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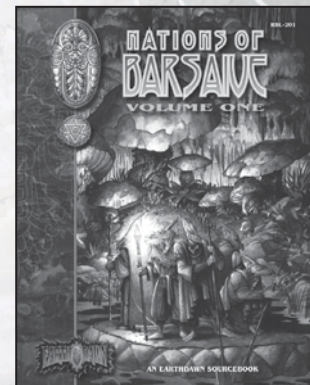
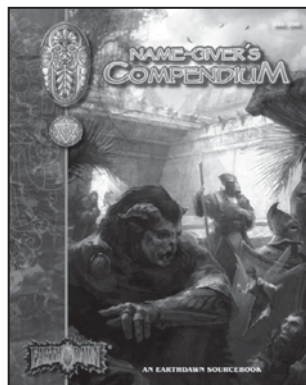
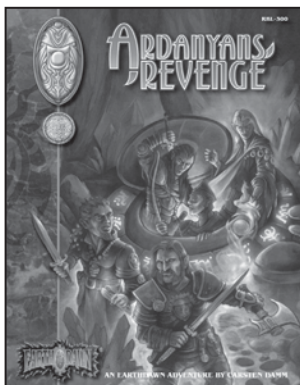
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BETRAYAL'S STING

*The Horrors may have forced us to live in darkness.
The Horrors may have destroyed our world.
The Horrors may have taken our lives.
But the worst thing they have done?
They made us live in fear.*

• **Carcinos the Younger, Theran Philosopher** •



Betrayal's Sting is an **Earthdawn** adventure for three to five Journeyman (Fifth to Eighth Circle) adepts of any Discipline. In **Betrayal's Sting**, the player characters meet a traveling merchant who suffers from a mind-affecting poison (injected by a Horror construct) and will have to deal with all the trouble it causes—to others or to themselves. They will get a good impression of how the vile work of the Horrors affects Barsaive's common man even today, a century after the kaers re-opened. In the end, they will realize that it is because of these common men that the adepts of legend set out to battle the Horrors in the first place, because others cannot help but fall victim to such monstrosity...

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

While **Betrayal's Sting** is a relatively straightforward adventure, each step depends on the prior actions of the group. Everything depends on the characters' choices, but chances are they will only slowly realize what this is all about. The gamemaster, on the other hand, needs to be prepared, and should be familiar with the entire adventure before the game starts. The first section in the plotline, **This is Something that Might Interest You**, p. 3, serves to get the characters on their way to the town of Escandar. But prior to arriving there, they will have an unusual encounter which unfolds a whole new mystery:

Who are You? What do You Want?, p. 4, details the characters' meeting with Vebraan, a merchant under the effects of a paranoia-inducing poison. Their interaction with him affects the remainder of the adventure.

Madman's Diary, p. 7, describes how the group can follow hints to discover the source of the poison that affects Vebraan: a Horror construct lurking near the road. It ends in a battle with the beast, with some characters possibly being poisoned themselves. From this point on, how the adventure develops is largely up to the player characters. Once all of them (and Vebraan, if he survived) are free from the poison, the adventure is nominally over. However, the events might well haunt them in the future.

The Enrager's Legacy, p. 11, is a general section needed throughout the adventure, detailing how the gamemaster can handle the group's attempts to work on the problems the poison poses.

Places of Interest, p. 13, details the town of Escandar and the hamlet of Mehlan's Rest, places that are dead-ends for the purpose of finding the cause of the paranoia, but which can become a focus of the characters' attention or used to expand the adventure.

Aftermath, p. 20, presents multiple options on how to modify or expand the adventure.

Because **Betrayal's Sting** is not absolutely predictable, many sections present the gamemaster with some options to adjust it on the fly.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Knowing a lot about traveling the wilderness, Vebraan, a former military scout for the Arm of Throal, put his abilities to use by starting a new life as a traveling merchant some ten years back. He is not the best merchant, but then again, he is not the worst, and villagers in the hinterlands are thankful for people like him. He also has a small family to take care of back in the dwarf kingdom, which is what keeps him going. He's not an unhappy dwarf, but struggles for economic survival with each new day.

That changed a couple of days prior to the beginning of **Betrayal's Sting**. A Horror construct, called an Enrager, crossed paths with Vebraan. It was forged by a Named Horror known as Fleshforger, a Horror that revels in destroying a bond between two or more Name-givers with its vile powers, feeding on the pain its victims cause each other.

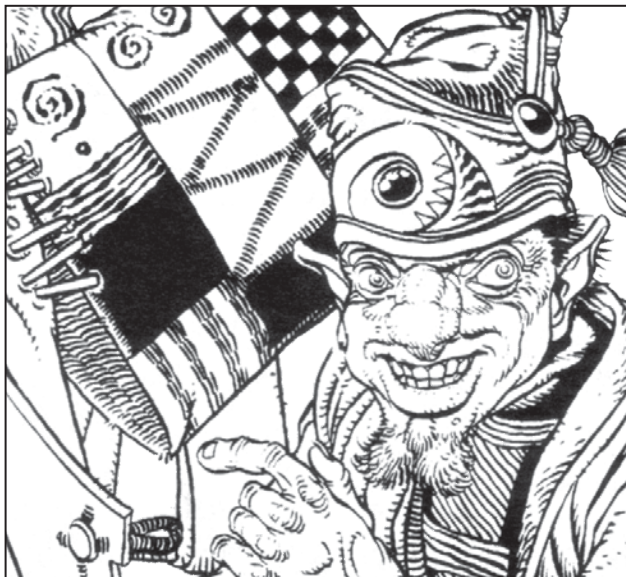
The Enrager injected the sleeping merchant with a poison which has made him paranoid. All of a sudden, the dwarf felt surrounded by a conspiracy dedicated to ruining him and endangering his family. He will react suspiciously and hostilely towards anyone he meets, assuming those he encounters were sent after him. He is not sure who exactly is involved in this conspiracy so far, but they are out there watching him—he knows it.

Enter the player characters...

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The player characters encounter a human who tells them of a relative of his from the town of Escandar, located north of the Thunder Mountains. The human's relative is in need of a group of adepts for some unknown task and wishes to pay good silver, but has not disclosed any details. The characters will have to travel to Escandar to find out more.

The adventure proper begins with Vebraan meeting the characters on the road. Vebraan instantly assumes they are part of the conspiracy determined to ruin him and attacks them sooner or later, depending on the characters' behavior and their answers to his strange questions. If the characters do not kill him, they will likely have to deal with him



for the rest of the adventure, as he will not be cooperative if captured, and will continuously attempt to escape or kill the characters.

Vebraan carries a diary that includes some hints as to what has happened, and the group can ignore it, take it as a warning, or choose to act upon the information in it to find out the cause for the dwarf's strange behavior.

Sooner or later, the characters will meet the Enrager themselves, and every part of the mystery they unlock before the encounter can help them defeat the Horror construct and escape its terrible poison. Every action the characters take brings them closer to the truth, and there is a good chance one or more of the characters will meet Vebraan's fate, and become poisoned by the Enrager, possibly even turning on the rest of the group. Once the characters have eliminated this threat, they are ready to head out for new adventures, either having deepened their bond or distanced themselves carefully from each other.

THIS IS SOMETHING THAT MIGHT INTEREST YOU...

The player characters will meet Graleg, a human merchant who tells them of a job a relative of his has to offer. This encounter serves to simply get the characters on their way, to make them travel the trade route between Urupa and Travar. It is not required at all to run **Betrayal's Sting** if the characters are already traveling said route, if the gamemaster devises another way to get them there (for example by running **Betrayal's Sting** as an interlude in another adventure), or if the gamemaster places the events of **Betrayal's Sting** anywhere else in Barsaive (which requires minor modifications to the adventure). If the gamemaster replaces Escandar with a town already introduced into his game, this can intensify the experience of characters encountering old acquaintances under the poison's influence. On the other hand, it prevents him from adding a new location to his game, and the player characters might not make new friends or enemies there.

SETTING THE STAGE

The gamemaster can set the encounter with Graleg in any place he likes. However, it is advised that the encounter is a casual one; it should be clear that Graleg did not seek the player characters out. He just happens to meet them, probably at a tavern or his shop, and mentions something a relative wrote to him in a letter.

It might pay off to stage this encounter as close to Escandar as possible, perhaps in Travar or Urupa, because it is more likely the group will consider the journey to Escandar if they are already in one of these cities—travel time is only a few days from either of them to Escandar.

THEMES AND IMAGES

The encounter with Graleg should be similar to any trivial conversation, and Graleg telling them of the job offer

should not appear to be a meeting with an employer or part of some mysterious plot. The gamemaster should start the conversation with another topic, with Graleg only mentioning the job once the attention turns to the characters' status as a group of adventuring adepts.

BEHIND THE SCENES

There is nothing going on behind the scenes. For the course of this adventure, the encounter with Graleg loses any importance. It can, however, be employed at a later point to bring the characters back on track while in the town of Escandar.

I Got This Uncle...

The characters meet Graleg, a local human merchant, at a location of the gamemaster's choosing (see **Setting the Stage** above). Graleg has an uncle by the Name of Nosleth who makes a living as a fur trapper in the foothills of the Thunder Mountains, near the town of Escandar situated halfway between Travar and Urupa. Graleg was raised in the town of Escandar, but moved to become a merchant after his parents' death over fifteen years ago. Still, Nosleth and Graleg exchange letters on a regular basis, and in the last one, Nosleth mentioned he might have a need for some adepts for a task he could not handle alone. The gamemaster may read the following passage out aloud to the players or paraphrase:

"A group of adepts you say? Well, I should have guessed as much from the looks of it. That's perfectly matched. As it so happens, an uncle of mine from Escandar mentioned in his last letter that he had a need for some adepts. He makes a living hunting animals to take their meat and fur, selling it in town. He did not say why, but I guess he has found something of interest. He gets around the Thunder Mountains a lot, and the Passions know what he might have found there that he could not handle alone. An old kaer perhaps, or some dangerous but prized animal he cannot bring down himself. If you're interested, I can give you directions."

Graleg can point the characters towards Escandar and describe his uncle, but really does not know anything else about the matter. He can tell the characters more about the town and its surroundings (see **Places of Interest**, p. 13), but this might not help the characters much—they need to get there to learn more. Of course, Graleg will not leave after this, he is happy to spend more time with the adventurers and will gladly answer all of their questions; he did not come to deliver a message, but to spend some time at the place of the meeting (or to work there, if they visited his shop).

On the Road

Depending on where the characters met Graleg, the gamemaster will have to decide what happens on the road once the characters decide to seek out Nosleth. If the encounter with Graleg took place in Travar or Urupa, it is only a short trip to Escandar, and the bulk of the

adventure takes place before they even arrive there. In this case, simply move on to **Who are You? What do You Want?**, below.

If the characters are farther away, they will likely have to travel via either Travar or Urupa and take the trade route between these cities from there. Travar and Urupa are also easily reached by riverboat or airship if the characters can afford this mode of transportation.

If the characters decide to travel to Escandar directly from the north, for example from Lake Ban, the gamemaster has to devise a way to get them onto the trade route and meet Vebraan before reaching the town. But as Escandar's location can be varied for a couple of days' worth walking in any direction, this should not pose any problems.

It is important to note that the encounter with Vebraan, the event which sets everything in motion, happens on the trade route between Travar and Urupa, but it is intentionally left open in what direction Vebraan travels. This allows the gamemaster and the player characters to start the adventure without too many complications.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The only thing that can go wrong here is if the characters do not take the bait. However, **Betrayal's Sting** can be introduced at any later point in the game. Graleg should not encourage the characters too much, as he really does not have anything to do with what comes afterwards. He will not offer money. He can offer them a small discount on a travel-related item or two at his shop if they sincerely promise to help his uncle, but will do so only if they were friendly before.

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?

This encounter is staged on the road between Urupa and Travar, close to the town of Escandar, and signals the start of the plot. The characters meet Vebraan, who attacks them after a brief chat, setting things in motion.

SETTING THE STAGE

The characters are on their way to Escandar after their meeting with Graleg. This encounter occurs on the road, and the important thing is that it does not take place too close to Escandar so there is enough room to place the hamlet of Mehlan's Rest, Vebraan's campsite, and the lair of the Enrager on the characters' way to the town.

THEMES AND IMAGES

Meeting a traveling merchant on the road is a common event for adventurers, even in Barsaive's hinterlands. These merchants supply small towns and villages with many things of need, and often are a good source of information and equipment for travelers. However, the characters' conversation with Vebraan will be brief, and with every second

he will grow more uneasy and suspicious. The characters should find his reaction curious, or perhaps even unsettling. The gamemaster should familiarize himself with the effects of the poison prior to this encounter (see the **Enrager's Kiss** sidebar on p. 10).

BEHIND THE SCENES

Veбраан was injected with the construct's poison two days ago and has not slept much since, which adds to his poor state. While the poison enhances his physical state, it also reduces his judgment and ability to reason. He will talk to the characters to see if they are just travelers on the road or if they are part of the conspiracy dedicated to ruining him and his family by stealing his goods—his personal version of the paranoia caused by the construct's poison.

An Attack with Little Warning

The characters spot the merchant and his wagon approaching from far away and traveling in the opposite direction. Coming closer, they can see he is one of the many merchants traveling Barsaive, selling goods to villagers or trading them in for foodstuffs. A donkey pulls his small cart, and he seems to trade in household and crafting wares like pans, pots, and tools, as well as food. The merchant looks to be a dwarf in his late fifties or early sixties, wearing plain clothes.

As the characters come within a few yards of Veбраан, he greets them formally, speaking in the Throalic dialect. He takes the initiative in the conversation, asking the characters who they are, where they come from, and what they are doing here. He reveals information about himself only if asked directly, although such questions strengthen his mistrust (especially if the characters do not give him information about themselves in return). Of course, everything the characters say makes them suspicious in Veбраан's eyes; it is just a question of when he will act on this suspicion.

During the conversation, the characters can make a Perception (6) Test, requiring an Extraordinary result, to realize something is wrong with Veбраан. If successful, they notice that he is quite pale and his hands are shaking, and

that his behavior grows progressively stranger. In addition, Veбраан carries various weapons on his body, concealed half-heartedly. Reduce the result level needed to succeed on the Perception Test by one for every minute the characters can keep the conversation up.

As soon as the gamemaster deems appropriate, Veбраан attacks, leaving all characters who did not succeed in the Perception Test surprised (see **Surprised in the Player's Compendium**, p. 409). Veбраан is no match for the characters, even with the benefits the poison grants him. Nevertheless, he does not surrender, and is not susceptible to any attempt made to manipulate him (also a result of the poison's effects). Veбраан shouts at the characters when initiating combat and also while fighting; "You'll not ruin me, foul folk!" or "I've seen through your lies!" for example. This can give the characters some initial hints that Veбраан suffers from delusions. When the fight is over, proceed to **When the Smoke Clears**, p. 6.

Keeping Veбраан alive for the rest of the adventure is a good idea if the gamemaster is comfortable acting out Veбраан's poison-induced insanity and paranoia, and wants to continue to keep track of him. Whether Veбраан lives or dies during this encounter may affect the remainder of the adventure, as the characters having to take care of him (64) become central to the plot. Of course, this would be ideally suited for characters who have had little or no contact with the Horrors' taint, letting them experience how it can affect a Name-giver and without actually encountering a Horror.

VEBRAAN

Attributes

Dexterity (10): 5/D8*

Toughness (13): 6/D10

Willpower (10): 5/D8**

Strength (13): 6/D10*

Perception (12): 5/D8

Charisma (9): 4/D6

* Add +3 steps when Veбраан is under the effect of the Enrager's Kiss poison.
** Add +6 steps when Veбраан is under the effect of the Enrager's Kiss poison.

Characteristics

Physical Defense: 6

Spell Defense: 7

Social Defense: 6**

Initiative: 5/D8*

Physical Armor: 4

Mystic Armor: 0

Death Rating: 35

Wound Threshold: 9

Unconsciousness Rating: 27

Recovery Tests: 2

Knockdown: 6/D10*

Combat Movement: 16

Full Movement: 32

* Add +3 steps when Veбраан is under the effect of the Enrager's Kiss poison.
** Immune when Veбраан is under the effect of the Enrager's Kiss poison.

Skills

Artisan:

Craftsman; Mason (2): 7/D12 [(2): 10/D10+D6]*

Painting (3): 7/D12

Knowledge:

Arm of Throal Lore (1): 6/D10

Dwarf Trade Routes (3): 8/2D6

Negotiation (3): 8/2D6

Military History (1): 6/D10

Throal Military Organization (1): 6/D10



General:

Avoid Blow (2): 7/D12 [(2): 10/D10+D6]*
 Climbing (2): 7/D12 [(2): 10/D10+D6]*
 Conversation (2): 6/D10
 Evaluate (3): 8/2D6
 Great Leap (2): 7/D12 [(2): 10/D10+D6]*
 Haggle (3): 7/D12
 Melee Weapons (3): 8/2D6 [(3): 11/D10+D8]*
 Navigation (2): 7/D12
 Physician (2): 7/D12
 Read and Write Language (1): 6/D10
 — Dwarf (Throalic)
 Speak Language (5): 10/D10+D6
 — Dwarf (Throalic), Human, *Or'zet*, *Sperethiel*, *T'skrang*
 Streetwise (1): 6/D10
 Tracking (3): 8/2D6
 Trading (4): 8/2D6
 Unarmed Combat (1): 6/D10 [(1): 9/D8+D6]*
 Wilderness Survival (2): 7/D12

Steps in brackets are used when Vebraan is under the effect of the Enrager's Kiss poison.

Equipment

Padded Leather (Phys 4)
 3 × Daggers (Damage 8/2D6 [11/D10+D8]*; Range 9–15–18)
 4 × Knives (Damage 7/D12 [10/D10+D6]*; Range 6–10–12)
 Dwarf Sword (Damage 9/D8+D6 [12/2D10]*)
 Short Sword (Damage 10/D10+D6 [13/D12+D10]*)
 Belt Pouch
 Climbing Kit
 Masonry Tools
 Navigation Charts (in Map/Scroll Case)
 Painting Tool
 Wealthy Traveler's Garb
 Writing Kit
 Donkey (use Pack Mule statistics from the **Gamemaster's Compendium**, p. 328)
 Small Cart (filled with trade goods, see below)

Steps in brackets are used when Vebraan is under the effect of the Enrager's Kiss poison.

Loot

53 silver pieces, 76 copper pieces in belt pouch

Legend Award

150 Legend Points

Notes

Vebraan possesses the dwarf Heat Sight racial ability.

Commentary

Vebraan is prepared for a fight. He is expecting the imaginary conspiracy to move against him, and is armed with items usable as weapons from his cart, concealed in various places on his person.

In addition to the loot found on his body, the cart contains simple items and foodstuffs worth 1,000 silver pieces (cart and donkey included). Refer to the **Vebraan's Cart** sidebar for more information on the goods Vebraan takes along with him.

VEBRAAN'S CART

Vebraan's cart contains a wide array of goods he sells to and buys from the different communities he visits. The list below is presented to allow the gamemaster to have a reference at hand without the need for too much preparation.

Item	Quantity
Animal hides	7
Backpack	2
Bedroll	3
Beer, simple	1.5 barrels
Blanket	5
Boots, mountain	1 pair
Boots, soft	3 pairs
Candles	20
Chicken, live	4
Childrens' toys	5
Cloak, woolen	2
Dress, plain	6
Dried meat	20 pounds
Hat, woolen	4
Iron pot	1
Kelix's Poultice	1
Lantern, hooded	3
Oil	11 flasks
Parchment	13 sheets
Rope	15 yards
Sack, small	3
Shirt, patterned	3
Torch	4
Trail rations	7 weeks' worth
T'skrang fish, grade B	.25 duari
Waterskin	7
Wheat	150 pounds
Whetstone	3
Wine, average	12 bottles
Wine, fine	2 bottles
Writing ink	3 vials

When the Smoke Clears

The easiest solution for the characters is killing Vebraan, although this is not necessarily in their, or the gamemaster's, best interest. The characters can, by accident or intent, subdue the dwarf, but this does not calm him down. On the contrary: whenever possible, he tries to free himself. If successful, he either attacks the characters or flees. Vebraan makes it as difficult as possible for the characters to hold him captive or interrogate him. Gamemasters should keep in mind that he might still have some weapons concealed, perhaps in a boot or some other place the characters didn't check—just to pull one of them out unexpectedly.