

MESSENGERS OF DOOM

*The heart of a Namegiver can be darker than
the taint of the foulest Horror.*

• SHAL'AREL, QUESTOR OF GARLEN •

In this adventure, the heroes discover a facade hiding a terrible secret. Sent out to deliver a simple package to Throal, the player characters find themselves soon enough in an unexpected deadly environment. If they can solve the mystery about their package, the heroes must decide what to do with this information and maybe even the package's contents.

SETUP

This adventure can start anywhere outside Throal or Bartertown. There are different ways to introduce the group to this adventure. If they are searching for a new job, the trader Dalnarim (see below) contacts them. Alternatively, they find the package somewhere in Barsaive beneath a rotten corpse, or someone they meet on their journey asks them to deliver this package for him.

EVENT ONE: THE TRADER

This is an optional event to start off the adventure. The player characters are approached by the human trader Dalnarim to deliver a package with antique works of art to his business partner Dworzin Hardcoin in Throal. Dalnarim runs a small company that searches for antique wares from before the Scourge since he realized that many people would pay a fortune to retrieve a small portion of their history that had been lost to the Horrors. Dalnarim tells the group that they will receive 120 silvers each from Dworzin when they hand over the goods. He insists on drawing up a business contract and he gives them a document in which he testifies that they are his couriers. If the characters ask why Dalnarim is not using some of his own employees to deliver the goods, Dalnarim answers that there has been an increasing number of incidents with bandits and scorchers on the way to Throal and that his employees are not trained to fight them off. The trader also tells them that the package is magically sealed and that only Dworzin knows how to open it.

During this conversation, one or more of the characters might want to examine the trader more closely. If perceptive enough, he may find out that Dalnarim is, in fact, an elf in disguise. If they confront him with this, Dalnarim tells them that his business partners in Throal do not respect elves and so he needs to work in disguise to earn his money in this profitable market.

EVENT TWO: THE GRIM LEGION

The player characters set out to Throal. What they don't know is that a band of the Grim Legion (see *Adventure Compendium*, p. 148) has observed the trader and suspect Dalnarim has dealt with a Horror. So they follow the characters and wait for a good opportunity to strike and get the package somewhere on the way to Throal. They fear that the group is also working for the Horror. The Legionaires attack disguised as simple bandits. They hope that by not revealing they are from the Grim Legion they will look much weaker than they are to get an advantage.

There are three more Legionaires hiding somewhere close by, watching the fight. If the other Legionaires lose to the players, these three will gather backup for taking down the heroes later on. The attacking Legionaires should be hard enough to give your players a good fight but they should not be strong enough to pose a real threat. Spotting the three observing Legionaires should be real tough, since those three are trained in hiding and leaving a place unseen to gather backup.

EVENT THREE: THE PACKAGE

This is an optional event if the players become suspicious of their package. To open it, the group must first break the sealing magic. It is a unique, Named Sixth Circle Illusionism spell similar to the spell Impossible Lock, which will only open for Dworzin.

If the player characters open the package, they find a valuable box holding some sort of artifact. The artifact may once have been a very beautiful statuette, but now it is horribly twisted. Regardless of its appearance, Namegivers who look at this artifact get a feeling that they want to take a closer look at it—the gamemaster may ask for a Willpower Test to resist this. Characters with Astral Sight may notice that the statuette has been tainted. As long as the package is not opened, the player characters will not see any traces of taint. Should they touch the statuette, however, they will be Horror-marked. If the group returns to meet their employer, they learn that he has left with no clues about where he went.

EVENT FOUR: THE DELIVERY

The group arrives in Throal to deliver the package. Dworzin does not know Dalnarim and refuses to pay the 120 silvers per character Dalnarim promised. Nevertheless, Dworzin is a dwarf tradesman and checks it out to see if there is something of value in the package. He even opens it so he can investigate the potentially valuable artifact. Since he is no adept, he is not able to detect the taint and falls for the trap. Examining the statuette, Dworzin suggests since the package was for him, he can as well keep the statuette, but will have to see if it is actually worth something, and how much. He further suggests to split the profits with the group. Maybe they'll be lucky and it's worth more than 120 silvers per head? It will take him a bit, so he suggests to the group to stay at a tavern nearby where the heroes get a free drink if they mention his Name.

EVENT FIVE: THE INTERROGATION

If the group stays in Throal to wait for their payment, they are arrested after three days. If the group leaves Throal, an armed force sets out to find them. Regardless of the situation, the force that arrests the player characters should be strong enough to win a battle against them. The group sits in a Throalic jail for quite a while before they are interrogated on the matter. The group learns that they are accused of murder and dealing with Horrors. Dworzin was found dead in his store. His corpse was twisted in an unnatural manner and traces of a Horror's influence could be found. After a really tough and long interrogation, the group may be able to convince the agent of the Eye of Throal who interrogates them of their innocence. Nevertheless the Eye of Throal regards the group as suspicious individuals and keeps tabs on them. When the group travels back to confront Dalnarim at this point, they find the same as described in Event Three above: he left without any clues of his whereabouts.

EVENT SIX: THE TRAIL

This happens after Event Three or Event Five, depending on the way the group chose through the adventure up to now. When the group is frustrated enough to stop researching their employer because they do not find any useful information, an elf asks them to meet him in the local temple of Garlen. The elf is wearing a long robe hiding most of his features. The characters may notice that his body has been horribly twisted. The elf tells them that he heard about them looking for Dalnarim and that he himself has been a victim of this trader. He only survived because he reached the temple of Garlen soon enough to receive sufficient aid, but his body is mangled for the rest of his life. The elf, who calls himself Neralean the Scarred, points them to a store in a larger town or city (such as Ardanyan or even Travar) for Dalnarim's whereabouts.

EVENT SEVEN: THE GRIM LEGION RETURNS

While the player characters are traveling to the store, the Grim Legion strikes again, provided the group didn't spot the three Legionaires in **Event Two**. This should be a tough fight, as the Legionaires are prepared to fight some powerful Horror worshippers. This time, they wear the full uniform of the Grim Legion.

At the beginning of this encounter, the Legionaires demand the statuette and all information regarding the group's employer. Since they are fanatic Horror hunters, it should be very hard for the characters to talk themselves out of this situation, and the Legionaires think that the Horror worshippers have increased Charisma to soothe the Legionaires and bind them to their Horror master's will. A fight should be next to inevitable.

CLIMAX

At the store pointed out by Neralean, Dalnarim, now in his true elven form, and some bodyguards make a last stand. At some point during the fight, the city watch appears to investigate the scene and stop the battle. Dalnarim tries to convince the watchmen that he is an innocent trader who is attacked by hired thugs. Depending on the option the gamemaster chooses (see below), Dalnarim may summon his Horror master if he is about to lose. If the group manages to defeat Dalnarim, or if Dalnarim manages to flee, they should find some hints that lead to another building. Here the group find Dalnarim's diary or some other evidence to prove his guilt. They also find some information that links Dalnarim's doings to the Grim Legion, but careful examination can reveal this as a forgery Dalnarim prepared to conceal his actions and mislead possible investigators into an encounter with the Legionaires.

Option One: Dalnarim is an experienced Nethermancer and Illusionist, who became greedy and started to make lots of money trading antique items he found in his companies' archaeological excavations. When he realized that his skills as a merchant were not enough to expand his market, he searched for new ways to be successful. During his research, he found information regarding certain Horrors that mark their victims through physical objects.

When he found the location of such an artifact, he gathered a band of thugs and sent them out to get this item for him. After the thugs returned with the artifact, Dalnarim had them killed silently. Dalnarim then sent the artifact to his rival traders and sent the Grim Legion after them, getting rid of the competition.

Option Two: While reading the diary or investigating the other evidence, that the gamemaster gave to the group, the group learns that Dalnarim was a high-Circle Nethermancer and Thief longing for power. Dalnarim set out to actively study Horrors. While he was exploring an abandoned kaer with a group of adepts, he was Horror-marked through an item. The Horror used Dalnarim to kill his companions and travel to several locations where the Horror hid the items with which it marked its victims. Afterwards, the Horror used Dalnarim to spread those items throughout Barsaive, so that the Horror could feed properly.

If Dalnarim was able to convince the watchmen of his innocence, the player characters may end up arrested. Dalnarim tries to buy off the local magistrate to increase the chance of the group's execution.

SEQUELS

If he survives, Dalnarim may become a recurring nemesis trying to use his resources as best as he can to harass and eventually kill the characters, since they know the truth about him.

Option Two in the Climax may lead the group into a series of adventures. They may want to do some research on the items with which the Horror marks its victims, so that they can destroy them.

Of course, the characters may want to set out to slay the Horror itself—especially if any of the player characters touched the artifact—if they can find its hideout. Alternatively, a more legitimate group of Grim Legionnaires may approach the group for the falsified documents (see **Option One** above) in order to check them for veracity. The Grim Legion demands that the group helps them restore their good name by fighting the Horror that marked Dalnarim.

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