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INTRODUCTION

Our powers are frightening to most, as we control the forces of life and death, and as we do not fear encounters with the spirits of the dead and other denizens of the Netherworld. The Horrors. They are from the Netherworlds. And them, even we fear. But curiosity remains, and the wish to understand. And curiosity leads to temptation. And giving in to it leads to the fall. Harness your curiosity.

• GRORUG, NETHERMANCER OF THE SIXTH SPIRE •

1

Ladras stood before the Horror, his customary veneer of confidence and strength wearing painfully thin. As his eyes lingered over the grotesque form before him, its features impossibly mismatched and gruesome, he found his resolve weakening. The monstrous entity stood high on its six legs, no two pairs alike. The jointed legs of a spider worked in horrific tandem with the heavy hooves of a warhorse and a pair of human-like limbs that ended in hands with fingers splayed wide like some caricature of an acrobat. Four eyes burned in its misshapen head: a pair facing forward like those of a man, but another, more menacing pair set into the sides of the head, like those of some ravenous bird of prey. Ladras could see these outermost appendages clearly, even though he did not want to, but it was strangely comforting in comparison to the swirling field of magical darkness that shrouded the Horror's torso, impenetrable and all the more terrifying for the endless possibility of what it concealed. As those four eyes blinked in a single motion, Ladras became certain that the Horror knew what thoughts boiled in his mind, what weakness flitted about his heart. Yet this did not matter to Ladras, for he had come prepared. Ladras would cut a bargain with this creature; he would inflict terrible suffering on those who had scorned him, and through that suffering the Horror's hunger might be sated. If he worked as a tool of the Horror, it could feed on his deeds rather than its own. It would have no need to feed upon Ladras himself, for it would have its fill as he exacted vengeance on all those who had laughed at him. Their suffering would be the stuff of legends.

"Yes," the Horror growled, its voice resonant and deep but at the same time screeching, driving Ladras to wince. "I will lend to you my power, but there are conditions. There must be a price for such a bargain. I will grant you the power to forge undead constructs, but only if their control is granted to me when your campaign of vengeance is at an end."

Ladras nodded, for this was not an unreasonable request. He had expected as much, for this was a Horror, after all.

The Horror spoke again, its voice measured and careful beneath the otherworldly tone. "Then, Nethermancer, there is the matter of the connection. If you wish to receive my power, a link must be forged between us, a thread of power."

"What sort of connection?" Ladras' confidence faltered. This was unexpected.

"A blood oath" the Horror replied, "will suffice. A blood oath to provide the conduit through which you might receive my power.

As you know, such an oath, born of blood, ensures that neither of us may break the pact. Does that satisfy your need for safety?"

Ladras hesitated, for the last time, before letting the visions of vengeance in his mind rise up once more. This power was well worth so small a price. He smiled triumphantly as he exclaimed, "A blood oath it is!" and from his belt he produced a polished knife.

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The oaths had been sworn, and Ladras had left to begin forging the constructs through which he would exact his revenge. It was a simple enough plan, but things would not go as Ladras presumed. Res'kretren knew far better than that. It had Horror-marked the Nethermancer, forged its own special brand of bond with the troll, and now it possessed a secret door into the mind of poor, foolish, naïve Ladras. Now that Ladras had accepted its help, Res'kretren would strengthen its hold each and every time Ladras called upon the powers he had borrowed. By the time Ladras realized that his actions were costing him his free will it would be far too late. Res'kretren knew all too well the corrupting influence of power on Namegivers; in fact it was this flaw in their character upon which the Horror thrived.

It would not even take all that long. The hubris of Nethermancers never ceased to amuse Res'kretren. The power available to the wise among the Nethermancers was staggering, but it was the young that amused the Horror so. Many would not, or could not, wait for the power they craved. They would seek out its kind, Horrors and their ilk, and demand alliance. Only those steadfast in their path were a threat to Res'kretren and its kin, and the steadfast were not those who sought allies from among the Horrors that plagued Barsaive.

Ladras was not steadfast. He was eager, and ambitious, and his pride was wounded. If ever there was a Namegiver perfect for the needs of Res'kretren, Ladras was such. The Horror did not understand the emotions of Namegivers, save for suffering, but it felt now the stirrings of an emotion all too rare in its kind: satisfaction. The very anticipation of what Ladras would do under Res'kretren's command, naively thinking that he was the master and Res'kretren the fool, was too delicious. It had been too long since the last village; too long since the last delicate feast of anguish and pain. Ladras would bring sustenance again: a feast of glorious proportions.

WELCOME TO EARTHDOWN!

Through this demo adventure for the **Earthdown Third Edition** roleplaying game, you have found your way into a world of magic, legends, and horror. The next pages will introduce you to the world of **Earthdown**, its most important features, the role the characters play, the basic rules of the game, an introductory adventure, several pre-generated characters, and rules used for conflicts of physical, magical, and social nature. You can use these characters and the rules to complete the adventure without any additional materials other than dice, paper, and a pencil (and a couple of friends to play with, of course). You can find additional material on our website at earthdown.com. Visit our forums for questions about this demo adventure, the other **Earthdown** rulebooks available from **RedBrick**, and all things **Earthdown**.

EARTHDOWN?

Earthdown is a roleplaying game set in the Age of Legend: the world's ancient past when the cycle of magic was at its peak, and the Horrors entered the world to feast on the pain and suffering of the Namegiver races. The people of the province of Barsaive went into hiding in underground, magically protected caverns called kaers, and returned four centuries later to reclaim the surface. Another century has passed since, and much has been rebuilt, but the last of the Horrors still roam the lands, and the mighty Theran Empire has returned to claim Barsaive once more. It is now that Barsaive needs legends. For one, the legends of the past: the legacies of legendary heroes have created magical artifacts of great power that wait to be uncovered. Then, the legends of today: the legends that adventurers build for themselves by performing feats worthy of song and tale. Uncovering ancient weapons and building their own legends, the players set out to take the fight to the Horrors, the Therans, and whoever else stands in the way of hope for the future. For they are adepts and follow magical paths called Disciplines, their magical abilities becoming more powerful as their legends grow.

ROLEPLAYING GAME?

Everyone has read a book or seen a movie where the protagonist does something so utterly wrong that the reader or viewer wants to shout a warning to the character. But no warning from the audience can keep that character from doing what the plot demands, no matter how much trouble it lands him in. The readers and viewers can't change the character's behavior; we're just along for the ride. A roleplaying game turns this situation on its ear. In a roleplaying game the **players** control the actions, or play the roles, of their characters and respond as they wish to the events of the plot. If the player doesn't want his character to go through a door, the character won't. If the player thinks his character can talk himself out of a tight situation rather than resorting to that trusty sword, he can talk away. The plot of a roleplaying game is flexible, ultimately based on the decisions the players make for their characters.

In roleplaying, stories (the adventures) evolve much as they do in a movie or book, but within the flexible story line created by the **gamemaster**. The story outlines what might happen at certain times or in reaction to other events. The story remains an outline, with few concrete events, until the players become involved. When that happens, the adventure can become a drama as riveting as that great movie you saw last week or the book you stayed up all night to finish.

Though the players all contribute to the story, creating it as they play, the gamemaster creates the overall outline and controls events. The gamemaster keeps track of what happens and when, describes events as they occur so that the players (as characters) can react



to them, keeps track of other characters in the game (referred to as gamemaster characters), and uses the game system to resolve the players' attempts to take action. The gamemaster describes the world as the characters see it, functioning as their eyes, ears, and other senses. Gamemastering takes both skill and practice to master, but the thrill of creating an adventure that engages the other players, tests both their gaming skills and the characters' skills in the game world, and captures the players' imaginations makes the gamemaster's job worthwhile. While there are many published game supplements and adventures to aid the gamemaster, talented gamemasters always adapt the game world to suit their own and their players' style.

A roleplaying game offers its players a level of challenge and personal involvement unmatched by any other type of game. Because the players and gamemaster create the adventures they play, what happens in the course of a roleplaying game is limited only by your imagination. The game is not a contest between the players and the gamemaster, however. The gamemaster may control all the bad guys, but he should work with the players to build and experience a tense, exciting adventure.

WHAT'S IN THE DEMO?

In this demo for **Earthdawn Third Edition**, you find everything you need to get to know **Earthdawn** and take your first steps to learn the basics of the game. We cannot provide you with every detail of the rules or the world, but have tried our best to let you know about the most important things. Here is a quick overview of the chapters included in this demo:

THE GAME, THE RULES

This chapter gives a short overview of the history of the world of **Earthdawn**, explains the game's setting of Barsaive, and details the role of magic in both the game and the rules. Magic is an important aspect of **Earthdawn**, as every player character in **Earthdawn** uses magic to gain and master his abilities. Players need not necessarily read this part, but it is important that the gamemaster reads and understands this section.

An introduction to the basic rules follows: how the dice are rolled and how bonuses and penalties to dice rolls work. **Earthdawn** uses the Step System, in which several of a character's characteristics are added up to determine a Step, which translates into a certain combination of dice. **Earthdawn** uses dice with six, eight, ten, and twelve sides (called D6, D8, D10, and D12 respectively) and combines them in dice rolls.

MISGUIDED AMBITIONS

This chapter is for the gamemaster's eyes only. We have kept things simple. The adventure is very straightforward, and the player characters get little opportunity to stray from the path. It is intended as an introduction to the world of **Earthdawn** and the basic rules of the game. You can alter it if you have some experience with roleplaying games or **Earthdawn** in particular; we provide only the information necessary to complete the adventure.

example, while the characters are based in a town, the adventure doesn't provide detailed information on it, as the adventure does not take place there. Feel free to fill in the details as you see fit!

To guide the characters through the adventure, we provide several texts the gamemaster can read aloud to the players to get them into the right mood or give them information about the world in which their characters live.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

These are five characters from which players may choose. These haven't been designed specifically for this adventure, but are sample archetypes found in the **Earthdawn Third Edition Player's Guide**. It's unlikely the players need all of the characters' abilities during the adventure, but if you decide to continue playing with these characters, all of the abilities will eventually come in handy.

The adventure is designed with four players in mind, but offers guidelines on how to scale the opposition for a group of two to six.

FIGHTING AND HURTING

This chapter provides the rules for combat and healing damage. You should have at least one copy of it available at the table, as you will frequently need it while playing the game, and it comes in handy as a reference and overview of the possible maneuvers and options in combat.

EARTHDOWN THIRD EDITION

After you have completed the adventure, you can take a look at how your way on the path of the adept might continue once you get the **Earthdawn Third Edition** core rulebooks. You have only begun your journey, and much lies ahead as you build your legend.

