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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

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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

