, Oratory 2, Politics 3

Commander: Strategy 2, Tactics 2, Leadership 2, Ambush 2

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 1

Knife: Attack (Fencing) 1, Parry (Knife) 4

Rider: Ride 2

Pugilism: Attack (Pugilism) 3, Footwork 3, Jab 2, Uppercut 1

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 2

Chevalier is the epitome of a King's Musketeer: honorable, noble, devoted to king and country. He's also arrogant and more than a little condescending, but his heart is good and he faithfully adheres to the Musketeers' code. The third son of a wealthy nobleman, he joined the army for the excitement it offered, and rose quickly through the ranks. He was selected to the Musketeers by Jean-Marie Rois et Reines himself, and has struggled to justify the man's confidence in him. He proudly tells anyone who will listen exactly who gave him his job; he's found it impresses people.

Charles is a valiant swordsman, and fights to uphold the honor of the kingdom. He is also an aristocrat, however, and affects the elitist snobbery typical of Montaigne's nobility. He has a hard time believing that gentlemen of





any stripe could commit a crime, and rarely persecutes anyone of breeding. If he becomes convinced they are a threat, however (as he does the Heroes), he will hound them to the ends of the earth: a noble foe is ten times as dangerous as an ignoble one. Unlike many of his peers, he knows that the peasantry of his homeland suffer and realizes that their complaints are genuine. While he sympathizes, he also genuinely believes that they were meant to suffer as they do. "If God wanted them happy," he is fond of saying, "he wouldn't have dirtied their blood."

Montaigne Heroes know Chevalier by reputation; Musketeers know him by sight. They can attest to his traits, both good and bad, and know that he is a foe to be respected.

Image: Chevalier is tall and muscular, with the grace of an athlete and the bearing of a king. He is clean-shaven, which makes him look younger than his twenty-nine years. His nose turns upward slightly at the sight of commoners, and he always condescends to those beneath him. He is always polite, however, and rigidly adheres to the code of chivalry at all times. Arrogance and honor can go hand in hand.

Reginald Coleson

Brawn 2, Finesse 2, Resolve 3, Wits 4, Panache 2

Reputation: 20

Advantages: Keen Senses, Explorer's Society, University, Linguist, Montaigne (R/W), Castille (R/W), Théan (R/W), Avalon (R/W), Vendel (R/W)

Arcana: Focused

Sailor: Balance 2, Climbing 3, Knotwork 1, Rigging 1, Navigation 2, Cartography 3

Scholar: History 4, Math 2, Philosophy 3, Research 5,
Law 2, Natural Philosophy 2, Occult 3
Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 1, Fashion 1, Oratory 2,
Mooch 4, Sincerity 2
Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 3, Sprinting 2, Throwing
1, Break Fall 2, Leaping 3, Swimming 2
Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 2, Reload (Firearms) 1

Coleson was always more at home in the woods than the cities and always felt more comfortable with stones than people. When he was young, he eagerly searched out fairy circles, abandoned houses, and the crumbling ruins of the Old Empire near his Avalon home. Ruins were a mystery to him, one he couldn't wait to solve. Who lived in these places? What use did their lives serve? Why did they leave these things behind? His gentry parents quietly encouraged his curiosity in the hopes that it would bloom into something more practical. It never did, but it succeeded in attracting the attention of the Explorer's Society, who knew a recruit when they saw one. By the time Reggie graduated from school, he was already a high-ranking member of the Society.

When his parents died, he spent most of his inheritance funding expeditions to the western isles. The ruins there enthralled him as none on Avalon ever could, and he led countless expeditions into their terrible jungles. The dangers never slowed him for an instant, and he proved daring and courageous with each expedition. When his personal fortunes ran out, he came to depend entirely on the Society for support; he had no home anymore, just the ruins he visited, and the occasional Explorer's safehouse for the few times he returned to civilization. To the Society, he was worth every penny. He had a nose for sniffing out artifacts and an insightful way of examining them that opened unheard-of vistas of thought. To the Society, he had become one of their most prized assets.

Today he continues his work as best he can, leading ships full of Explorers to the farthest edges of the world. He

continues to deliver all manner of strange and unusual artifacts into the Society's hands. He's just completed a major expedition that produced a staggering number of finds and is currently struggling to deliver them to a safe locale within Eisen. In the midst of these travails, the Heroes meet him.

More on Reginald Coleson will appear in the second installment of *The Erebus Cross*.

Image: Reggie is the epitome of the rumpled scientist: friendly, enthusiastic, and a little bewildered. His long brown hair is tied in a pigtail, and a thick mustache shadows his smiling mouth. He has a pair of glasses which he wears for close examinations. His clothes are exceedingly practical, used more for tramping across far-away islands than socializing in drawing rooms. He never thinks to change them when he returns to the continent. The secretive nature of the Society have taught him a few things about the world, and he keeps his guard up when dealing with those outside of the Explorer's Guild. But those who earn his trust find him friendly, affable, and willing to talk about almost anything. He has a knowledge of seamanship and most "gentlemanly" pursuits, although he rarely uses them. His favorite topics, of course, are the mysteries of the past and potential ways to unravel them.

The Three Captain(s): "Ringer" Gutwold, Lars Ostrom, Deacon Hampford

Brawn 2, Finesse 4, Resolve 2, Wits 3, Panache 2

Reputation: -16

Advantages: Able Drinker, Scoundrel, Avalon (R/W),
Montaigne (R/W)

Arcana: Lecherous

Sailor: Balance 3, Climbing 4, Knotwork 3, Rigging 2,
Piloting 4, Navigation 3

Streetwise: Socializing 3, Street Navigation 2, Scrounging
3, Shopping 2, Underworld Lore 3

Performer: Acting 1, Dancing 1, Oratory 1, Singing 3,
Disguise 2, Cold Read 2

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Attack (Improvised Weapon) 2, Eye Gouge 2, Throat Strike 2
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 3
Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 1, Throw (Knife) 3
Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 1

Ask any five people who have traveled on Reginald's hired boat, and they're apt to give you five different descriptions of the captain. He could be anyone from a barrel-shaped Crescenter to a lanky blonde Vendel, sometimes even a woman. The fact is, the ship changes captains as easily as it changes names. Three men co-own the vessel, and take turns commanding it. One appears as the captain, while the other two pose as mates or other high-ranking officers. They switch off when they feel the need or when circumstances dictate it. Considering the line of work they are in, it's come in handy.

The men are smugglers and ne'er-do-wells, running illegal cargo through the gauntlets between nations. Ringer Gutwold is an Eisen man of Vodacce descent, with dark curly hair and liquid brown eyes. Lars Ostrom is a wind-blown beanpole from northern Vendel, who fled his creditors for a life of anonymity. Deacon Hampford comes from the slums of Avalon's capital, and while he speaks with erudite precision, his low-class accent betrays his true origins. Together, they and their crew have shipped weapons, stolen goods, even political refugees – whatever's paying best at the time. They try to avoid bloodshed if they can but aren't afraid of a fight. As time has gone on, they've hit upon a brilliant scheme for keeping their identities anonymous.

Whenever the ship runs into difficulties with the authorities (as it may in this adventure, see Encounter 5 above), the crew rushes to change its name and appearance. The plaque bearing the ship's name is removed, burned and a new one fitted in its place. (It currently goes by the *River Mist*; two other prepared plaques read the *Lady's Fan* and the *Windy Bough*). The

crew similarly removes the carving on the prow and fits it with a new one. Falsified registry documents are always in the hold, and new ones are created whenever a new plaque is commissioned. The same goes with the captains. If an Eisen patrol runs afoul of the craft and remembers that the captain was tall and blonde, you can be sure a short dark-haired gent will be at the helm when it reaches harbor. The three are fairly adept at disguising themselves and easily fool casual onlookers. Most of their crew is in on the ruse, so the transitions are almost seamless. Newcomers are often left to figure things out on their own: much to the amusement of the rest of the crew.

Image: The trio can appear in almost any form of clothes, from formal naval uniforms to the barest scraps and rags. All three are rough and tumble sailors and waste little time on social niceties. They conduct business negotiations with coarse honesty and bark orders to the crew like junkyard dogs. Despite that, they've earned the loyalty of those under them; protection and (relative) prosperity have a way of doing that. For more information on the Three Captains, see Part Two of the adventure, and Random Encounters 4, 5 and 6.

The River Mist

Brawn 1, Finesse 4, Resolve 2, Wits 2, Panache 4

Besides its rather unique camouflaging abilities, the *River Mist* is a typical sailing barge. It holds considerable cargo space, as well as a few hidden locations to hide contraband. Its crew sleeps in hammocks and passengers are expected to do the same: cabins are usually used for storage. It's equally at home on the ocean or along an inland river, although it lacks the capacity for deep sea voyages. It can maneuver quite quickly for its size, and on the open sea can outrun all but the largest military clippers. It has two cannons for defense, plus the personal arms of the crew. More than that tends to draw attention.

The Evil Woodcutter: Fleischwulf

Fleischwulf's statistics aren't important, since he won't attack the Heroes, and they can't hurt him except by destroying one of his wooden carvings.

It is assumed that the Heroes will meet Fleischwulf in the forests of Eisen. Otherwise, they will run into him in Montaigne where he goes by the name Leblanque. He's a deeply malevolent creature, who has existed on Théah for many hundreds of years. Whether he is related to the Sidhe or some other ancient race, only he can say; he was never human, however, although he has spent most of his life in human form. He roams the forests and wilderness of the Théan continent, looking for new victims to devour.

Fleischwulf appears to his victims as a woodcutter, a gruff but kindly man in his early forties dwelling on the edge of a great forest. He wears clothes typical of the area he currently inhabits, though they are always coarse and simple: woodsman's clothes. He sometimes has a hut but more often than not can be found amid the great tree trunks, chopping down branches with a great axe. He always appears to those who are lost or confused who need a guide to help them on their way. He's always happy to help those in need.

At night, when his victims bed down, he strikes. He's never so crude as to physically attack; that's for creatures of less power and finesse than he. Instead, he strikes at the soul of his prey, aiming to capture it and bind it for all time. He carves a wooden doll in the likeness of his victim. When they awake, he shows them the doll and challenges them to a contest of riddles. If they answer correctly, he vanishes never to trouble them again. But if they fail, he pulls their souls from their bodies and into the doll. His prize secured, he leaves the hapless traveler's empty body behind to rot in the woods. The corpses are found with a look of shocked confusion on their faces, as if unable to believe the fate which has befallen them.

Canny locals know that look as a sign of Fleischwulf's presence.

No one knows what Fleischwulf does with his wooden dolls, or where he transports them once their souls are imprisoned. Those aware of him speculate that he has an army of them, gathered away from some fell purpose. Others believe he uses them as trading goods with other infernal beings. But everyone agrees that the final fates of his victims must be unimaginable. If you have the misfortune to run across him on some lonely country road, be prepared to guess his riddles correctly... or else run for your life.

General Montegue

Brawn 3, Finesse 4, Resolve 5, Wits 3, Panache 5 (+1 from Valroux)

Reputation: 120

Advantages: Commission (General), Indomitable Will, Swordsman's Guild, Academy, Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Eisen, Ussuran

Arcana: Willful

Valroux (Master): Double Parry 5, Feint 5, Tagging 5, Exploit Weakness (Valroux) 5

Commander: Strategy 5, Tactics 4, Artillery 3, Leadership 4, Logistics 3, Incitation 5, Ambush 5

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 3

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 1

Knife: Attack (Knife) 1, Parry (Knife) 5

Rider: Ride 3

Hunter: Stealth 1, Survival 2, Tracking 2

Streetwise: Socializing 3, Street Navigation 2, Scrounging 2, Shopping 1

Rising from the mass of disaffected Montaigne commoners, Montegue has become one of the most dynamic personalities on Théah. He's led his armies to victory after victory, bringing glory to the Montaigne crown and praise to his name. He stands in the vanguard, anticipating the day when all his lord's foes will fall



beneath him. This isn't arrogance or jingoism on his part, just a simple assessment of his own capabilities. He really is that good.

The General has had a trying few months when the party finally reaches him. The Ussuran campaign has taken its toll and lines of weariness have begun to appear on his face. His charisma still shines through, though, and a few minutes of talking to him is all the party needs to understand why men follow him. Like any soldier, he loves his country and does what he believes is best for it. He's unused to the intricacies of Théan courts, preferring the harsher realities of the battlefield to test himself. He's coming to learn that not all enemies face him over cannons, however, and with his wife's help is devising ways to take the fight to them.

Montegue is an average-size man, with dark hair and a brown beard. He dresses in a military uniform at all times, and makes sure it is always in good condition. Unlike most Théan generals, however, he shuns the pomp and grandeur of his station; his outfit is only marginally more elaborate than a Montaigne lieutenant's. He has a will of iron and a fierce pride, coupled with a belief that he can defeat any foe. The fact that he continues the Ussuran campaign in the face of such superhuman opposition is testament to his resolve.

In *The Lady's Favor*, Montegue serves primarily as a plot device: the goal the players are trying to reach. This won't be the last they see of him, however, or of the forces he commands. More information on the general can be found in the *7th Sea GM's Guide* (p. 76) and the upcoming Montaigne sourcebook.

Minor NPCs

Gregor Vogel, thief

Brawn 2, Finesse 4, Resolve 2, Wits 3, Panache 2

Reputation: -28

Advantages: Scoundrel, Eisen, Montaigne

Arcana: Cowardly

Criminal: Gambling 3, Quack 2, Shadowing 2, Stealth 2, Cheating 3, Pickpocket 4, Prestidigitation 3, Lockpicking 2

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 2, Reload (Firearms) 2

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Sprinting 3, Throwing 2, Side-step 2, Long Distance Running 3

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 1, Attack (Improvised Weapon) 2, Throw (Improvised Weapon) 3, Eye Gouge 2

Gregor is a miserable weasel of a man, preying upon Eisen refugees with a series of swindles and short con games. When he sees the Heroes passing through, he takes the opportunity to pick their pockets... and may end up with the most valuable object he's ever seen.

Gregor grew up on the streets of Freiburg, and maintains an urchin's sense of survival. He's not strong but maintains a wiry agility that lets him slip free of most ugly situations. He dresses in dark, nondescript clothes and has a face like an open wound. He tries to be charming with his marks, but ultimately comes across as somewhat repulsive. If threatened, he will whine cravenly for his life, but won't honor anything he says unless forced to. He's a thorough scoundrel in every sense of the word.

Standard Soldiers

Brutes

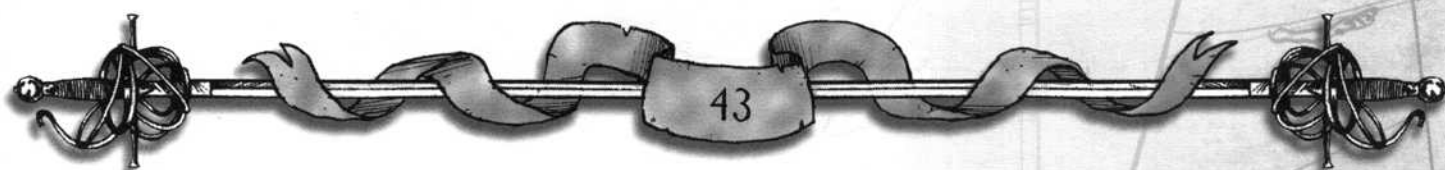
Threat Rating: 2

Usual Weapons: Muskets (Firearms)

TN to be hit: 15

Skills: Attack (Firearms) 3

These are standard soldiers of the type encountered almost anywhere in Théah. They're usually Montaigne in this adventure, but the same stats can be used for Eisen, Ussura or any other nationality. Use them for Montegue's forces, the men of the river patrol or any other military units the Heroes run across.



Soldiers will be dressed in a variety of uniforms depending upon their function and nationality. Those along a front will be utilitarian and sparse, while those in the rear are cleaner and more elaborate. Almost all soldiers carry muskets with bayonets; officers will have swords and possibly a pistol or two as well. See the *7th Sea GM's Guide* for further details.

Quartermasters

Brutes

Threat Rating: 1

Usual Weapons: Decorative Swords (Small)

TN to be hit: 10

Skills: None

The quartermasters at the way station the Heroes come across are considerably less trained than their combat counterparts. They dress in the standard Montaigne uniform — navy blue with the sign of the Sun King emblazoned upon it. They carry no firearms, however, and their swords are more decorative than purposeful. Their stats reflect the differences from the usual Montaigne military.

Musketeers

Brutes

Threat Rating: 3

Usual Weapons: Muskets (Firearms), Fencing (Medium)

TN to be hit: 20

Skills: Attack (Firearms) 4, Attack (Fencing) 4

Special Abilities: Musketeers are considered to have a Panache of 4, instead of 3.

The King's Musketeers are among Théah's elite fighting forces. Trained in multiple combat techniques, raised to obey *l'Empereur* above all things, they let nothing stand in the way of their duty. The ones detailed here represent the forces beneath Captain Chevalier.

Musketeers usually dress in the King's colors, with a large image of the Sun emblazoned on their chests. They carry muskets and pistols, as well as dueling rapiers attached to their belts. Their wide brimmed hats separate them from the Montaigne army, and they move with the nobility expected of their station. They can usually only be found in Charouse or at the royal palace, but in this case their duties have pushed them far beyond their usual jurisdiction.

Ussuran Partisans

Brutes

Threat Rating: 3

Usual Weapons: Axes (Large)

TN to be hit: 20

Skills: Ambush 3

Pyeryem Sorcerer Leader (Bear Form)

Villain

TN: 20

Brawn 6, Finesse 2, Resolve 4, Wits 2, Panache 2

Attack Roll: 7k2

Damage: 6k2 Bite, 6k3 Claws

Skills: Bear 5, Footwork 3

These are guerrilla fighters, battling the Montaigne occupation of their country. They lack formal training, but make up for it with heart and fierceness. They're a ragged group, dressed in worn and primitive clothes. Their faces are drawn with suffering, but they have a strength in their eyes that belies their haggard appearance. They strike swiftly and move with the menace of great cats. The Montaigne army has rightfully learned to fear them.

Their leader, who doesn't give his name, is somewhat better dressed, and wears a gold medallion signifying a member of the nobility. He towers above his men in a great fur coat, which belies his lycanthropic heritage. He carries no weapons; his transformation is enough. When



he changes, he appears as a huge grizzly bear, with thick brown fur and claws like daggers. He is as much a part of Mother Ussura as its beasts or forests.

Crew of the River Mist

Brutes

Threat Rating: 2

Usual Weapons: Knives (Small)

TN to be hit: 15 (20 on ship)

Skills: Balance 3

The crew numbers about thirty, and contains all manner of sailors, scoundrels and thieves. Most of them are fairly cutthroat, but they're loyal to the three captains and perform their duties well. While the party should never completely drop their guard, they'll find them by and large agreeable; they're too busy to harass the paying passengers. They're dressed in a variety of clothes, and vary wildly in appearance. All are shady characters however, and look it.



The Beast of Dechain

Battering Damage: 7k5

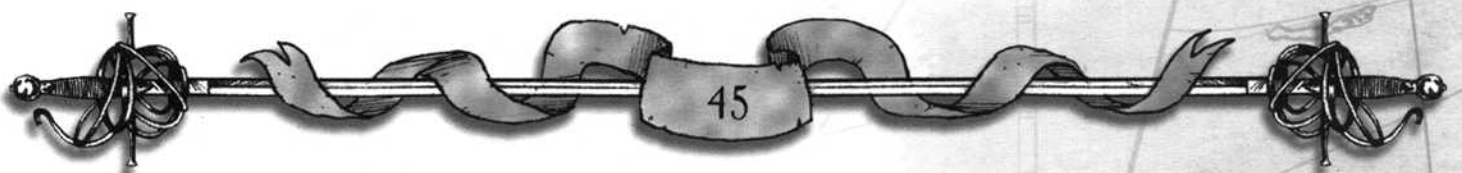
Bite Damage: 10k10+20

The Beast of Dechain is a huge sea serpent, related to the Drachen of Eisen myth. This particular specimen managed to find its way into the Dechain River, where it has found a home and thrived for nearly three hundred years. Its attacks have become the stuff of legend.

The Beast is enormous, over three furlongs (about 20 feet) long, and large enough to crush entire hulls within its coils. Its massive head is framed by a mouth full of sharp teeth, which it can use to tear apart an anchor chain or swallow a man whole. Its serpentine body is dotted with huge fins and covered with thick metallic scales. Some have claimed it has limbs and claws, but in truth it has none. Its gaping maw is more than enough. It rarely appears above the surface, and spends most of its time beneath the Dechain's murky depths. When it does appear, only parts can be seen: a single coil, perhaps, or part of a fin. The few times its head has risen above the water have been terrible indeed.

The Beast has no formal statistics, for it is almost impossible to kill and cannot be injured by anything short of a cannon. It can use its head as a battering ram, causing 7k5 damage to any hull it strikes. Its jaws cause 10k10+20 with each bite, and can tear steel apart if it wishes. It takes cannon shot just to get its attention, but the Heroes can't actually injure it. The best defense is to hope it doesn't notice you, but its attacks on watercraft are thankfully rare.

In addition to these characters, there's the man who steals the artifact from Montegue — the one seen by the Hero in a vision. He lurks somewhere in the western isles, and his plans are slowly growing to envelop the party. But we'll learn more about him in good time...



The Explorer's Society

In 1586 Hierophant Julius IV contacted a man named Cameron McCormick for a special favor. The McCormick family had long been in good standing with the Vaticine church, and Cameron had attended the University in Castille, graduating in high standing.

Julius IV commissioned McCormick to retrace the lives of the three prophets first-hand, beginning in their birthplaces and following the paths they walked. McCormick's studies and travels were quite successful at first, yielding a wealth of scholarly material still in regular use in church teachings. But in June of 1587, while traveling through the hills south of Vodacce, McCormick made a strange discovery. In the caverns, he found whole walls of amber encasing what appeared to be full suits of strange looking armor.

Initially, McCormick attempted to explain his findings within the boundaries of the church's doctrine, identifying them as remnants of the Synchron civilization. However, he was unable to ignore certain obvious dissimilarities between his findings in Vodacce and the radically different sites he had encountered in Eisen only a few months earlier in his travels. The writing found in both locations looked nothing alike. The Eisen ruins relied on a pictographic form of communication, while inscriptions in Vodacce were in a fluid, curving script punctuated with dashes and dots. The great caverns of Eisen were huge, standing over a hundred feet high, with doorways more than 50' tall. The tunnels that McCormick found in Vodacce were barely large enough for a man to move through in some places. And the 'armor suits' he found there looked large enough to fit a small man.

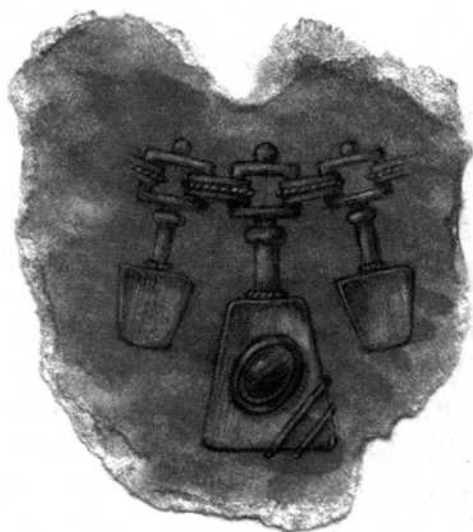
McCormick had specialized in the study of biology at the University, as well as being an avid reader of history. What he encountered fired his imagination, rendering him unable to finish the Hierophant's request. He handed the task off to a close friend who had accompanied him on his travels, and with apologies to the Hierophant, McCormick took his leave.

After a detailed study of the Vodacce caverns, McCormick continued his search throughout Théah. He found similar caverns scattered through the hills east of Vodacce. He then moved westward, following the great river and looking for any additional evidence washed up by the seasonal rains. He offered large sums of money for genuine artifacts that could be brought to him. Many an eager peasant partook of his generosity, not always offering authentic materials. McCormick soon expended his own fortune pursuing these new endeavors. His family, convinced his forays were folly, cut him off from the larger McCormick fortune and from his inheritance.

Out of money but not yet out of hope or ambition, McCormick contacted several of his closest colleagues from University. He asked for funding for his expeditions, promising in return true knowledge, and a place in history for his contributors. Of the 17 letters that McCormick sent out, six answered that they would join him in his quest. The bulk of the funds came from McCormick's closest and wealthiest friend, Allario Caligari.

McCormick's other contributors were Alejandro Diega from Castille, Gern Luffwitz of Eisen, Darius Olaf of Vendel, and McCormick's own sister Margaret, now Lady Margaret McOrin, a woman of means since her recent marriage. The only condition that McCormick's contributors all remained firm on was that they be allowed to participate in his excavations.

With new funding, and consequently tools, manpower and to some extent respectability, the sextet formed the first incarnation of the Discoverer's Society, an elite group



of self-declared adventurers on a quest for truth. For the better part of two years the fledgling society tried its wings, digging its way through Théah, buying entry where they couldn't barter it. Group members would sometimes work together. On other occasions, they would separate and continue their researches independently, even competitively. But one rule remained firm. Any evidence and all artifacts were turned over for examination by the whole society at the house of Darius Olaf, their newly appointed headquarters.

The arrangement went very well until late September, 1589. At this point, McCormick discovered that his close friend Caligari had been keeping and selling items found on his expeditions. Infuriated, McCormick broke with Caligari, who withdrew his funding and many of his discoveries. Shortly thereafter Caligari formed his own teams of excavators to continue the search for artifacts and ruins. McCormick disgustedly dubbed the new groups 'diggers' in disparaging reference to their grubbing for profit, and the name stuck.

Without Caligari's financial support, the Discoverer's Society began to founder. During the next five years Alejandro Diega was called home to take over responsibilities for his ailing father, weakening his ties to

the group. Darius Olaf found his trading ships on the receiving end of the unwelcome attention of raiders, diverting his attention and resources as well. The core group of the Society became MacCormick, his sister Margaret, and Gern Luffwitz. The three cut back the size of their digging teams to conserve the funds available to them. They dismissed most of the servants and assistants they traveled with, often venturing into new sites as a team of three.

The three developed a system that would become the basis of most dig teams. MacCormick would scout an area initially, to see if the site warranted further attention and to check for potential hazards. Once this was accomplished, the other two would join him. Margaret cataloged their findings and related them to earlier work. Gern, more versed in combat than either of the other two could ever hope to be, stood between them and danger. The group had long since learned that the sites they visited were as often as not the homes of creatures unlike any seen before.

The three continued their expeditions in this fashion for several years. Occasionally they would take on assistants, men and women as eager to know what lay beneath the mask of the Syrneath as the remaining members of the Discoverer's Society.

In November 1597 Cameron MacCormick received word that his younger brother Albert, the beneficiary of their parents' estate, had died in a hunting accident. Once again the heir to the family fortune, MacCormick found himself both blessed and cursed. He now had the funds he required to continue his work, but with them came the responsibility to tend his family's property and business.

MacCormick returned to his family home in the winter of that year. As the weather warmed and MacCormick grew unbearably restless to continue his work, he came to a decision. Although he couldn't in good conscience leave his lands and duties, he could bring his passion to him. In early May 1598, MacCormick declared his familial





home the official University of the newly renamed Explorer's Society. He imported a vast library including the journals that he and his companions had painstakingly recorded over the years. He converted one wing of his home into a dormitory and another into a space for classes and research. Then MacCormick wrote letters, very similar to the ones he had sent out eight years earlier. He invited the original members of the Discoverer's Society, excepting Caligari, to do what he had and to open their homes to other adventurers seeking the truth of Théah's history.

They agreed, forming the first chapter houses of the Explorer's Society in Avalon, Vendel, Eisen and Castille. Each of these houses now holds its own library and museum as well as space for learning and research. In the years between then and the present, another house has opened in Montaigne under the watch of Etienne Deneuve. Any member of the Society can expect hospitality and if necessary, sanctuary, in any of these houses.

The Public Face

The credo of the Explorer's Society is to pursue the quest for knowledge and the truth of Theah's history with care and with honor. Its members spend long hours in study, face terrible dangers in the field, and turn over their findings in the name of knowledge, not profit. They know that the Syrnych walked the shores and valleys of Théah before mankind was born, and they seek to learn all that they can about this older race so that men can reap the benefit of their wisdom and avoid the errors that presumably took them from the face of the world.

Although some of their findings conflict with established church doctrine, the Explorer's Society has a good relationship with the heads of the Vaticine faith, and is respected by most of the major governments and rulers of Theah's nations.

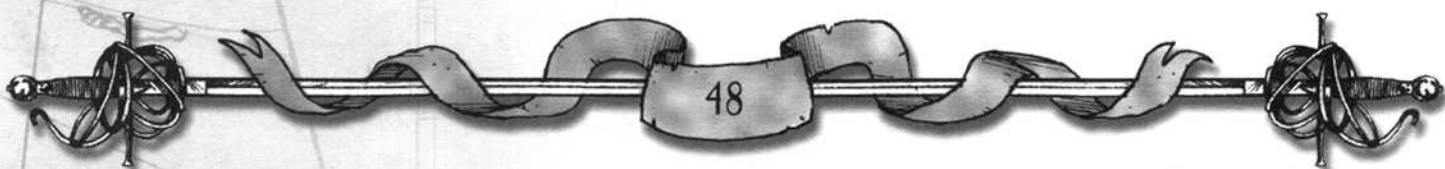
The Private Agenda

Behind the closed doors of the Explorers' chapter houses its members share different theories about Theah's history than the ones they publicly divulge. It has been known by the Society since its earliest days that more than one race existed before man, possibly at different ages, or perhaps sharing the world.

Explorers have learned to determine the comparative age of their findings. For instance, soil and rock are found in layers. Remnants found in different layers most likely belong to different ages. So far only the remnants of one civilization at a time have been found in a single layer. One of the main goals of the Society is to find remnants of more than one group mingled together, sharing a layer. This would prove that not only did more than one race exist before mankind, but that they coexisted, possibly working in harmony.

This kind of theory is making the Society increasingly unpopular with the Inquisition, the primary organized power of the Vaticine church in contemporary times. The church, through the Inquisition, stands behind the idea that mankind is the pinnacle of Creation and that any earlier races were inferior, thus causing their disappearance. The idea that more than one race capable of intelligent thought and building might have worked in organized cooperation is deemed heretical under the present church order.

The Society is also aware of the existence of the 7th Sea. Although most of the people of Théah look upon the 7th Sea as a sailor's fable, the Society sees it as a real place, and one to be explored. Members of the Society's inner circle suspect that this mysterious 'place' may be integrally linked to the old races, and may even hold the secrets of where they went.





The Society's Activities

Several dig sites are under regular excavation and examination across Théah. (These are detailed at the end of this chapter.) In addition to these standard sites, explorer teams constantly search out additional ruins, and their digs dot the continent from urban Montaigne to the hills of southern Vodacce at the edge of the Crescent Empire.

In addition to their continental exploration, the Society sends out yearly voyages to search out new continents and other lands. These convoys began four years ago and although no major land masses have been discovered yet, regular reports come back from these ships reporting the unique sea animals and smaller islands they have discovered.

The Society's Structure

The Society structures itself like an academic organization. It is led by a Headmaster, whose role and robe have been handed down since they were first worn by Cameron MacCormick. He is attended by a council of six senior members, elected by their peers. Below this are six ranks of Explorer, each named for one of the six known seas. Each rank is vouchsafed additional knowledge.

There is also a material benefit to rising in the ranks. Although all artifacts discovered are turned over to the Society, not all of them are needed for research. Once it has been determined that no more of a particular kind of item are needed for study, the extras are redistributed among the members, beginning with the highest ranks. Needless to say, some of these artifacts can be exceedingly useful once their original purpose has been discovered.

Members identify themselves as being from a particular sea when addressing other members. For instance, a beginning explorer will say that he "...is from the Trade

Sea." The ranks begin with the sea surrounding MacCormick's native Avalon and continue counter-clockwise around Théah. They are as follows.

The Trade Sea

Beginning explorers are part of the Trade Sea. They are largely responsible for their own equipment and accompany parties as assistants most of the time. First rank explorers are seldom allowed inside dig sites. Instead, they're responsible for cleaning and cataloging items that the more experienced members extract.

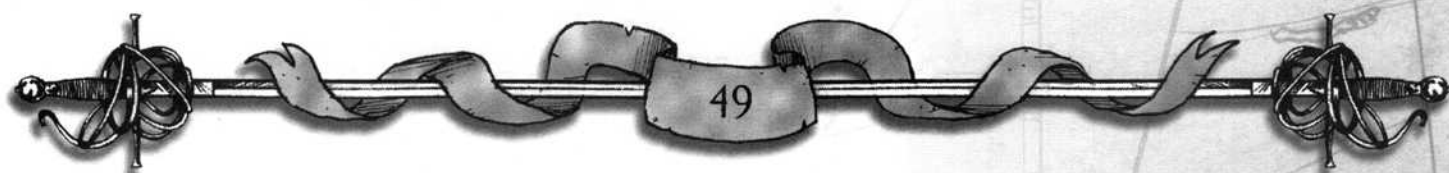
Their knowledge is equivalent to that of the average layman; for instance, they may still believe that only one race ever walked Théah before mankind. They're required to attend basic courses at the charter houses or to learn in the field from a tutor. These courses teach them the proper methods of recording their findings.

The Frothing Sea

After participating in several organized digs, an explorer advances to the next level. They're now allowed into the more secure portions of excavation sites. Also at this stage they may begin to receive the Explorers' 'unique' equipment, including a palm-sized globe made of a substance similar to quartz. If left in the sun, the globe will emit a soft light in darkness for half as much time as it was exposed to daylight. Frothing Sea explorers continue coursework, learning field techniques.

La Boca

At the third level, if they haven't figured it out already, they're told about the Society's belief that a number of older races existed. They're allowed to fully participate in excavations so long as at least one senior Explorer (Mirror or higher) is present. An explorer from La Boca can begin to receive credit for his own published works and journals. Most learning at this level is in a tutorial capacity. However, when not in the field, members of this rank spend time in independent research at the charter



houses finding out all that they can about their particular areas of expertise.

The Forbidden Sea

Explorers who have attained this level have crossed a threshold of sorts. Up to this point members are responsible for their own housing and income. Although a charter house will grant sanctuary in times of need, it won't support a lower ranked member indefinitely. Once an explorer has reached the rank of the Forbidden Sea he or she can choose to receive full boarding at a charter house, as well as having all of their necessary equipment provided. Most explorers repay part of this support by teaching introductory courses to newer members.

Explorers at this point are told about the Society's agenda to uncover research linking several of the older races together. So long as only one race's remnants can be found in a single location, the Society cannot prove that there was more than one race. Disputing scholars and the Inquisition espouse that the diversity is a result of one race developing over an indeterminate amount of time. However, if a mixed sampling of remnants can be discovered in the same location, the Society will have the evidence that multiple races did exist.

The Mirror

Explorers who have reached this level are deep in the midst of the Society and considered dedicated in the extreme. At this level, the Society reveals its theory that the 7th Sea is not only real, but a physical place that can potentially be visited, and may be connected to the older races and their unique magics/sciences.

The Corridors of Flame

Members who have reached this point are one step away from the inner sanctum. They have access to records and information regarding almost all of the Society's activities. At this stage members' dedication is deemed complete, and they are brought into the Council's confidence. The

very public voyages that the Society launches annually to look for new lands have a very different agenda. Instead of looking for new lands, they're searching for the 7th Sea. Since the first expedition went out four years ago, consisting of four boats and nearly 500 men, not one of them has sent back a single report.

Whether they've become lost in their quest or succeeded in it, the Society doesn't know. But they suspect that the 7th Sea may be more than a place: it may be a doorway. And if that doorway is where the older races left this world, then it's possible that that door could open again. This is the real reason for the Society's dedication to 'exploration abroad'. Members from the Corridors of Flame are responsible for constructing the fictional reports expected from those lost ships.





Reports of the Syrneth

What follows is a series of articles from the Explorer Society regarding their theories and speculations on Syrneth. While it may not be as straightforward as the previous sections, it does give a first-hand glimpse at what the Théans believe they are dealing with in those vast caverns and lost cities.

Presented by Headmaster Vincent Berndavore at the Annual Archaeological Conference in Carleon, Tertius 17, 1668.

Today is the tenth anniversary of the Explorer's Society, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made this decade so memorable. We have improved the fields of exploration, cartography, and world knowledge and made great discoveries in their sciences of chemistry, medicine, and mathematics, among others. I, for one, could not be more proud.

Though I have been the Headmaster of this Society for only five years, I would hope that all of you are as pleased with my work as I am with yours. The nation of Castille has been exploring with the blessing of the Vaticine Church for nearly fifty years, and they cannot claim half the accomplishments we can. So I say unabashedly congratulations, one and all.

Now, on to business.

First and foremost, I must again stress the number of damaged artifacts we receive every year. I cannot help but wonder if our techniques in the field are not too aggressive, or if the work is done too quickly. These items are our future, and should be treated with the proper care at all times. In addition, please note that many of our Directors have pointed to the mercenaries we have been hiring for protection over the last two years as part of the cause for this problem. Please observe caution when hiring such individuals.

The newest order of business this year must be our considered response to the sudden interest of the Church of the Prophets

in our work. Since the death of the Hierophant, they have become more active in their appraisal of our activities, and on at least a few occasions, directly interfered with a project's success. Also, several items have been confiscated by the Inquisition, who claim that they are of "religious importance."

I wish all of you to know that the Explorer's Society has made this their top priority for 1668 and beyond. Though we must still adhere to their rules and especially their borders, we will by no means stand idly by while they deny us access to our own finds. Nor will we tolerate the incarceration of our representatives, or the blatant hindrance of our efforts abroad. When we have more information to afford you on this matter, additional meetings will be convened. Until then, please report any abuses of Inquisition power directly to your coordinators.

So, without further ado, I present to you the summary reports of our current field researchers, and their finds.

Enjoy.

The following sections are highlights from the report presented to those at the Archaeological Conference.

Speculation on the Setines

Annual Progress Report

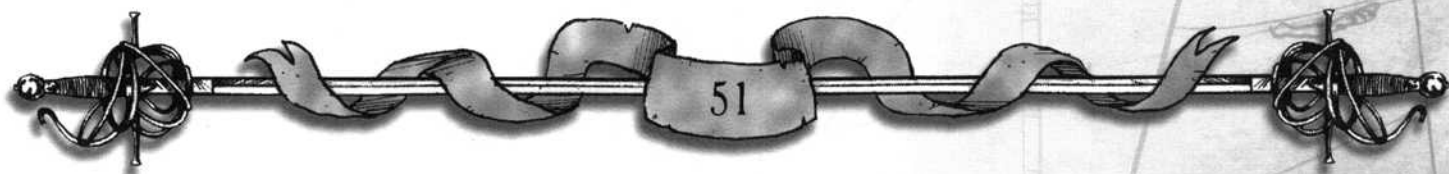
Dr. Jules von Gregor

Scientific Advisor

Hello good sir,

As I write these words and consider the ramifications of the enclosed material, I cannot help but wonder why you have chosen to include it in the Conference presentation. I do not suppose to question your judgment in this matter, but I am quite concerned at the possible directions our research could take after this information is released. Those unprepared for it may very well scurry back into their ignorant hovels and cast our fledgling scientific community adrift. Other may simply decide that nothing else matters.

We cannot take that chance.





Please reconsider your inclusion of this material. It is dangerous. As the research is not yet complete, we cannot make accurate assessments of the present data, and my personal opinion is that its presentation will cause friction with various powers in Théah, particularly the Vaticines, who could hinder our progress in other areas as well. Ultimately, however, you can rest assured that I will bow to your superior interests.

As always, I am your obedient servant,

Dr. von Gregor

Our first encounter with the beings we refer to (for lack of a more accurate term, and for reasons I will relate below) as “Setines” occurred late in the year 1664, shortly after the annual migration of the bocca through Castille and Vodacce along the Great River. In their wake, they had left great patches of upturned soil, which the farmers of both countries were working feverishly to cover before the winter snows arrived.

Within the hole left behind by one of these patches, the remains of a single being were found. The bones were unlike anything the Castilian farmer who owned the land had ever seen before, and so he dug out what he could and contacted us in the spring. Unfortunately, the bones had been badly damaged by the bocca, and subsequent digs in the same site recovered no new evidence to determine what the thing could have been.

Initially, my dig team and I thought that the being was the result of some form of occult tampering with the human form. It was slightly larger than even an outsized human. Its skull was grossly malformed, with a forward protrusion reminiscent of a snout or beak of some sort. The most remarkable thing about it, however, was the growth of what appeared to be frail wings from just below its shoulder blades.

These growths were the most heavily damaged part of the find, and we spent several months attempting to piece them back together in their original composition. I can only hope that our efforts have provided us with a close-

to-correct abstract, though with our lack of other samples for comparison until very recently, we cannot be sure yet. The “wingspan” of this first set of remains measured just over four yards in length by our calculations.

Needless to say, we were all intrigued.

We spent the next year conducting additional research on the being and scouring the Castilian countryside and Vodacce winelands for additional specimens. During this time, our only additional discovery was that the bones of the creature were mostly hollow and very brittle, like those of some smaller birds. Though we contested the Society’s resulting decision that it was an aberration not worth additional time and money, we were overruled. My team was split up and sent to new digs across Théah, and I was ordered back to my post as Scientific Advisor for the continent.

For two years, I continued with the coordination of digs and performed my regular duties without further incident. Last year, however, while working with Father Butolli at one of his Eisen locations, I found something that I believed was relevant to the “Setine” project. It was another set of remains (these only providing a partial corpse) that – while much larger and of a radically different body structure than the last – had the same type of hollow bone configuration.

Immediately contacting the Society about the find, my request for an investigation of the Setines was again flatly rejected. But this time, I would not be stifled that easily. I contacted my associates from the former dig site and asked them to keep an eye peeled for additional remnants of what I was coming to believe were an entirely new race which lived upon Théah in the far-distant past.

Much to my surprise, reports began flooding in over the following months of skeletons recovered within digs across southern continental Théah, previously unidentifiable, all with the same hollow bones. Few remained fully intact, but there were both males and





The Explorer's Society

females, some with wings and some without. They varied greatly in size and shape, ranging from something approximating humanity to immense and distorted beasts over twelve feet in height and apparently built to walk on all fours like a dog or bear.

But the most startling new find was what appeared to be armor modeled after the style and make of that worn by our predecessors in the Old Republic. Some of these suits were obviously useless to humans, being far too large and sometimes even form-fitted to ten-foot monsters with grossly bulbous barrel-chests and gnarled legs. By late last year, we had recovered two full suits and nearly a dozen individual pieces.

The Society could no longer ignore these finds. They brought my old team back together at the start of this year and cleared our docket. We have been working around the clock ever since, attempting to make up for lost time, and piece together the truth of these lost beings.

My greatest fear since that time has been this report. While I can be nothing short of truthful herein about my suppositions, I do not believe that we have enough evidence to support any claim. I have just received a letter from my former colleague, Father Butolli, which I have included for your perusal. It relates that another of the Setines has been discovered on the smallest island in the Vodacce Keys, which is owned by the Villanova family.

The importance of this particular sample is that it reportedly exhibits traits from both the male and female genders, as well as being roughly androgynous in shape and size when compared to our former finds. I believe this Setine may present the Project with a unique opportunity to piece together the common denominator between the existing samples. Unfortunately, Mr. Villanova seems hesitant to release the specimen for some as yet undetermined reason.

Now, with regards to the theory that Director Carleon has requested for the Conference, I can only repeat that these speculations are premature in the extreme. Please consider them unsubstantiated until further evidence to support them has been retrieved.

The members of the Setine Project team believe that our civilization was preceded by another: a vast collective of races held or forced together by an as yet unknown element, and that the element was the Setines themselves. Their remains have been found in nearly every dig on continental Théah, proving that the only place these beings did not roam was (perhaps) the far Isles of Thalusia and Syrne.

There are four probable reasons for the Setines' prolific presence, as follows:

- 1) They were a slave race, exploited by the others.
- 2) They were a servitor race, working together with the others.
- 3) They were a guide race, subtly or overtly influencing the others.
- 4) They were a ruler race, suppressing or enslaving the others.

This last theory is the most favored at present, given the beings' obvious strengths and incredible adaptability.

The Syrne Isles

Annual Progress Report
Professor Joseph McTavish
Isle of Syrne Site Director

To Headmaster Carleon,

This has been another outstanding year for the Explorer's Guild here on the Isle of Syrne. We have completed the clearing away of vegetation from Site A and commenced a careful study of its interior from top to bottom, and the initial survey and removal of debris from sites B and C proceeds on



schedule. In response to your request for a summary of our discoveries and theories for the Archaeological Conference, I have prepared a short presentation for your use. Please see enclosed. As always, it is a pleasure working with you.

Your Loyal Assistant,

Professor Joseph McTavish

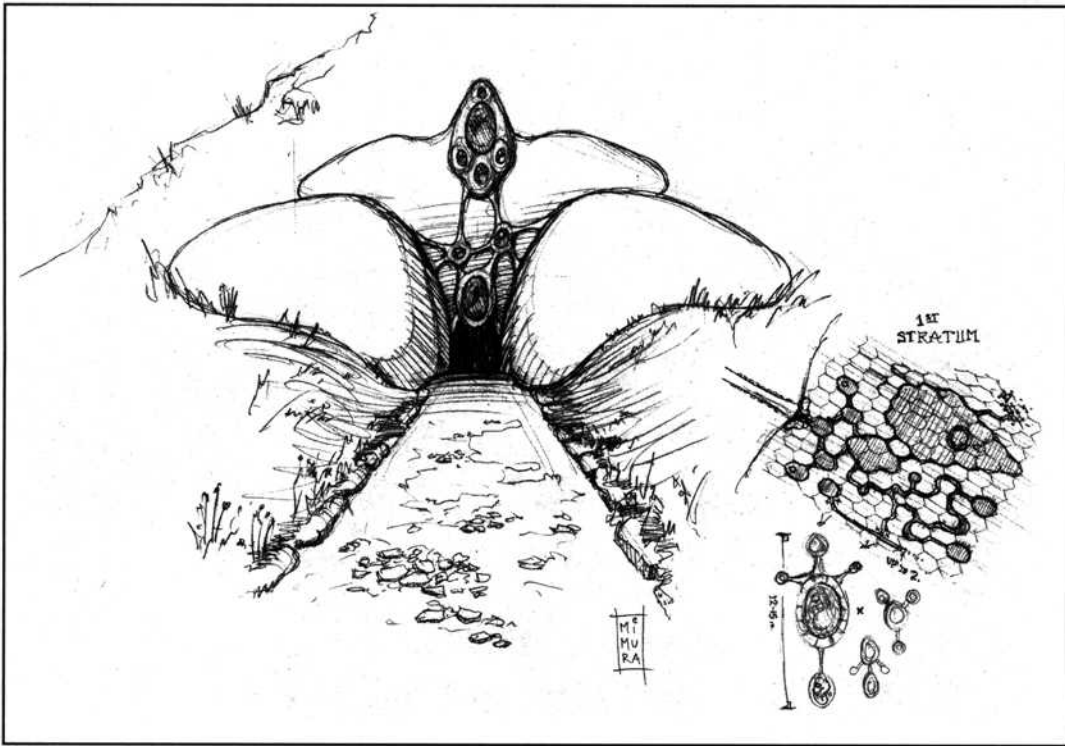
The Isle of Syrne runs fifteen miles from its northernmost point to its southernmost point, and five miles from its westernmost point to its easternmost point. It is located near the Median, approximately 300 miles west of Castille. It possesses a warm, humid climate year-round, and thus far we have discovered three sites that we are researching. The island is primarily inhabited by the charming aspreys, though recent years have shown a sharp decline in their numbers, and there is growing concern for the race's survival. Besides the aspreys, there are a number of small, seafaring birds that they feed on, as well as crabs and other common seashore life. The vegetation is lush and thick, and has presented us with the problem of clearing it away from any sites we wish to investigate. In addition, there are large patches of sea rose that flourish near the island which provide an important supplement to our diet. Located on the island are two large volcanoes, jokingly named "Captain Johnson" and "Councilman Bernard", after two rather hot-headed individuals who were involved in the early stages of the dig site's history. These two volcanoes have thus far done nothing but smoke and rumble occasionally. In the center of the isle we discovered a wide, deep lake filled with hot, almost scalding water. We refer to it as Terra's Blood. Captain Johnson and Councilman Bernard are located on the southwest and northeast sides of Terra's Blood, respectively. That should provide you with some idea of the island's layout.

Before we move into what we have discovered, let us examine the difficulties of conducting digs on the isle: as they say, bad news before good. The waters near Syrne are infested with pirates: both the so-called Sea Dogs and

the Brotherhood of the Coast have attacked our ships while they were ferrying cargo back and forth from Théah. Next, there is the constant worry that one of the two volcanoes on the island may erupt at any time, destroying years of effort. When you add to this the flooding found at two of the three sites as well as the virulent diseases that fester in the jungle here, you are presented with a complex puzzle to solve. Thankfully, we have thus far had no significant pirate activity on Syrne itself, but the threat has always loomed over us, since this island was once the haunt of the famous Captain Rogers himself. As a matter of fact, we are forced to chase off at least two expeditions a year that wish to thoughtlessly dig up the island following rumors of buried treasure. The Captain's long habitation of Syrne adds one final complication to our task. Every time we discover an artifact, we must ascertain whether it is simply a remnant from the pirates, or if it represents an actual scientific discovery. Enough doom and gloom for now, however. Let us discuss happier subjects.

We have made marked progress in researching the Syrne sites these past seven years. We have discovered three primary sites that we are conducting digs at. We refer to them as sites A, B, and C, in order of discovery.

Site A is located deep within the jungle to the northwest of Terra's Blood, approximately one mile from the ocean's shore. It was brought to our attention by a group of sailors who had landed on the island in search of Roger's treasure (in retrospect, perhaps we owe him a debt of gratitude for basing his activities on the island). At first sight, it appeared to be a tall, narrow stone structure with strange markings above its single entryway, but after we removed the vegetation, we found it to be an enormous building. The entire building is covered in a grid of lines, and appears to be laid out lengthwise along a line extending to magnetic north. Each square formed by the grid is exactly 10 ½ inches tall by 10 ½ inches wide. Measuring the building, we found that it was



door opens to the north. Moreover, it has sunken part-way into the ground, filling up with mud and debris that we have been removing as we go. We have not yet reached the center of the building in order to ascertain whether or not there is a duplicate white cube there.

Site C was found on a submerged island in the center of Terra's Blood. The water is approximately three feet deep, and as mentioned before almost scalding to the touch. In addition, it appears to

exactly 32 of these units tall, 128 units long, and 64 units wide. Inside are row upon row of rounded rocks. These are one unit high, two units wide, and eight units long, the exact height and width of the single door leading into the building from the south. In each row are eight rocks. At the very center of the structure we found a small white featureless cube that exactly fit the measurements of the squares inscribed on the wall. When we attempted to move the cube, we found it to be attached to the floor in some manner. The building is lit by sunlight shining in through apertures two units high and two units wide spaced along the ceiling and covered in some hard, clear substance that resists our attempts to break it. We are uncertain what the structure signifies, but we are fairly certain that it has some sort of religious significance.

Site B is located to the southeast of Terra's Blood, approximately one mile from the ocean's shore. It is a mirror, down to the exact detail, of Site A, at least from what we can tell by what we have uncovered. However, whereas site A's single door opens to the south, site B's

contain great quantities of sulfur, which leaves a thick yellow crust on anything submerged in the lake for very long, such as the ruins themselves. Work on site C has gone very slowly due to the discomfort of working the site for very long and to the concealing properties of the thick sulfurous crust, which has to be painstakingly scraped away. However, we have counted the buildings at site C, which number 127, and we have determined that they are laid out along a rigid grid aligned to magnetic north. In the building at the center of the city, we discovered an unusual thing: a small raised grid, 8 squares by 8 squares. On the grid were an assortment of variously colored, featureless cubes, all the same size. There were eight each of black and white, and two each of red, blue, yellow, green, purple, orange, gray and brown. While we have yet to figure out its purpose, one of the men studying the device invented "Squares", a game that has become surprisingly popular.

The artifacts that we have discovered vary in size and shape, but most of them seem to possess a magnetic attraction. Many produce odd humming noises when held, and one very odd device floated up away into the sky when we disturbed it. Strange magnetic disturbances on the island periodically cause every compass on the island to reverse its magnetic poles, and swivel around to point in the opposite direction. With the next disturbance, the compasses return to normal. Worst of all, several workers have been burned by scalding hot steam when investigating buildings at site C, forcing us to increase our safety precautions.

Analyzing the information we have on the Syrneth, which admittedly is little enough, they must have been about 6–7 feet tall and 1–2 feet wide, since their doors are of approximately that size. It does not seem unreasonable that they might have resembled a larger variety of the asprey, which would give them the appropriate dimensions. In addition, they placed the number 2 throughout the ruins, raised to its various powers: 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128. Presumably, it must have been of some great importance to their culture, though we are unsure exactly what.

Since the Director asked me for my best theory concerning how all the dig sites are related, I must add that I am currently of the opinion that the Syrneth race started out as primitive creatures similar to large aspreys, then later in their reign developed some technique that let them change their form, which led to the divergent forms of their race that we have discovered at the various dig sites. I believe that in each instance, as they moved to a new home, they assumed a different form and a style of building that fit their new environment. How else could so many creatures of different shapes live in peace, when mankind, which has only a single form, cannot maintain a peace lasting more than a dozen years?

The Thalusian Isles

Annual Progress Report

Lord Archibald Dunnet

Thalusian Isles Lead Site Director

Dear Vincent,

How are you, my old friend? The wife and children are well, I trust. Did you receive that bottle of Felice I sent you for your anniversary? The digs here on the Thalusian Isles have been disgorging their mysteries to us faster than I had dared hope, although there have been some slight problems with the exploration of the amber caves. Nonetheless, I feel that this year has been our best ever, and I know in my bones that we are very close to unraveling the mysteries of the Thalusian Syrneth. I have enclosed the report you desired for the Conference. I hope it is sufficient for your purposes.

Your Friend,

Lord Archibald Dunnet

The Thalusians are a chain of islands located to the far west of Avalon. There are eleven islands in all, running from the northwest to the southeast. Due to limited manpower, we have only been able to thoroughly explore three of them. The others remain largely a mystery to us for reasons I shall explain momentarily. The three islands that we have explored are named Grimorias, Alvora and Stark, after some of our most esteemed colleagues and forefathers. They are, respectively, the second, seventh, and tenth islands in the chain, starting from the northwest. They possess a temperate climate, although the winters get chilly. The islands were only discovered three years ago by a lost fisherman, but already we have learned a great deal about them. They possess an incredible variety of insect life seen nowhere else on Théah. Most of these creatures are harmless, if sometimes inconvenient. There are a few dangerous specimens as well, but again, I'll get to that in a moment. Each island is topped by a mountain. These range from Mouse Hill, at a mere 500 feet tall, to the mighty Mt. Re, which we

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estimate to be no less than 15,000 feet tall. Our estimates are somewhat hampered by the perpetual fog of clouds that clings to the sides of several of the taller mountains. However, it was at the base of the smallest mountain, Mouse Hill, which is located on Stark Isle, that we made our greatest breakthrough. Following the remnants of an unusual road, we found a vast network of caverns that honeycombed the hill, and led us deep underground. The caverns were entirely without sharp edges, being almost perfectly rounded. More incredibly, they are completely lined with amber! If even a small portion of the amber here was mined and sold, it would destroy the amber market forever. Needless to say, we have kept the export of amber from the isles carefully regulated. Thus far, we have mapped only a small section of the grottos.

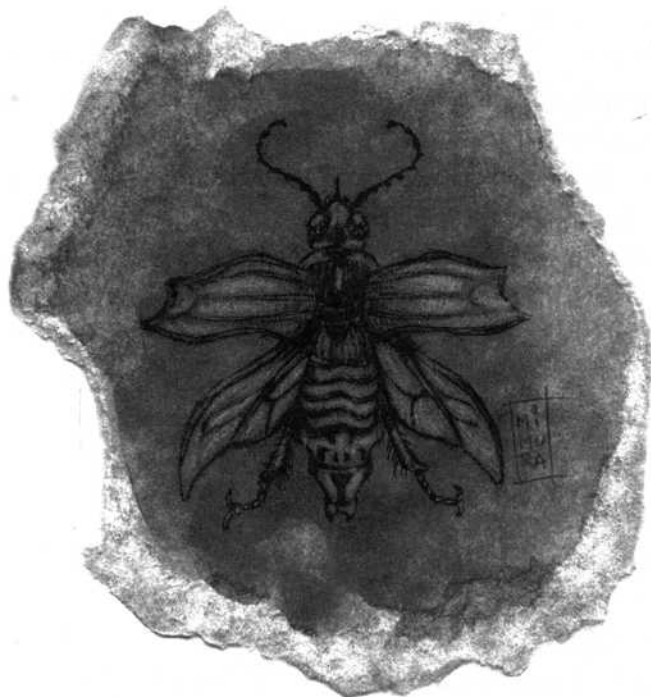
This brings me to the difficulties of the task at hand. The length of underground expeditions is limited by the food and light that the men can carry with them. We have, to our misfortune, been victims of mysterious explosions in

the caverns. In addition, men have simply laid down and died, for no apparent reason. If that wasn't bad enough, there are hideous insects the size of your fist found in the caves that can kill with a bite, and unstable areas that can collapse without warning. When we attempted to land on any of the islands that we are not currently exploring, great swarms of insects attacked us, and we were forced to flee back to our ship. I would like to land a small party on one of these isles dressed in heavy cloth and armed with torches to drive away the insects, but thus far no volunteers are forthcoming. If the Headmaster had not forbidden it, I would go myself.

The rewards that are uncovered on these isles are just as great as the dangers, which make the Thalussian Isles a gold mine of knowledge for men daring enough to face their threats. On Grimorias Isle we have found pieces of road in many places, particularly concentrated around three cavern entrances, which we have named "The Abyss", "Martin's Doom", and "No Man's Cave." If these names seem somewhat dramatic, it is because Grimorias is the most dangerous of the explored isles. When we were exploring the Abyss, we lost five men to an unexpected collapse of the floor. They were dropped into a chasm which we have been unable to explore due to its great depth, and I was forced to forbid further exploration in that cavern entrance.

Martin's Doom was where we discovered the first of the insects we refer to as ten-second scarabs, the name alluding to the amount of time a bitten explorer has left to live. As you might perhaps guess by the cavern's name, a young explorer named Martin was the first to discover this property of the scarab's bite.

Lastly, No Man's Cave is so named because of the extraordinary fear it has elicited from the explorers on the island. Periodically, strange lights can be seen glowing from within the cave. When one group of six explorers dared its depths, they never returned, except for one poor man who came crawling back to the entrance before he

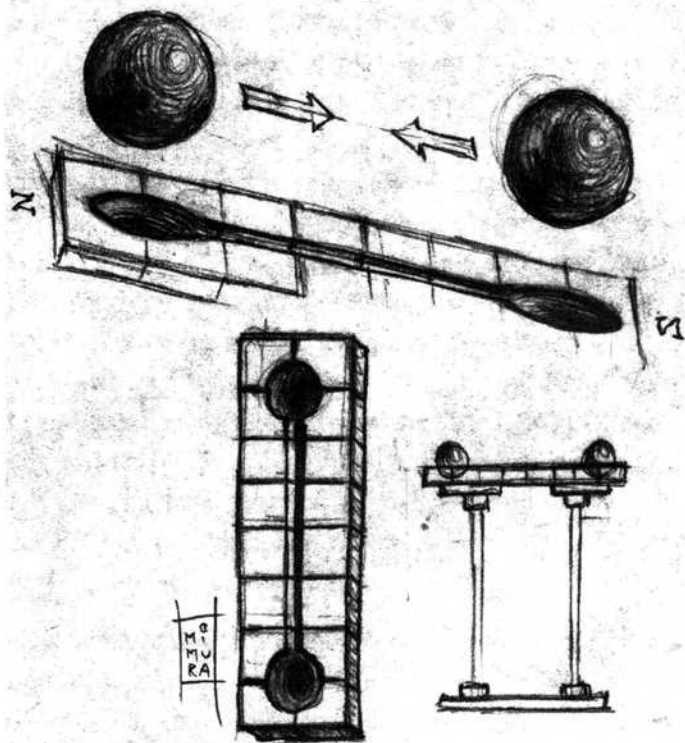


died. His skin was a charred mess, as if he had been burnt horribly. Since then, no one has ventured into its depths. It must be stressed that these sacrifices are inevitable in the pursuit of knowledge, and these men knew what they were getting into when they signed up for this assignment. The Explorer's Guild has provided their families with an ample pension from the amber mined in the caverns.

On the isle of Alvara, we have found two entrances into caverns, which we have named "The Fiery Winds" and "Leon's Place." The Fiery Winds was the cave in which we first encountered the mysterious explosions that sometimes decimate entire explorer parties. We lost twelve men in that first instance, and have since restricted the size of expeditions to eight to avoid losing so many good explorers at once.

Leon's Place is a small cave that doesn't go very far into the mountain. Apparently a Vodacce sailor named Leon lived in this cave for several years after being shipwrecked on the isle some 60 years prior to our arrival. It is from his diary that we learned of several insects to avoid. Leon, because of his meticulous style of note-taking, probably saved dozens of men's lives. The diary ends with an entry stating that he had finished building a raft and stocking it with food, and that he was going to attempt to sail off these isles. Although I have made a point of checking historical documents in every country I have visited, I have yet to find any evidence that suggests Leon survived the journey. For the sake of the men whose lives he had saved with his notes, we sent his diary home to his native Vodacce to be buried in lieu of a body, and erected a small memorial to him in the cave in which he dwelled for so long.

The smallest of the isles, Stark, has ironically revealed the most about the Thalussian Syrneth to us. It was the first isle explored and contains only one cave entrance, which we have named "The Great Hall." There are few of the dangers that seem to infest the other cavern entrances.



The cave goes up into Mouse Hill, branching into many small, empty rooms. Then it splits into two primary corridors. The left corridor leads to an enormous amphitheater of some sort. The walls are pocked with holes leading half way up to the ceiling. The holes are three inches in diameter and spaced thirty inches apart. At the top of the ceiling is an enormous crystal which peeks out of the top of the mountain and diffuses light throughout the room, lighting the amphitheater during the day. When we attempted to follow the right corridor, one of the men touched a lens mounted on one of these walls, which promptly exploded, taking the corridor and three men with it. Since then, the men have been under strict orders not to touch any lenses they encounter.

If it were not for the miraculous nature of the artifacts we continue to unearth from the caverns, I would abandon the dig without a second thought. However, we have found strange devices that float in the air without any obvious support, artifacts that are capable of genuinely



The Explorer's Society

frightening acts of destruction, and most importantly, examples of Synchron writing. I hope to someday gather enough of their writing to decipher their language, which could unlock their secrets, giving mankind powers it can only dream of. Ironically, the nobles who help to fund the dig are only interested in certain decorative pieces of a hard material that we occasionally dig out of the walls. These trinkets often wind up as jewelry or decorative (but ineffectual) armor. We find enough samples of this material that, like the amber itself, I do not feel any contrition in selling it to fund our efforts here and at the other digs.

As for my personal theories about the Thalussian Synchron, and the Synchron in general, the Headmaster is quite familiar with them, but I will repeat them here at his request. I believe that the Thalussian Synchron were approximately the size of humans and possessed eyes that were very sensitive to light, hence their choice to live underground. Due to the presence of the amphitheater, I believe that the Thalussian Isles were the capital of a great Synchron council. Judging by the reports made by my colleagues from the other dig sites, I find it hard to credit that a single race constructed all these vastly different buildings, and the only way they could have maintained the peace between such different races was by bowing to the wisdom of a council of representatives.

Finally, I would like to ask the assembly at the Archaeology Conference to observe a moment of silence while the Headmaster reads the names of those men who sacrificed their lives here on the Thalussian Isles: Alms, Armister, Baker, Bernard, Bertrand, Caster, Craige, Daviau, Dumont, Franklin, Gerald, Heileger, Indigo, Jones, Keller, Layalis, Martin, O'Riley, Perr, Roark, Sakes, Stevens, Thane, Trauer, Ulwin, von Haffe, Wester, and, of course, our mysterious benefactor, Leon. May the Prophets guide them and hold them near.

The Home Front

Annual Progress Report
Father Andre Butolli
Domestic Sites Coordinator

Prophets preserve you, my son.

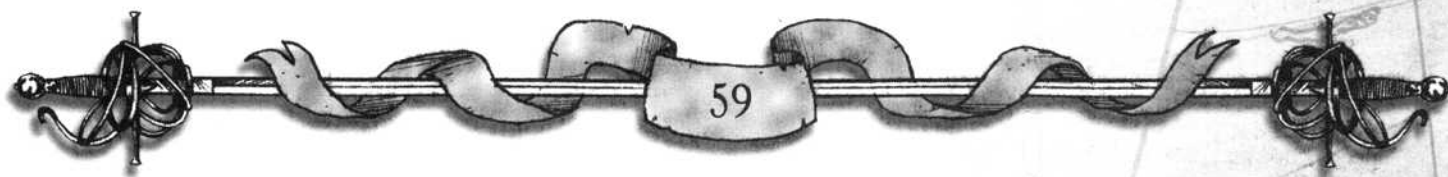
Even after an entire year in the position, I am still gratified that you would allow an old priest such as myself to coordinate the digs on continental Théah. It is a great deal of responsibility, but a job that I greatly enjoy. I pray I will be equal to the task. There are so many things to do; so many details that cannot be overlooked. Sometimes I wonder if any man is capable of the task. But fear not. As long as you continue to place your faith in me, I will perform my job to the best of my ability. Please find enclosed the report you wished me to write in preparation for the Conference. I wish I could attend, but my duties here are unrelenting.

Your Servant,

Father Andre Butolli

There are two primary efforts taking place on continental Théah: one in Montaigne, and one in Eisen. I will address them separately.

It is a well known fact that many of the larger Montaigne cities are built on strange foundations. One need only glance at some of their more unusual architecture to see that no human hand ever fashioned those buildings. Unfortunately, so many people have lived in those buildings for so many years that anything of value there has long since been lost, stolen, or destroyed. However, many of the Montaigne sewers are built by the same race that built the fantastic buildings up above: one of the Synchron races. Rather typically, the Montaignes have buried this vital information, knowledge that could unlock the Great Puzzle itself, under an enormous pile of garbage. The sewers underneath Charouse are our main dig site in Montaigne. They are known as "Little Vodacce" and they are inhabited by several dozen

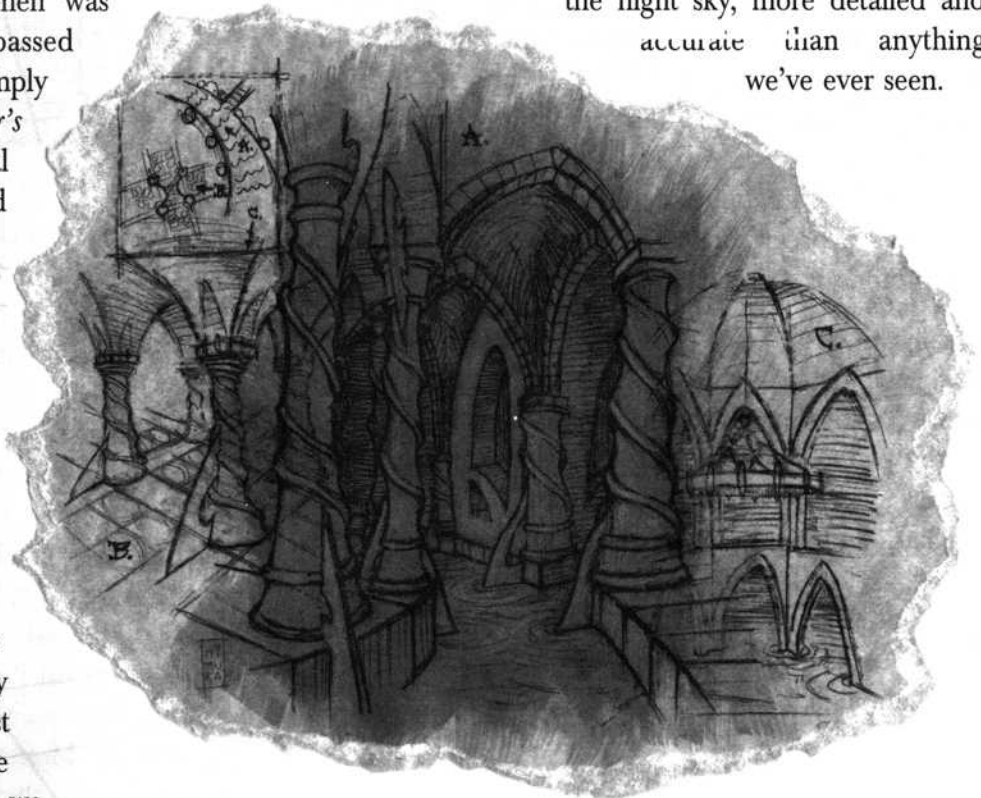


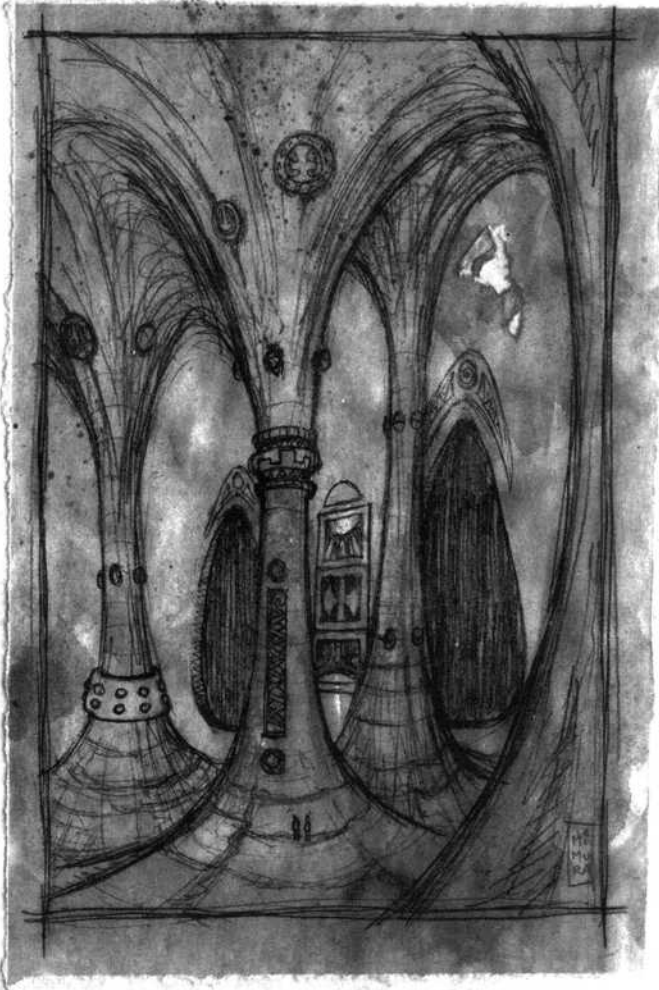
homeless Montaigne beggars who have been forced off the streets and now jokingly refer to themselves as "Sewer Hunters" in imitation of the famous Eisen Monster Hunters. These men and women have been instrumental in our researches, serving as guides to the dizzying maze of tunnels below the city. They have told our team that when the Montaignes began to dig sewers under Charouse they broke through into a complex series of passages, and, instead of exploring them or sealing them up, decided to save themselves the effort and used them as the sewer.

This brings me to the logistical difficulties of carrying on an archaeological dig in the Montaigne sewers when not only will the Montaignes not assist us, but they in fact seem determined to thwart our every effort. Their officials harass our workers; their townsfolk drive us from the town when we emerge from the sewers; the Emperor has sent guards into the sewers to drive off the Sewer Hunters; and once, one of our men was executed when the Emperor passed downwind of him after a dig simply because he had offended *l'Empereur's* nostrils! Clearly, these are not ideal conditions. If the aboveground situation weren't bad enough, the sewers themselves are dangerous. There are bizarre creatures in some of the less traveled sections of the sewers that are known to be dangerous to men. Even when our men are not assaulted by these things, they must dig in moving water, somehow attempting to sift the Montaigne trash from the Syrneath remnants, all the while worrying about the unhealthy conditions under which they must work. It seems incredible that we have recovered anything at all. Still, we

continue our efforts in the hopes that we may find some essential piece of the puzzle that will bring everything together for us.

One of our greatest discoveries seemed to be a gift from Theus Himself. As one of our teams prepared to enter the sewers at night (so as to better remain unnoticed by the city guard), their torches caught a silver glint in the water. Investigating more closely, they found a small metallic globe. When held in the hand, it pulled the holder in a certain direction. Curious, the team followed the globe through the sewers, mapping as they went. It led them to a dark spherical room with a transparent bridge crossing its center. Embedded in the walls around them was a fantastic assortment of gemstones and jewels. One of the team members had some experience in astronomy, and noticed that some of the formations on the wall resembled constellations in the sky. Since then, we have discovered that indeed the room appears to be a map of the night sky, more detailed and accurate than anything we've ever seen.





Besides this incredible find, we've also discovered samples of Syrneth writing, and, rarest of all, certain devices that would appear to be weapons built for creatures very much like humans. One of these, a glove-like device that killed anything its wearer touched with it, was so dangerous that we've been forced to hide it away to keep it out of the hands of the Emperor. Only days after we found the thing, his men were poking around our headquarters in Charouse, looking for something. I hate to think what he wants with it.

In Eisen, we've had much less success than in Montaigne. Only one of the Eisenfürsten has allowed us to examine any of the ruins there: Nicklaus Trägue of Freiburg. He

allowed our team to not only tour the Wachturm, an obvious remnant of a Syrneth society, he also took them to visit a series of caves carved into a remote hill. The caves contained paintings of what appeared to be drachen using tools and standing upright, as men do. This would seem to be a fanciful notion, given the reputed size of the drachen, and one of our team members mentioned that point to the Prince. In response, Trägue took them to an enormous room, one that was far too big to have ever been built by humans. The team reported to me that, "Standing there in that room, with the roof arching high over our heads like the sky itself, we were prepared to believe that drachen had built it. In fact, if one of the beasts had emerged from a side passage and invited us to tea, not one of us would have been particularly surprised."

My teams are coming to believe that the Montaigne sewers contain the remnants of a very advanced race. They had a great reverence for the heavens, and they must have been a very peaceful race, for a more violent race would surely have destroyed themselves utterly had they possessed the weapons we have discovered under the streets of Charouse. I am unconvinced that the dragons of legend were responsible for the ruins in Eisen. As any student of anatomy could tell you, the remains of the dragons we have found thus far lack even the most basic grasping appendages, which are required for the development of intelligence. As for my theories regarding Syrneth history, I must state that I am inclined to agree with Dr. von Gregor's Setine theory. That one race built all the various ruins we have found seems utterly preposterous to me. The philosophies represented by their styles of architecture alone are so varied as to be utterly alien to one another. Moreover, the thought that all these races lived in peace without some ruling body standing watch over them is so incredible as to be scientifically unsupportable.

Black Market Artifacts

Annual Progress Report

Professor Andrea Galia

Explorer's Guild Black Market Collection Agent

Sirs,

I have sent no formal report with this letter. I apologize for this, but I have never shared the taste for minutiae that so many of my colleagues seem to possess. Rather, I prefer to speak in my own words, without unnecessary embellishments. If my colleagues choose to think less of me because of this, then so be it.

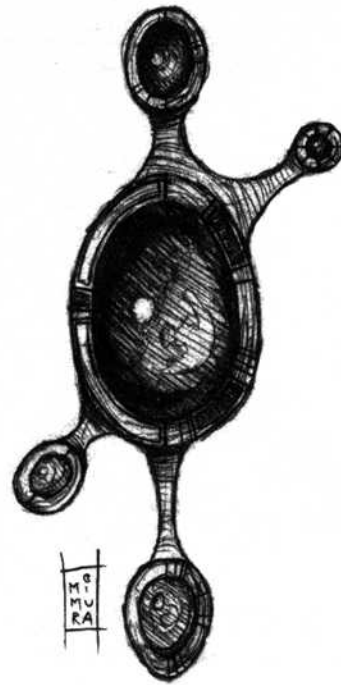
I would like to speak primarily of three artifacts that have come into my possession within the last year. Although whether or not they are of Syrnych make is in doubt, I firmly believe that these objects are just as deserving of study as anything the Syrnych ever created. In fact, the objects seem rather too new to be made by the Syrnych. I instead believe that their place of origin is the land of Cathay. I'll explain my reasoning for each artifact as I go.

The first artifact was acquired from an Ussuran trader who had found no use for this unusual object. It was nothing more than a bracelet, but it had strange writing on it, writing of the sort that we have come to associate with the people of Cathay. I took a fondness to the bracelet, and, for lack of a better way to determine what, if anything, it did, began wearing it on a daily basis. One night, I was meeting with a contact of mine concerning a supposed Syrnych artifact that turned out to be nothing more than a rather fancifully designed hatpin of Montaigne design. I was warming myself next to the hearth when an atrociously careless barmaid bumped into me and knocked me into the fire. However, not only was I not burned by the fire, my clothing wasn't even singed! Retiring to a more private place, I determined through experimentation that wearing the bracelet protected me from being burned by flames. I daresay more than one scholar would have benefited from the bracelet during a visit by the Inquisition. My reasoning that the artifact is Cathayan is simple. 1) It has Cathayan writing on

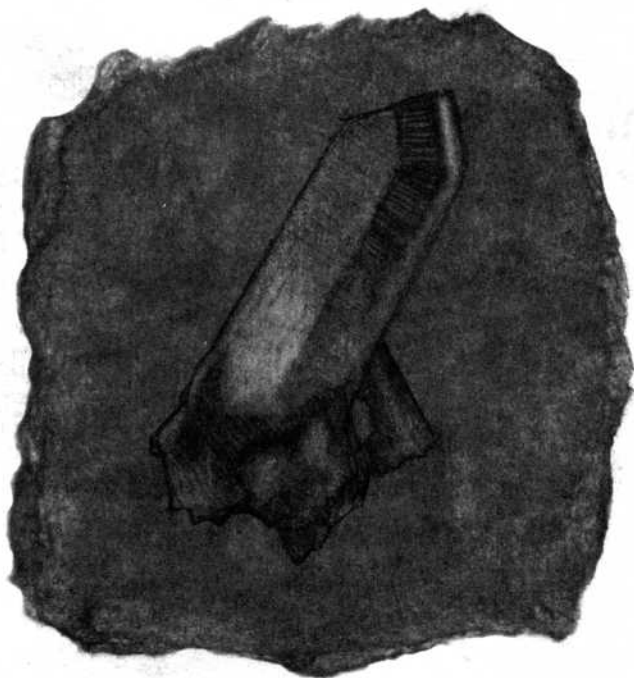
it, and 2) It possesses protective properties against fire, something I'm sure the Cathayans have mastered.

The next artifact came into my hands from a street peddler in Vodacce. It is nothing more than a frame of wood with some silk stretched across it and a string tied to it. However, when the string is held in windy conditions, the frame and fabric float up into the sky in the most extraordinary way. Written on the fabric is a single letter that I believe to be of Cathayan origin. As the device pulls upwards with a good deal of force, I must wonder if a big enough frame could carry aloft a person. If so, that would truly be something remarkable to see.

The last artifact I wish to tell you of is the most unusual. It is nothing more than a flat stone with text upon it, and yet I feel it may be the most important discovery of all time. I recognize at least a portion of the text as Cathayan writing. However, there are at least two other languages on the stone, both of which are known to me. One of them is represented at the ruins on the island of Syrne on the walls there. The other is a text that an Avalon friend of mine identified as writing that is in fact in use by the Sidhe. If any of these three



languages can be deciphered, the stone could provide the key to the other two, which would surely be an accomplishment unprecedented in archaeology.



New Prospects and Conclusion

Annual Progress Report – Addendum

Professor Andrea Galia

Explorer's Guild Black Market Collection Agent

Sirs,

I have been asked to elaborate here about a situation I find most distressing. As long as those insufferable Vaticines continue their ban upon Crescent and Cathay trade items, the scientific community will be the ones who pay the price. There are wonders of history hidden away in these “infidel countries” that would completely revolutionize modern thought, and we must not allow faith to stand in the way of the progress we could achieve with them! My reasons follow.

In the spring of 1667, my contacts in the Vodacce black market obtained for me an item of unusual design. It looked

like a series of animal bladders sewn together into a ring, with the center hole approximately nineteen inches in diameter. The bladders had been cured and had a texture much like leather, and were partially filled with a pale green fluid. On the inside of the bladders, there was a white, viscous compound that clung to anything it touched with incredible strength.

The morning after we examined the item, everyone who had touched the compound was dead, apparently having passed in their sleep. Of the rest, anyone who had had extensive contact with the fluid also died within a week. Given the chance to examine these people throughout their prolonged debility provided us with a great deal of information about the ailment. It was as if their bodies began to slow down at first gradually, and then more and more quickly. By the third day, most were unable to feed themselves or even sit up. Nothing we or the Castilian herbalists did was effective.

I make no pretense of being objective on this point. My husband was among those who never awakened. His work is well known to all of you, I am sure, so I will not elaborate on his loss here. But I will comment that I did not participate in the initial study, being preoccupied with other matters at the time, and that I was scheduled to do so the next morning. I feel personally responsible for Norman's death, and the deaths of all seventeen members of the team that worked with the bladder-ring, and my report is understandably colored by this fact.

Further experimentation with the compound and fluid determined that they were both of similar design, the former being a more concentrated version of the latter. Both are deadly toxins, purposefully sewn into the bladder-ring for a purpose I have yet to determine.

Another object I must note here is the sliver of red gemstone that has come to be known as “Legion's Spike.” Though I am sure that all of you know of the item, I will repeat its description here for posterity. It is a simple jagged sliver of red crystal that looks very much like ruby. Its edges are sharp, but its most outstanding feature is a reflective surface in which a

large number of people have claimed to see images more beautiful than they can describe.

Many who have looked into the stone have been interviewed and asked what they saw, though most have been unable to describe their visions. The images vary from one subject to the next, we are sure, and they are always the most fabulous sights imaginable. I myself have looked into the Spike's depths and found within a vista of colors and images that, apart, are likely meaningless. The memory of them together, however, has been the source for more dreams of fantasy and joy than I can relate.

Of course, there have been the well-documented side effects of such exposure. Melody Charmers of Avalon has not stopped screaming for two years, and Molokai Breslow Komunuw, the Ussuran tradesman, spent one full month silent and unmoving before slaughtering a family of twelve and their visitors in Vodacce. There are countless other lesser-known incidents of altered personality and various "episodes."

I, like most others in the Explorer's Society, had assumed that Legion's Spike was a unique artifact, and that with its recovery and confinement the threat was over. But in recent months I have come to understand that there is another red jewel of the same type – this one a full, uncut stone the size of a human fist – among the treasures of one of the Vodacce Princes, which came (against the edicts of the Church) across the eastern mountains. I have not been able to confirm this, but should the rumor be true, we may have a large problem on our hands. Not only would such an artifact be priceless (and therefore in high demand), if it is of the same class of stone we have seen before, it could be incredibly dangerous to everyone who sees it.

The importance of these finds is in their effect upon the human body. If either of these items were constructed by the Crescents or the Cathay, then these "infidels" have knowledge of medicine and the workings of our bodies far beyond our own. If not, if these things predate the cultures that currently occupy the East, then our organization is the most qualified for the prospect of seeking that knowledge out. Either way, the

Church has no right to impose embargoes on these artifacts or to refuse us access to the countries they came from.

I do not presume to support any theory of the old world, other civilizations or races, or even the nature of these artifacts we are recovering across the globe. Gentlemen, our place is not to make these decisions yet. It is to continue the search. To do that, we are going to have to move past the outdated notions of religious distinction and political boundaries when conducting our surveys. I beg of you, please, to consider my suggestion that we begin a campaign against such restrictions. Until we do, the Explorer's Society will continue to fumble around in the dark with an unsheathed sword.

Someday we may stumble, and spear ourselves dead.

Thank you.

Professor Andrea Galia

