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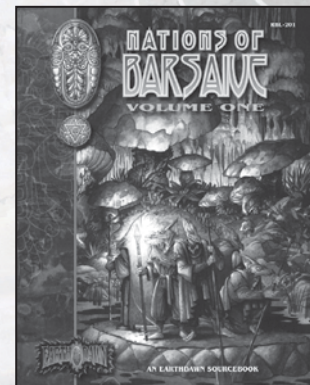
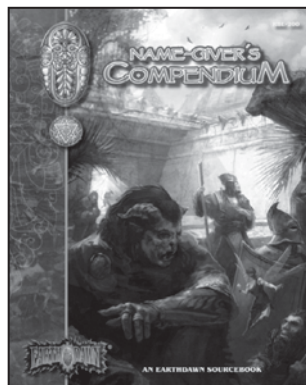
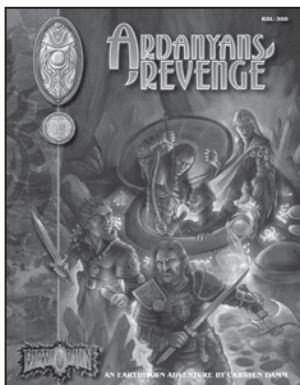


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# BLACKOUT

*You'd think that the races that can see in a sliver of light, peer into astral space, or detect heat would be immune to a fear of darkness. You'd be so very wrong...*

• Gaurng Metsmetev •



Gaurng Metsmetev shivered, peering vainly through the pitch darkness as though straining his eyes might magically produce some glimmer of light. His footsteps echoed off the stone walls and ceiling, and his own breathing sounded like the roar of a hundred skeorxes in his ears. His bones ached with cold, and he was afraid. He didn't know what he was afraid of.

He couldn't see what he feared. He simply knew it was there. Something waited for him in the dark. Something he couldn't name but knew existed. His breathing sounded louder now, faster. He willed himself to breathe more slowly, to calm down, but the harsh noise refused to subside. Slowly, it dawned on him that the roaring in his ears was not his own frightened breaths, but something else. Something ahead of him, somewhere in the dark.

The roaring descended in pitch to a rumble, like a mountain falling down. He had seen a landslide once, as a young boy on a trek with his father through the Throal Mountains. An entire hillside near them had crumbled away, tons of soil sliding downward at breakneck speed. The shock waves had toppled him and his father to the earth, where they lay clinging to each other's hands until the shaking stopped. Gaurng wished he had a hand to cling to now ... but there was nothing, nothing except the darkness and the noise and the terrible thing that lurked in it.

Gaurng took a step forward, then another. Far ahead of him, he saw a glimmer of reddish light; so faint he thought at first he was imagining it. The light frightened him, yet he could not stop moving toward it. Around him, the light grew brighter and the rumbling grew louder until he could feel his teeth rattling in his head. He could see the walls of the passageway now, winding to his left and vanishing in the red glow.

As he stepped around the corner, hugging the wall, he felt cold, sharp claws bite into his shoulder from behind...

"Sir! Sir! Lord Metsmetev, please wake up!" The voice was young, panicked ... familiar. Gaurng followed the sound upward, dragging himself out of the well of sleep. Young Nikol was bending over him, shaking his shoulder frantically. "Please, sir...!"

"I'm awake ... I'm awake," Gaurng muttered, struggling to sit up. Nikol dropped his hand and stepped back, respectfully giving him a few seconds to collect himself. From underneath the floor came a faint rumbling, like a far-off thunderstorm. "Do you hear that?" Gaurng asked.

Nikol swallowed and nodded. "That's what I've come to tell you about, sir. We've been hearing it all the way up here for hours now. The workers are panicking ... they all think the tunnels are going to fall in on them. Some of them are saying there's a monster down there, or an angry earth spirit that doesn't want us meddling with its domain.

"And—" Nikol broke off and stared at the floor, twisting his hands together.

Gaurng sighed. "Out with it, lad. I won't bite your head off, whatever it is."

Nikol looked up, his eyes full of fear. "The second team, sir. One of them's just come back." He bit his lip. "I'm afraid she won't last long, sir. Not even Kelix's poultice seems to help—"

Gaurng swung his feet to the floor and grabbed for his long coat. "Lead the way," he said gruffly. "We've got to find out what happened while we still can."



**Blackout** is a scenario for three to five Journeyman adepts of any Discipline. In this adventure, the characters travel to the tunnels and caverns far beneath the Inner City of Hustane. In addition to abilities suited to exploration and combat, **Blackout** requires social skills and characters should be able to deal with Throalic politics as capably as



Horrors. The adventure assumes that the characters have high enough status in Throal to come to the attention of the Royal Chancellery, and that they begin the adventure in Throal or Bartertown.

## RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

**Blackout** is presented as a series of events. Each is described for the gamemaster, who should use the information given to run each section. There is little text to be read aloud to the players, meaning the gamemaster will have to describe many of the scenes to the characters as he sees fit. Where possible the text describes the terrain and areas the characters will encounter, but much of the detail is left to the gamemaster to devise.

Each encounter contains four sections: **Setting the Stage** contains a narrative description that the gamemaster reads aloud to the players, **Themes and Images** helps the gamemaster set the mood and pacing for a particular encounter, and **Behind the Scenes** explains what is really going on in each encounter. The final section of each encounter, **Troubleshooting**, offers suggestions to help the gamemaster get the adventure back on track should things go awry.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In addition to the thousands of citizens who live in the Halls of Throal, the Kingdom of Throal also contains nine Inner Cities. Five of these cities—Oshane, Yistane, Tirtaga, Bethabal, and Wishon—are thriving communities with

sizable populations. Raithabal and Thurdane are still in the process of being built, although their construction has been halted (**Nations of Barsaive, Volume One**, p. 121). The Inner Cities of Hustane and Valvria opened only recently and are still filling up with settlers. Unfortunately for the dwarf kingdom, things are not going smoothly: it appears one settler took residence in Hustane far ahead of schedule—one whose presence threatens not only the city, but the entire Kingdom of Throal.

Far beneath Hustane lairs the Horror known as Emr'r'ko, the Dweller in the Depths. Unlike some Horrors, Emr'r'ko is not satisfied with the slow corruption of individual Name-givers. It intends to gorge itself on the pain of thousands of Name-givers all dying at once. This Horror has made its way into the depths of the Throal Mountains beneath the Inner City of Hustane, where it has begun creating Horror constructs with claws that can shear through rock. The constructs are digging around fault lines and stress points under the city to weaken its foundations so that the cavern that holds the Inner City of Hustane inevitably will collapse, crushing the inhabitants under millions of tons of stone.

The rumbling of the Horror's excavations has attracted the attention of the remaining worker crews still left in Hustane, who reported the strange noises to the Warden in charge of the construction. The Warden in turn alerted his superiors in the Royal Chancellery, who allowed him to send a team in search of the cause of the mysterious sounds beneath the city. After two unsuccessful expeditions, the Chancellery has decided to hire an experienced group of adepts who presumably will have a better chance of surviving.

Through a bit of cloak and dagger maneuvering, the adventurers are hired to venture into the tunnels beneath Hustane, both to discover the source of the mysterious sounds and to find out what happened to the previous two groups. The Chancellery has decided to keep news of any potential dangers a secret, however, which complicates the characters' mission. Chancellery officials fear that if word of the situation should spread, it might slow or even stop settlement of the city. The level of secrecy is so tight that even the newly appointed Baroness of Hustane, Divuna Divunicus (**Nations of Barsaive, Volume One**, p. 121), remains uninformed. The player characters cannot discuss their mission with anyone, not even after it is over. The common folk must never know the truth, lest fear of unknown Horrors and other hazards lead people to leave Throal in large numbers.

## PLOT SYNOPSIS

Despite the best efforts of the Chancellery, however, rumors have already spread among the Throalic nobility that the Inner City of Hustane is in some mysterious trouble. The rumors have caught the attention of Baroness Divuna Divunicus and Lendiltay, both nobles of House Moberl. Lendiltay served as Baron of the city of Bethabal until he was deposed by the crown for proving himself completely inept at his job. In an attempt to pacify Lendiltay's family, the king appointed Divuna Divunicus to the barony of Hustane. Lendiltay, however, feels he should

have gotten the job rather than "a jumped-up junior member" of his House. Insulted by Divuna's appointment, he is looking for anything that might let him discredit Divuna and take her position for himself. He plans to investigate the rumors, hoping to hit pay dirt. Divuna, meanwhile, has plans of her own to find the truth. Both these nobles have heard that the Chancellery hired a team of adepts to investigate Hustane, and both have taken steps to protect their own interests.

After gathering equipment and dodging inquiries, the adventurers set off for Hustane. Along the way, the characters are tailed by a Thief in the employ of yet another House Moberl noble, and attacked by thugs working for Lendiltay. After dodging the Thief and fighting off their assailants, the characters must cope with the difficulties of descending into the lower tunnels and caverns. They must cross chasms, climb down sheer rock walls and avoid flammable pockets of subterranean gases. Meanwhile, every light source they carry with them grows gradually dimmer, no matter what they do to compensate for the growing gloom.

As they descend further and further into Throal's depths, the characters discover that they are not alone. Two other groups of explorers are braving the deeps—one in the service of Lendiltay, the other working for Baroness Divuna. The adventurers must not only complete their mission, but also attempt to keep their activities secret from the other two groups.

Finally, the adventurers come face to face with Emr'r'ko and discover why their lights have been going dim: the



Horror detests light, and has been exerting a special power to dampen light sources in its vicinity. If the characters kill the Horror, they discover that its light-dampening power has become a curse on the city of Hustane.

As they start back toward the surface, the characters may end up dealing with the other two exploring parties. Upon reaching safety and reporting back to the Chancellery, the characters face one final hazard: politics. How they dealt with the other explorers and how they behave in the presence of nobility may determine their future in the dwarf kingdom.

## A CONFIDENTIAL MEETING

In this encounter, the adventurers meet with an official of the Royal Chancellery, who makes them an intriguing job offer.

### SETTING THE STAGE

*When you first met the dwarf Named Ioroz, you thought he was the oddest person you'd ever dealt with, at least in Throal. He followed you halfway around the Grand Bazaar before asking you—in a voice so quiet you had to ask him to repeat his words just to be sure you'd heard aright—if you wanted to perform a great deed for a great power. And he flatly refused to say anything else—wouldn't answer a single one of your questions about himself or his employer. Definitely a strange one, that dwarf. But he intrigued you, so you told him you were interested despite your better judgment.*

*Then things got even stranger. The dwarf sent you to an elf, a seller of potions Named Lirrur, who sent you to a grizzled old dwarf Named Poget who just happened to be a retired officer of the Arm of Throal. Neither of them would say a word about themselves or who they might be working for, either. In fact, Poget quizzed you unmercifully about your previous exploits, your current loyalties, and your discretion. Somehow—you're still not sure how—you satisfied him that you were trustworthy, because he sent you to see Tonliga Uvnimsaya. You recognized Uvnimsaya's Name immediately—an Officer of the Court, a remarkably important personage for you to be visiting. You still have no idea what "great deed" your services are wanted for, but it must be something serious for someone only two steps removed from the crown to be involved with it.*

*Two guards politely usher you into Tonliga's chambers, where an aide invites you to sit and offers you drinks. Once each of you has refreshments to your liking, the aide cautions you that not a word to follow must ever leave this room. You solemnly promise silence, and the aide disappears briefly through a small side door. Then Tonliga Uvnimsaya comes in—a pensive, tired-looking dwarf in his middle years. He carries a leather portfolio stamped with the royal arms and clasped with a rune-inscribed*

*lock. Taking a seat at his desk, he lays the portfolio down, folds his hands on top of it and regards your group with a worried expression. "An unknown force is threatening the kingdom," he says. "I need you to discover what it is and deal with it quietly. Word of this threat must never reach the ears of anyone outside this room—not the people of Throal, not the nobles. Especially not the nobles. Not naming Names, but some of them will use anything they can to harm His Majesty's government; and a mysterious threat is just the thing to make people afraid of their own shadows. Poget assures me that you are up to this vital task, and he is normally an excellent judge of character. Are you willing to take on this mission?"*

### THEMES AND IMAGES

Make this encounter feel like a scene from a spy movie. From beginning to end the characters learn of secrets hidden behind mysteries wrapped in conundrums. The situation facing them is layered like an onion; with more layers behind every one they see. When any of them asks questions that no one wants to answer, the characters get nothing but blank stares.

### BEHIND THE SCENES

The adventure assumes that the characters have been through the web of contacts described in **Setting the Stage**. If the gamemaster wishes, he or she may roleplay the series of meetings leading up to the talk with Tonliga to enhance the "espionage thriller" feeling.

After Tonliga finishes his brief introduction, give the characters a chance to respond. If they ask about the nature of the threat to the kingdom, Tonliga hands them the letter on p. 6. If possible, make a copy of the letter and give it to the players to read.

Once the characters finish reading the document, Tonliga will ask for it back. If they ask to keep it, Tonliga politely but firmly refuses.

After the characters have read the letter, Tonliga briefly explains the political situation, saying that certain factions would like to see the newly appointed Baroness of Hustane—Divuna Divunicus—disgraced. He does not mention Lendiltay by name or hint that Divuna faces opposition from within her own House. Tonliga also urges the characters to begin their investigation as soon as possible.

Tonliga offers the characters three thousand silvers each, plus the heartfelt gratitude of the Crown of Throal, for successfully completing the mission. Depending on how successful the characters are, the latter may well be worth more than the former.

Once they accept the mission, each player character receives a pouch containing 150 gold pieces (equivalent to 1,500 silver pieces). They will receive the rest of their payment upon completion of their assignment. The characters may use this money to buy supplies for the expedition. Because secrecy is of paramount concern, they may not requisition gear through the Arm of Throal, as that would involve official channels and make an obvious connection

between the adepts and the government of Throal. When the characters leave Tonliga's office, go to **Traveling Tribulations**, below.

## TR?UBLESH?OTING

The only possible problem in this encounter occurs if the characters turn down the mission. If they want more money, Tonliga can offer them another thousand silvers each, upon completion of the mission. If necessary, remind the players that refusing a request from an Officer of the Court is a bad idea—such an officer is only two steps removed from the king, and turning him down is almost like turning down royalty. If the characters remain reluctant, hint that an ugly fate may await those who find out deep dark secrets and then prove themselves unreliable by refusing to do the right thing. Keep in mind, however, that Throalic officials never make overt threats. They simply imply that a bad end may await people who fail in their obligations to the kingdom.

If the group includes a Nethermancer who wishes to use the Experience Death spell on the lone survivor of the exploratory team, Tonliga will grudgingly allow it. Unfortunately, the spell will only reveal the survivor's slow death without giving the Nethermancer any information about the nature of the menace below the city.

## T R A V E L I N G T R I B U L A T I O N S

In this encounter, the characters travel to the cavern beneath Hustane. Along the way, hirelings of Baroness Divuna and her mysterious opponent, the former Baron Lendiltay, follow (and may confront) them. Everyone wants to know what is going on in Hustane, and some are willing to resort to extreme methods to ferret out the information they seek.

## SETTING THE STAGE

*The busy Halls of Throal seem shockingly loud after the hush of Tonliga's office. After a few moments, however, all the sound and motion becomes reassuringly normal. People of various races going about their business, groups of dwarfs blocking the passageways with debates—all the color and background noise of the dwarf kingdom washes around you like a river. You plunge in; heading straight for the stalls where you know you can get the best deals on supplies.*

*Plenty of people in the crowds seem to be going the same direction as you. Not surprising, considering how busy the Grand Bazaar is at this time of day. Still, you can't help looking over your shoulder now and then. Somehow you can't quite shake the suspicion that you're being followed.*

## T H E M E S A N D I M A G E S

Even though the characters are simply preparing for an adventure, the need for secrecy and the presence of spies

**From:** Gaurng Metsmetev, Chancellery of Hustane

**To:** Tonliga Uvnimsaya, Officer of the Court for Construction, Royal Chancellery of Throal

**Subject:** Report Concerning the Second Deep Exploration Team

**Confidential:** Officer's Eyes Only

*My lord, what follows must receive immediate attention from your office, for the sake of Throal. I cannot sufficiently stress the urgency of this matter.*

*The rumblings from deep in the mountains below Hustane have gotten progressively worse over the past two weeks. They remain relatively quiet in the lower tunnels and inaudible in the upper levels, but several expert builders assigned to this project expressed concern over possible shifting of rock below the city. If the stone is indeed moving, at the least we will have to shore up the city foundations and discontinue settlement. Worse, these groanings may be early signs of an earthquake, in which case the entire cavern may collapse.*

*To answer these concerns, I sent a party of inspectors down into the deep tunnels. After some hours with no sign of them, we were forced to conclude that they had vanished—how or why, I do not know. I then sent a second team, better equipped and trained—this one included two adepts, a Warrior who once served with distinction in the Arm of Throal and an Elementalist recommended personally by Karon Foll of Yistaine. They were set upon by monsters in the depths of the mountain—of what nature, we cannot be sure. The monsters slew all but one of the second party, and the sole survivor died from her injuries soon after returning to the surface.*

*We must put together a third team immediately, consisting entirely of highly trained, powerful adepts, to discover what manner of fiend has invaded the depths of the kingdom. The issue must be handled with extreme discretion to avoid a panic. I beg you to use every resource at your disposal, and anxiously await the new team's arrival.*

Yours,

Metsmetev