



THE BANEWARRIENS

A mega-adventure taking characters from 6th to 10th level

BY MONTE COOK

Uses Third Edition rules. Fully compatible with Ptolus: Monte Cook's City by the Spire.

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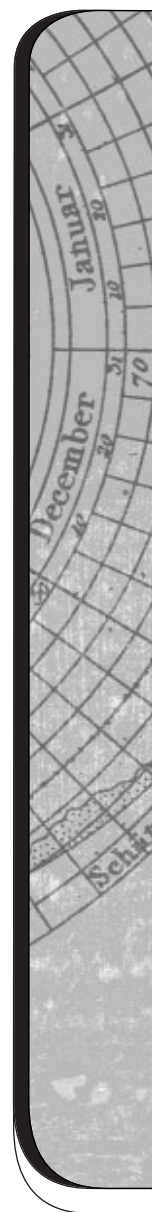
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Prelude to Adventure

The basic premise of this adventure is simple: What happens if an ancient storehouse of evil artifacts and dangers opens up near a very populated area? Who gets involved? Who wants in, and who wants it sealed back up again?

The answers, on the surface, might seem surprising.

The *Banewarrens* is an adventure designed with four 6th-level player characters (PCs) in mind. If these characters proceed through the course of the adventure, they should reach at least 10th level. A rogue is essential to the party because the Banewarrens contains a lot of traps and locks, and the group must do a lot of information gathering. But, of course, fighters, arcanists, clerics, and other classes all have a role to play.

The course of the adventure takes the PCs into the deepest bowels of evil: an ancient underground vault system used to store the vilest artifacts and imprison the most evil of creatures. But *The Banewarrens* is no simple dungeon crawl. The PCs aren't the only ones interested in this ancient storehouse of malevolence. No fewer than four large organizations are also involved—some friendly to the adventurers and some not.

This adventure is both location- and event-based. As the PCs explore the warrens, other forces are on the move, changing the way things work. The DM must not only manage the locations important to the Banewarrens but the events that occur as part of the dynamic plot. The adventure is divided into chapters, most of which contain both locations and events. This format helps provide structure. The events described in a chapter do not occur until the PCs are in the locations that chapter specifies. Exactly when to stage the events is up to the DM.

BACKGROUND

In the ancient recesses of time, a powerful and benevolent cleric set upon a well-intentioned plan. In those days, evil was on the decline and the forces of darkness had been routed in almost every field of battle. The master of evil dragons had been chained, and even the fell races of orcs and goblins—once more numerous than the races of humans, dwarves, elves, halflings, or gnomes—had squirmed back into their meager, shadowy refuges.

With malevolence on the wane, the cleric Danar Rotansin sought once and for all to rid the world of the remaining evil influences. This powerful figure began to gather up all the evil artifacts, objects of dark power, trapped essences of vanquished fiends, demonic relics, and even the last vestiges of

particularly horrible diseases. Danar called all of these things “banes” and imprisoned them. He believed that, if destroyed, the banes would simply release their evil into the world to wreak more havoc and bring about other darknesses. Destroying banes begat new banes.

Danar used powerful spells and magical items to accomplish his task, working tirelessly. As his collection of banes grew he began to bury them beneath his tower, Mosul Pearl, located near the sea. Danar constructed a vast catacomb, well warded and sealed, deep underground, and he called it the Banewarrens. He also found allies who believed in his cause to aid him. Chief among them were the dragon known as Sagarintys the Silver King and a celestial named Bastion, Guardian of the Morning.

But Danar's goal was folly. Concentrating so much raw hatred and spite—so much darkness and evil power—in one place was a terrible mistake. His actions drew the attention of vile intelligences of whose existence Danar had never even dreamed. These secretive forces manipulated events (and perhaps even time and space) to ensure that the *Book of Inverted Darkness* fell into the hands of this well-meaning cleric.

The *Book of Inverted Darkness* is an artifact older than the world itself. Scribed by gods and demons, its pages contain vast lore (only the *Book of Eldritch Might* contains greater lore, it is said), all of it dreadful. Unfortunately for Danar Rotansin—and the world—the book presented this dreadful knowledge using supernatural techniques, giving it an irresistibly seductive quality.

While he intended to seal the book away with the rest of the banes, Danar lingered over its pages for just one instant too long. Its cunningly crafted words beguiled him to keep the book by his side. Soon, he read more. And more.

And still more.

The book consumed Danar. He neglected his quest to gather the remaining banes. He withdrew from his family and comrades. The book's dark lore corrupted his spirit and twisted his mind. The lure of the dark power and forbidden knowledge was too much, even for Danar. Danar Rotansin became Eslathagos Malkith—the Dread One. With the vast resources of the banes he had gathered and the knowledge

he had gained from the *Book of Inverted Darkness*, the Dread One withdrew into his tower, also renamed: Jabel Shammar. He emerged only a few years later, launching an attack so devastating, it threatened to tear the world asunder. His might knew few bounds, and with his magical aid, the armies he had created or summoned conquered the surrounding lands with ease.

The earth itself, no longer able to tolerate the concentrated evil that Eslathagos Malkith and the banes represented, thrust Jabel Shammar away from it, creating a tall, impossibly high and narrow spire atop which the tower stood, its former pearly hue turned black as night. From there, the Dread One could survey the world—a world he desired to either conquer or crush entirely.

Only the actions of all the mortal races, led by powerful and stalwart heroes (many of whom had been friends and companions of Danar), stopped the forces of Eslathagos

Malkith. It is said they carried the battle into the halls of Jabel Shammar itself. When it was over, the Dread One lay defeated. The world's greatest heroes sprawled dead and dismembered all around him. Most of them had lost not only their lives but their souls to their foe's magic and the banes he wielded.

Some bit of Danar—the good and true man he had once been—still remained, however. His spirit, now free of corruption, managed to seal the Banewarrens once again. Although his quest remained uncompleted, and some of the banes were released again when he became Eslathagos Malkith, the warrens still contained vault upon vault of evil artifacts, foul creatures, and vile relics that it would keep away from the world at large.

Unless the Banewarrens should ever become unsealed again.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

As the characters mind their own business in the city, they run afoul of a strange dark elf who inadvertently seems to curse the innocent bystanders around him with uncontrollable magical powers. After that strange encounter, the player characters are contacted by either a powerful arcanists' guild (the Inverted Pyramid) or an influential religious group (the Church of Lothian), or both, to investigate the mysterious origin of this dark elf. Could it be the fabled Banewarrens?

Delving deep to investigate, the PCs discover a section of the Banewarrens that was not completely sealed. They encounter members of the Pactlords of the Quaan, an evil group of monstrous creatures intent on getting in to obtain something called the *Black Grail*. The Pactlords breached this section of the Banewarrens recently, their actions loosing the dark elf. They used a *wish* to get past a Sealed Door in the warrens, but a paladin named Kalerecent closed the door again before most of them could get through.

So everything seems fine, except that the PCs learn that this door has a key, and it is in the possession of an evil noble family: House Vladaam. If they want the key, either to use it or secure it, they have to negotiate with the Vladaam family—or steal it from them. And it just so happens that someone wants to help them break into the estate. Except that this someone is family matriarch Navanna Vladaam in disguise. She intends to steal the key back from the PCs, of course; she only wants people to *think* that her family no longer has it.

Now the Inverted Pyramid wants to learn more about the Banewarrens and seal the place back up again. The Church of Lothian, on the other hand, wants to explore. So the PCs head back down into the Banewarrens, dealing with traps and guardians as well as some of the banes, the Pactlords, and Navanna herself. As they explore, they learn of the existence of the *sealing rod*, a magic item that will help reveal the Banewarrens in conjunction with the *warding generators* located throughout the dungeon. It seems that the *generator* in the section that the Pactlords initially penetrated was never entirely functional, explaining how they got inside in the first place.

Eventually, the PCs return to the city to discover the Pactlords operating out of a chapel of the Church of Lothian and learn that a cleric they were dealing with actually works for them. Once they handle the traitorous priest and his lackeys, the adventurers discover an intelligent magic item that once formed one third of the powerful *staff of shards*. They also learn that in the Quaan, an extradimensional realm, the Pactlords possess another part of the staff. This staff, when whole, can destroy the Banewarrens key. Perhaps important now, perhaps important later (that's up to the PCs), but they'll want to collect the staff pieces at some point.

Back in the Banewarrens, the Church of Lothian is looking for a fabled artifact it considers to be of religious importance: the *sword of lies* (which the Church believes is actually the *sword of truth*). It is just this sword the Inverted Pyramid fears, though, because it proves so useful against arcanists. They send in an agent of their own and eventually attempt to seal the Banewarrens entirely, with everyone—including the PCs—still inside.

Once the PCs find a huge shaft known as the Baneheart, they can obtain the *sealing rod* and the last remaining piece

Timeline

Throughout this book, the timeframe during which Danar built the Banewarrens and subsequently became Eslathagos Malkith to threaten all creation has been left intentionally vague. In the playtests, these events took place around 18,000 years ago. In your campaign, the intervening time could be much shorter. At minimum, the DM should allow many centuries—perhaps a thousand years—to have passed since Danar's redemption. The terms “The Dread One” and “Jabel Shammar” should reference legends of mythic proportions. Some people might not have even heard the tale of the saint and his quest. Most people have forgotten the Banewarrens entirely.

of the *staff of shards*. To get it, they must deal with powerful Pactlords, Navanna Vladaam, and the Malificite: one of the Dread One's most powerful servants.

In the end, the best possible resolution is that the PCs complete the unfinished *warding generator* in the Sealed Door Area, recover the *sealing rod* to seal the opened doors, and use the *staff of shards* to destroy the Banewarrens key. If this occurs, the Banewarrens are sealed forever, with no possibility of anyone ever getting in again.

The PCs in your game might choose a very different path, however.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure is a mix of keyed encounters relating to specific locations on a map and event-based encounters that occur when and where the DM wishes. It is not particularly linear, so you might find that the PCs go to the various locations in a very different order than the chapters of this book would suggest. Use the material you find in this book to extrapolate what might happen if the PCs decide to do something not directly covered in the text. Your main concern should be using the nonplayer characters (NPCs) and their various motivations to encourage the PCs (directly or indirectly) to continue exploring the Banewarrens and learn all its secrets.

Treasure distribution in this adventure is nonstandard due to the nature of the scenario. PCs will fight many evil monsters and overcome deadly traps only to gain access to evil items they cannot or will not use. Treasure in the form of coins or valuable objects is uncommon in the Banewarrens. Thus, usable treasure in the hands of NPCs and in other places is increased to compensate. PCs should find themselves adequately rewarded and compensated in the long run.

Evil characters, however, will find the Banewarrens to be the treasure trove it sounds like. This is a warning to all DMs who allow players to run evil PCs in this adventure—they will find extremely powerful rewards waiting for them in these dark halls. If the PCs are evil and looking to use the objects they find in the Banewarrens, the DM should actually increase the challenges to make them work for it. Evil PCs could, in fact, end up with multiple artifacts they could use, such as the *Antithesis Stone* and the *Black Grail*, if they complete this adventure. That could pose problems.

VARIANT CLASSES

A variant version of the sorcerer and the bard class appear in Malhavoc Press' *Book of Eldritch Might II*. A variant ranger is available in the archives of "The Stuff" column at <www.montecook.com>. Where these classes appear in this adventure, the variant versions are used. If you do not have

access to these variants or do not wish to use them, converting is simple. Monsters that cast spells "as sorcerers" use the standard sorcerer class, not the variant. For example, the dragons, the couatl, and a few other monsters in this adventure use the standard sorcerer rules from the *Player's Handbook*.

USING THIS BOOK

Throughout *The Banewarrens*, an asterisk (*) is used to refer to spells, items, or classes that originate in *The Book of Eldritch Might*. A dagger (†) indicates material from *The Book of Eldritch Might II: Songs and Souls of Power*. Otherwise, all references to spells, feats, and other rules are from the three Core Rulebooks: the *Player's Handbook*, DMG, and MM.

About the Author

Monte Cook started working professionally in the game industry in 1988. In the employ of Iron Crown Enterprises, he worked on the *Rolemaster* and *Champions* games as an editor, developer, and designer.

In 1994 Monte came to TSR as a game designer. As a senior game designer with *Wizards of the Coast*, he codesigned the new edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, authored the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and designed *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*, and the d20 version of *Call of Cthulhu*. For *WizKids* games, he recently designed the *HeroClix* system of superhero combat. His *Book of Vile Darkness* is due out from *Wizards* in October 2002.

A graduate of the *Clarion West* writer's workshop, Monte also has published short stories and two novels. In his spare time, he runs two games a week, builds vast dioramas out of LEGO building bricks, and reads a lot of comics.

About the Illustrators

Toren Atkinson is known by night as the lead singer of the Cthulhu rock band, *The Darkest of the Hillside Thickets*, but by day he collects Saturday morning cartoons and draws monsters for money.

Lars Grant-West made a big splash with his fabulous black-and-white line art in the 3rd Edition Core Rulebooks, and this East Coast artist has gone on to create some impressive cover art as well.

Game fans worldwide know **Quinton Hoover** for his terrific color work in the *Magic: the Gathering* trading card game. He lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Alan Pollack was born in New Jersey in 1964. He studied at the *School of Visual Arts* in New York City and in 1991 received his first cover assignment, for *TSR's Dungeon* magazine. Two years later, Alan became a full-time illustrator at *TSR*. In 1997 he went out on his own and has worked for many roleplaying game companies as well as *Del-Rey*, *ROC*, *Tor Books*, and *Wizards of the Coast*. Alan lives in Freehold, New Jersey, with his wife, their two children, and his Siberian huskies Xena and Pikachu.

Although **Arne Swekel** has been keeping busy with color work, including illustrations for the *Harry Potter* trading card game, roleplaying fans know him for his fabulous black-and-white line art from the 3rd Edition Core Rulebooks and many other titles.

Malhavoc Press

Malhavoc Press is Monte's d20 System imprint devoted to the publication of unusual magic, monsters, and evocative game elements that go beyond traditional fantasy. Malhavoc Press products exhibit the mastery of the d20 System rules that only one of its original designers can offer.

The Banewarrens is the second adventure from Malhavoc Press, after the high-level module *Demon God's Fane*. Coming later in the year, look for *Requiem for a God*, also designed by Monte Cook. As a followup to his award-winning *Book of Eldritch Might*, Monte brings you *Book of Eldritch Might III: The Nexus*, coming soon.

Current titles are available to purchase in either print or electronic (PDF) format at <www.montecook.com>

As the player characters explore the Banewarrens, they encounter fabled evil items and creatures called the banes. These items are mentioned in the rooms where PCs may find them, but are fleshed out fully in the Banes Appendix starting on page 115.

All maps in this adventure use icons explained in the master Map Key on this page.

Certain passages in this adventure refer you to particular pictures in the Illustration Appendix at the end of this book. The illustrations there are meant to serve as visual aids to players as their characters enter a new location. Clicking on each illustration's icon takes you to the larger picture. Because we wanted to offer you a thorough gallery of game-aid pieces in this appendix, you won't see as much art throughout the rest of this book as you do in other Malhavoc Press titles.

If you'd like to expand this adventure, some bonus source material and ideas appear on Monte Cook's website. To find the links to these web enhancements, visit *The Banewarrens* product page at www.montecook.com/mpress__Bane.html.

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SETTING

This adventure can easily be set anywhere, although fairly near a large city is a good idea and very near or under a big city is best. From here on, the adventure offers the city of Ptolus as a standard backdrop. Feel free to use Ptolus or replace it with a city of your own. You could, for example, use a city in the Scarred Lands (by Sword & Sorcery Studio) or Freeport (by Green Ronin Publishing).

Ptolus is a major city of about 30,000 people. It is located near a large bay on the southern end of the Whitewind Sea, and was originally built around a fortress, Dalenguard. Ptolus is built over an abandoned underground dwarven city, Dwarvenhearth, the ancestral home of dwarves known as the Stonelost. Called the "City by the Spire," Ptolus lies in the shadow of a strange rock formation rising impossibly high (almost 3,000 feet) and surrounded by mysterious legends and rumors. These tales tell of ancient battles waged and cities erected on the site. Many of them might be at least somewhat true, for recent developments have revealed vast complexes under the city.

Of late, Ptolus has become a city of adventurers as treasure-seekers have flocked there to explore and plunder the labyrinthine structures beneath the streets. If the stories are true, these catacombs involve the sewers of the city, the remains of an older city (and its sewer system), Dwarvenhearth, and even more, plunging impossibly deep below the present urban area.

Ptolus lies in a cool, rainy coastal region with harsh winters. It serves as an important port on the Whitewind Sea and until recently was part of the Empire of Tarsis. With the collapse of the Imperial government, Ptolus now maintains a somewhat independent status, ruled by a council still dominated by representatives of an Empire far removed from the city's concerns.

For details on Ptolus, see the map on page 8.

THE DISTRICTS OF PTOLUS

Ptolus lies between the Spire and the sea. The highest portion of the city, the Noble's Quarter, is built on the very feet of the Spire. From there the level of the city drops down a sharp cliff to Oldtown, and then again into Midtown. Lastly, the final cliffs of Ptolus drop into the sea, with the only flat area at the bottom of those cliffs occupied by the city's docks. Well-worn paths connect the various elevations of the city and help make Ptolus very defensible (although the city has not been attacked in even an elf's lifetime).

The King's River flows through the city, spilling into an eroded chasm in the northwest corner and flowing down to the Whitewind Sea near the docks. The bottom of the chasm, usually called the King's River Gorge, is 80 feet below the level of ground on the north side, but almost 180 feet below on the south side. The south side still bears the old city walls and for-

MAP KEY



Altar



Balcony Railing



Brass Sphere



Door



Iron Grating Catwalk



Round Pit



Pit



Secret Door



Secret Trap Door



Spiral Staircase (arrow points up)



Stairs (arrow points up)



Statue



Trap



Window