

LIVING ROOM GAMES

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SCOURGE UNENDING

Writing

Horrors

Robin D Laws, Teeuwynn Woodruff, Greg Gordon, Sam Witt, Allen Varney, Chris McCubbin, Caroline Spector, Fraser Cain, Louis J Prosperi, Rob Cruz, Diane Piron-Gelman, Andrew Raglan, and Rich Warren

Scourge Unending

Damon Earley, Aaron F Johnson, Sean Kelley, Gary McBride, Chris Palomares, Aaron Robb, Marco Soto, Mike Williams

Earthdawn Line Developer

Mike "Woodchuck" Williams

Editorial Staff

Editor

Scot Greisch

Production Department

Art Director

Shirley Soto

Cover Art

Luis Corte Real

Cover Design

Shirley Soto

Interior Illustrations

Oliver Eriksen, Stephanie Folse, David Grilla, Christi Smith Hayden, Denise Jones, Mark Mandolia, Jacob Minor, Kevin Minor, Matthew Minor, Melinda Picard, Shirley Soto, Martijn Vellinger

Layout

Marco Soto

Proofreading

Joe Chan, Aaron F Johnson, Jason Middleton, Aaron Robb, Marco Soto, Shirley Soto, Mike Williams



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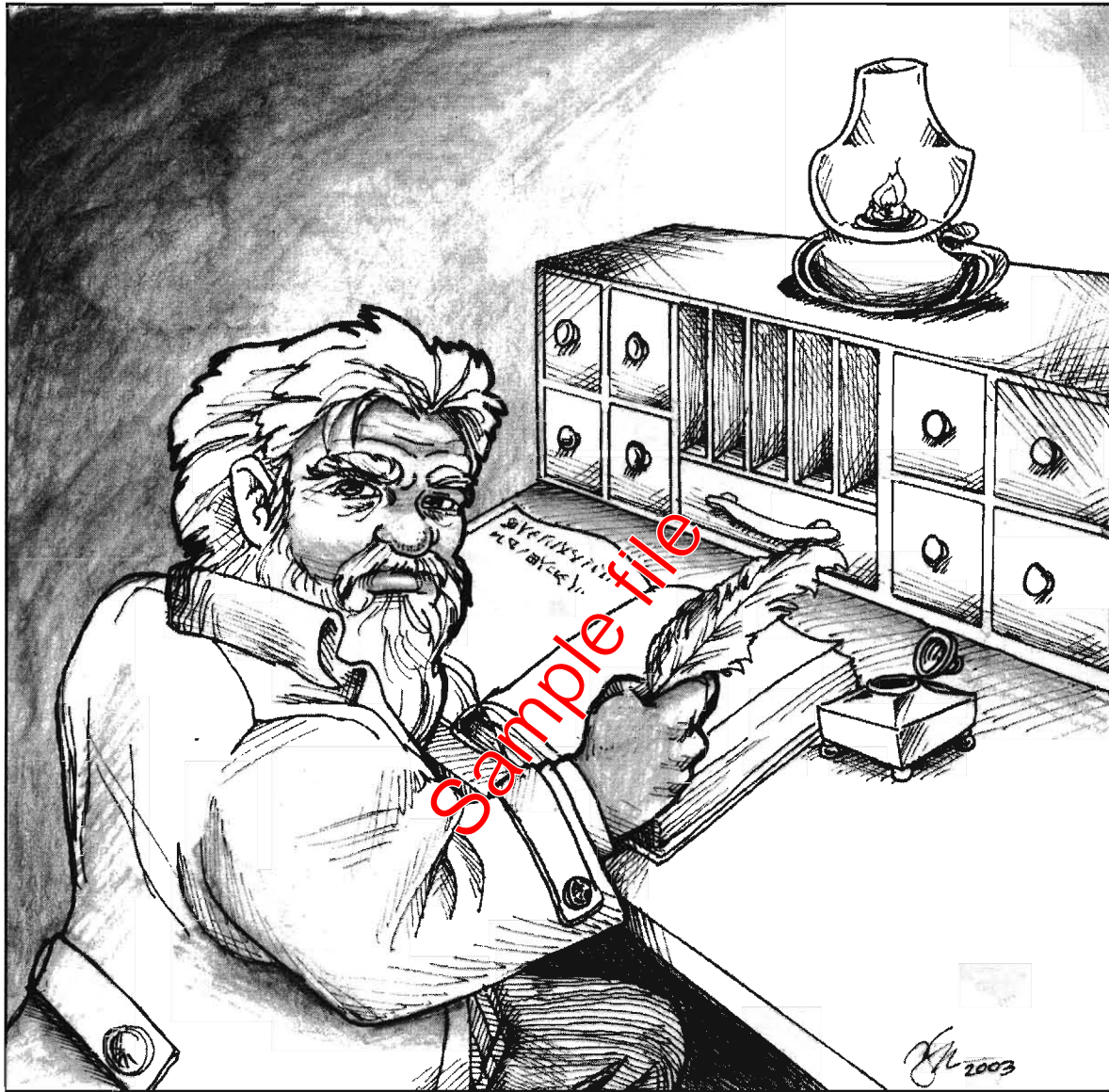
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Arlington, TX 76014

E-mail: info@lrgames.com
Visit us on the World Wide Web at <http://www.lrgames.com>



THE HORRORS REVISITED



Much like its predecessor, this book was born from a meeting between myself and His Highness. However, this time I was not speaking with my dear, departed friend Varalus III, but instead found myself attempting to console his son and successor, King Neden. So much had happened across Barsaive in the last two years, with Throal seeming to serve as the focal point. It had taken its toll on our young king; indeed, the night this meeting took place had only seen him awake and well again for two weeks. The clean-up of the attempted coup was still underway: the repairs to the streets were not finished, an obsidian Purifier Named Hermod still watched over the old section of the city where the Horror that had haunted our king had hidden, and the funerals for those innocents who had died during that night of chaos still continued. King Neden had made monumental efforts since that night to bring order back to Throal. It was during one of these late-night meetings, when the others had been dismissed, that His Highness asked if I would stay for a time. I agreed.



Once again, the conversation begun was not one that I ever expected would end with the creation of another dangerous tome. In a quiet, mellow tone, the kind of tone reserved for safe firesides, warm drink, and good friends, His Highness asked me to speak of his father. That private conversation is not for the pages of this or any other manuscript. However, it finally led up to the king's revelation, and his other reason for asking me to remain.

After a time, King Neden rose from his chair to look down at the small fire. The flickering light and shadows made me realize how much the previous year's ordeals had aged him. His relatively young face now bore the marks of his trials. Lines of sorrow from the tragic loss of his father and the many others that died in the short, bloody war to oust Thera from our borders were stamped around his eyes. Lines of horror had been etched by the many months of Horror-bred nightmares. The most prevalent lines, however, were lines of resolve not unlike the creases that I had grown so accustomed to seeing in the face of his father. When he addressed me, his voice was still low, but it was filled with strength and purpose.

"Thank you, Merrox, for this conversation. I wish to see the realization of my father's hopes for me and his aspirations for this kingdom. I would not say that my ascendancy was as... smooth... as he had wished..." He paused then, to take a sip from his mug. "... but I think that we are in a better position for seeing the changes he sought. There are two things that I have learned at a very steep price in the past year. The first is patience." He looked back at me, then, before continuing, "The second... the second is the identity of the enemy I fear most."

The visions that the Horror (forgive the superstitions of an old man, but I will NOT write its Name) had left with our king had shaken him, initially. Now, however, he felt that Throal was not doing enough against the Horrors. I tried to point out the many successes of the Exploratory Force – the many, many Horrors and constructs that they had dispatched since our emergence. This was not enough for His Highness. "That is not the same, Merrox. There, we are hunting for our own reasons. Hunting to bring Barsaive back to the surface, to reclaim lost knowledge and legends. True, that very act helps to fight the Horrors. We aren't *hunting* them, however. Like this crusade of Horror Stalkers in Scythia I have heard of. *That* is a hunt. *That* is taking the fight to the Horrors."

I tried pointing out the times the Arm had mobilized to fight back an encroaching Horror from a Throalic community. He replied that it was still a defensive gesture, only upholding the basic rights of the citizens. I pointed out the many heroes, such as those who freed His Highness from the grips of the Horror's mark, that were known for fighting the Horrors. From the sly gleam in his eye, I could tell that I had fallen into the trap he had been waiting for.

"Exactly! Is it right to rest the full burden of that responsibility on the shoulders of those few brave souls who, without the aid of an army and little or no aid from a kingdom, are willing to take the fight to the Horrors? The Exploratory Force has done much; more, even, than I would have dared hope. I do not mean to belittle their accomplishments in any way. However, the main goal for the Exploratory Force is to rediscover Barsaive. Throal needs people whose goal it is to wipe out the Horrors. I wish to give her just that."

Of course, he continued, such people would need to be properly armed for such a battle. One of their greatest weapons, he claimed, and I could not argue, could be knowledge. Knowledge of their enemy. He asked if I would be willing to find the original tome that the Library had compiled, some years ago, on the nature of Horrors, and update it with what had been learned in recent years. His words brought back the echoes of his father's, and the arguments I had already lost once. Perhaps in the stubbornness of my old age, I tried again. King Neden's arguments were nothing if not equal to his father's, perhaps even more compelling. When King Varalus had argued the need to arm ourselves with knowledge against the Horrors, it was as a sovereign worrying over his nation. King Neden argued as a man who wished to save his very soul.

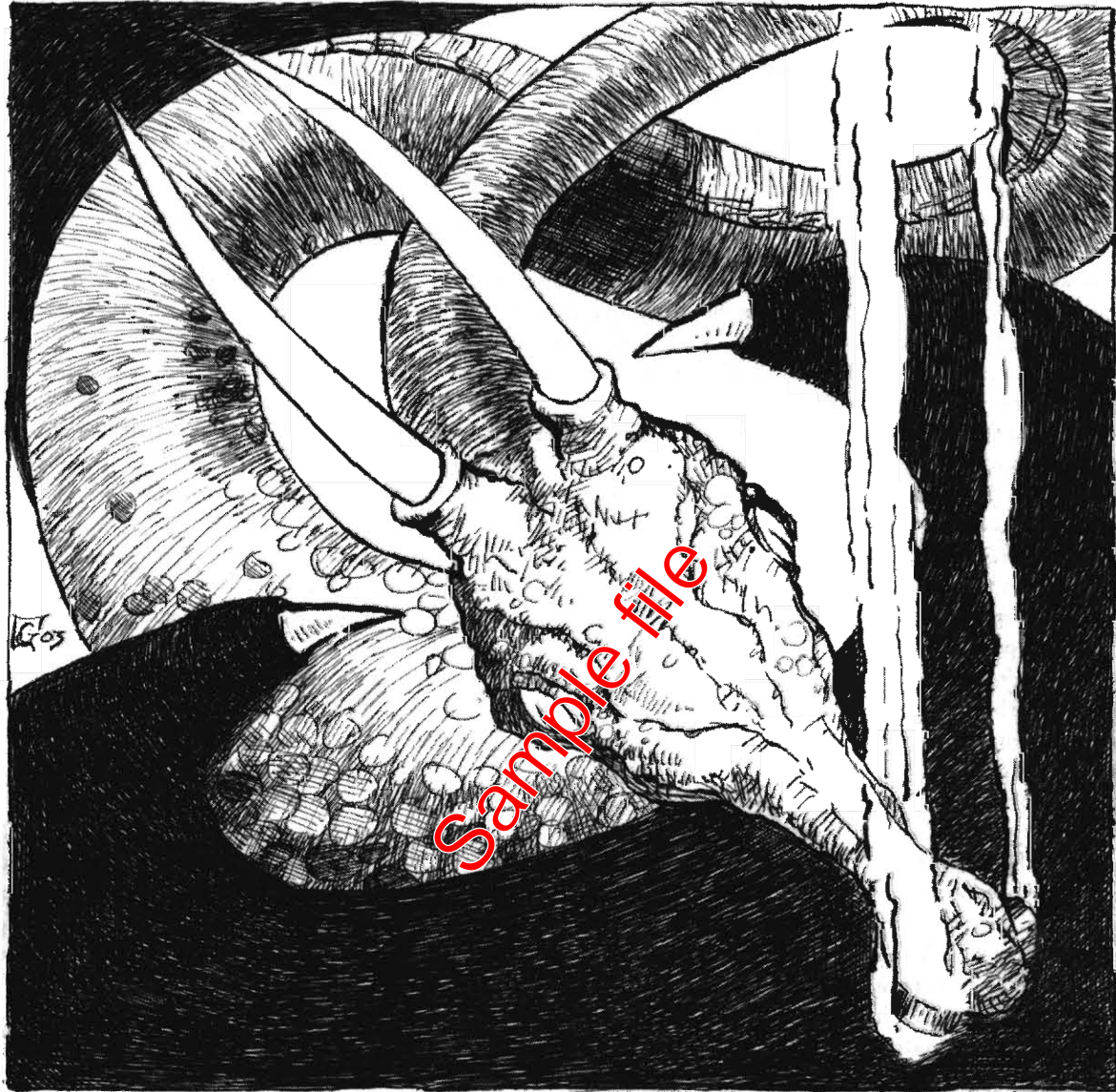
The king already had hopes to recruit a group of Horror Stalkers, Lightbearers, and anyone else willing to serve under Throal as a legion of Horror hunters. A missive was being written and a messenger was going to be sent towards Scythia to find Name-givers willing to take on such a task. What he needed for them, when they arrived, was something that might better prepare them for the hunt. Something that might just give them an edge. I accepted the task, just as I had accepted it before.

As with the first one, I did not help write this book; I merely found those willing to compile it, for I still refuse to read it. A substantial portion of the work in this tome would not have been possible without the Hunters of Throal (the Name the king gave this new group of Throalic soldiers). Many at the Great Library toiled to make sure that this volume included any changes noted from the original. Again, Adesian Skoln oversaw the creation of this tome, along with Quinn Agair, the leader of the Hunters at the time of this writing. The crew of the *Earthdawn* offered some of their experiences and stories, as well. Since his work on the first book, I do not believe that brave Adesian has had a single restful night's sleep. Despite that, he was still willing to help revisit this tome. He was one of the few willing to work on it again. He paid a price for it, as well. Adesian left us, not three nights ago as I write this. His body was found in his bed, his face a mask of horror. It was not a fitting end for such a good man. He has been our first casualty for this tome. I fear he will not be the last.

I sit, this tome completed, with the ink of my foreword drying as I watch. All together, I cannot help but feel that this work may hurt more than it helps. I hope that this is simply the childish fear of another tired, old man, who has seen the rictus of horror on the face of a dear, departed friend. While Vasdenjas, the Keeper of Secrets, is also gone from this world, I feel that I would be remiss if I were not to include his final advice on this subject, given so many years ago to those who would read the first tome.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records, 1513TH





'Knowledge is a powerful tool in this age of magic and often proves beneficial. Knowledge of the Horrors, however, invites their touch upon your mind and heart. The wise Name-giver will remember this and be wary.'

—Vasdenjas, Master of the Secrets

