

bargain with the beast.” So I indeed thought it was worth a try. Now in order to communicate with such terrible beasts, one must recall that they are made by Allfather and have certain desires and impulses, as well as strange customs. Usually, I try a few words of introduction in order to sound good-willed and at the same time I determine the syntax and word formation system with the reply. So I spoke to the Arachnid their beast tongue which consisted of many dark clicks and hissing sounds by which I hoped meant something to the effect as follows.

“Good evening, oh great one, please allow me to speak” The spider stopped, withdrew her razor tube from the Count and replied in a much different dialect than I expected.

“Why do ye come here and disturb me? Await in silence over in the corner, for ye shall not escape.” At which I said, “Ye have taken my companions, please deliver them back or else ye shall not be fed any longer, its not right, ye know, for spiders now to dine on men.”

At this the spider seemed to glare and her eyes seemed to glow red, she cursed and said “Ye will all die this very night!” Then Droctulf said, “I would guess that this is one of the possessed ones, what say ye?” I nodded, and he continued “...in that case we must destroy her...”

I remember that we did destroy that beast in furious battle, with bows and even with close sword strike. The beast betrayed fear of us, as it was possessed by demons no doubt, which are craven, but some of us were poisoned...

### VORTEX

The tradition of the Sands of Time has been traced to a mysterious rock cavern in

Desert of Luz. No dungeoneers or archivilungs have ever returned from that place. Another closely linked Ammouric legend claims that the Aerial One is the condemned spirit of the Giant Edamnoch who fell to ruin there under the prayer of Maceon.

The Legend of the Aerial One is still widely professed. Reports have come from Kithom of travelers attacked by “a titanic vortex of wind” that rips apart flesh. There is told a short account of a traveler who heard it in a run down half-deserted drinking tavern near the Yezez, a semi-desert that stretches southwards from east of the Antylnk range...

### Vengeance of The Arial One

“I was trying to find the entrance to certain rumoured mines that lead to Nystul, but I had been spending too much time in those arid lands as that wasteland is extremely disorienting. After a while, with the realization that, again, few of the townsfolk were interested in entering that desert for the sake of treasure hunting, I put the project off for some time and took up copying rare tomes.

One day I was bringing my donkey into town to get the usual hoofwork done. Since the road which goes through the northern stretches was infested with horseflies almost the size of sparrows that year, I endeavored to take the seldom used southern route which goes by the thousand foot drop into the Yezez proper. As I was passing into the latter half of the journey, I espied a man lying face down up on the road, as if dead. Running up to him I turned him over and on close examination he appeared merely unconscious. I took that he would be in danger of dying from exposure and thirst. His face, somehow

familiar looking, was torn with bits of sand, what in my estimation must have been some unnatural scourging. I poured into his mouth the remainder of my skin. He was clad in chainmail, so he had been perhaps an armsman, or perhaps one of the Edolunt riders who patrol the furthlands, having been accosted by bandits. Nay, for bandits surely would have stripped him of his mail. I pulled him up off the ground and slung him over the donkey. when we finally reached town I brought him to the local physician.

After he had been nurtured to stable health and returned to full consciousness, from his bed he told the physician and myself the following account of misadventure:

“A poor freeman, I had gone on foot to the Yezez desert on a certain financial enterprize with three other swordsmen from Ulthuring. “Gazalir” our kind are called by the locals, to rightly denigrate those tourists who seek Hermius’ treasure in the forbidden “Canyon of Hegemons”

The first night everything passed by well. I stood guard for part of the night and the others slept soundly. The second day we traveled a very long ways, and about noon we discovered ourselves to be traveling in repeating circles.

Certainly we were lost. Now that desert gets rugged in the North and there are no trails. The famous treasure of the ancient conqueror was said to be in a minor group of caves, hollows ‘neath some massive outcropping of rock which juts out of the sands in the shape of a sitting lion. All night I dwelt with delight on the fantastic rumours as I gazed wistfully into the bejeweled dome of stars above.

The next day we set out at dawn. After about two hours trek we spotted

some sort of wagon left on a plain of dessicated mud. Upon examination it turned out to be very disturbing. It was a drackettes wagon covered with torn skins that rested quietly in the still air, its wood not yet dried in the desert sun. They must have wandered, lost off the track, and ended up in the pathless waste and it seemed that the team had abandoned its hitch violently. we came unto it and searched through. Bolgoth skeletons and kobold carcasses were huddled together. There was piled treasure within, as much as could be loaded into the wagon: mostly copper coins, but some silver chalices, and a ring of impure gold, a silver hilt shortsword with ruby studs on the scabbard, a gilded visor-helm and considerable silver coinage, enough to share among us all for our troubles. I wagered that if the bolgrim had not found Hermius’ treasure, then surely they had raided the tomb of some other feudal lord long forgotten. The wagon could not be moved, so we began loading up our packs.

But as we did so, it seemed the carcasses were watching us with envy. What unhinged us the most was how the flesh of the bolgs and kobolds were somehow stripped to the bone, their very skin and muscle stripped off them. Further, they had died very recently, for there was still moisture in one of the chalices and the leather belts and boots were not dry and wrinkled, but fresh.

We filled up our extra bags with the rest of the substantial treasures, an added weight that would slow us down. My companions were gleeful with the find and unable to hold back grins, but it was nothing, really, to what the rumours of Hermius’ treasure promised. They reasoned that if we did not find the hidden horde we sought, (no one has in hundreds

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of years actually seen the treasure), then at least we would have something to show.

We went about an hourglass further in some direction, but finally turned back navigating by the declining sun. The sacks were too burdensome to continue on. By the end of the second day we were already voided of any droplet of water. We agreed that we would keep going back the next morning but set camp beneath the grey hills for one last cold night.

The cold did not last. When we awoke at sunrise there was a hot and torrid wind. We hurried to fold up our hides and ate no breakfast.

There were rumours about the taverns warning against something called "The Aerial One." It was supposedly a devilish phantom that guards some accursed treasure, (for there are thought to be many horde-tombs in the Canyon of Hegemons). It has the force to destroy flesh by sending deadly bits of arc-sand at highest velocities. What if such a tale might be true? Considering those de-fleshed kobolds we had seen...and they were huddled together in fear. "Why should our fate be any different then theirs?" I said. They agreed and we resolved to high-tail it out of there.

One of the companions, Abaro of Namaliel, had conveyed to me the legend in passing, a legend which he had heard from his days as an initiate of the Cult of the Veiled One, a bizarre eastern sect that he later escaped. Now I would to know more and interrogated him.

"If this entity exists and catches us, how shall we protect ourselves? Can we bargain with it?"

"There is no escape from the Aerial One," my companion responded. "No protection is there from air and its spirits,

ye fool. This is not a man, this is not flesh and blood that can be bargained with or to say, "Come, let us reason together." This is a spirit, a dread spirit invisible. Only God can protect, if you dare to believe that such a greater being could possibly exist, and if God does exist, then we may be assured that there are other things to be feared, things worse than death."

It was not long before wind became wilder, and then I looked back and there it was, a storm upon us, a huge black wall of swirling dust, tall as a mountain, rolling like a great wave. We had about ten minutes before it overtook us. It seemed that there would be no place to hide. we saw only empty terrain and dunes rolled out before us. Scrambling up a rocky sand-hill some forty feet high, loose gravel kept giving way under foot. we would be overtaken. We all had a very bad sense that this was no natural storm but indeed "the Aerial One," since the thundering and alien hissing sounds it made were terrifying. I will never forget them.

I pressed on up the hill as hard as my legs could work and looking back saw the two others struggling below on minor sand hills. I cast off my sword and other luggage including the gold treasure, shouting for them to do the same, "Cast off arms and all other luggage including the loot!" I warned, doing the same myself, but "retain sheilds for protection!" Somehow I attained the top of the hill and spotted a rock with minor cave openings large enough for men, about thirty feet down from the summit of the sand hill. Again I glanced back, but my companions had still not thrown off their gold-heavy rucksacks as they struggled, and so burdened by greed they climbed much too slowly as the colossal swirl of darkness began to gain upon them.

Then the storm was almost directly over us turning like a diabolic vortex. I swear that I spotted for a moment fiendish eyes peering at me from the maelstrom of dust. There was a large outcropping of rocks, the only solid area for many miles around, and we had been running for that, for earlier we passed by it and noted it. I leapt down the hill and dove into a cavernous overhang and covered my body with the round shield.

I don't know how long I was curled up in there, but it was not sufficient cover. The Darkness overcame me and I began to fear with dread for my very life. I thought that, even though there was nothing I could really do but hide, I could at least pray to Allfather. furious wind whipped about the cave with a sheer sound that only the most deadly forces could make. "Could I not just give up, end our lives now somehow, before pain," Bits of arc-sand began to sting my flesh fiercely and it seemed that my lower legs, uncovered by the shield, were burning up in the most horrific way.

"Deliver me into the land of my forefathers, hear me o merciful and holy life in the beyond, have I not offered thanksgiving before your altars?" Then, upon a sudden an inward voice spoke unto me.

"Child of him who is enthroned, thy cry of prayer has come unto to the Allfather..." And now upon me came both a warmth and a sort of spiritual power and overtook me like divine enthusiasm, for I began to speak in a voice not mine.

"I command you, spirit, submit to the will of your conqueror or endure His utterance" The winds began to slaken off somewhat at first, but then sped up again some, as if in a bestial rage it thought that

it might make war. Flashes of lightning thrice split the chaotic air. Then the wind died down again slowly diminishing. After perhaps an quarter of an hour the vortex had ceased.

I came out rubbing my eyes and espied the dark cloud moving off to the western horizon. I experienced great pain in my legs and feet, and checking how fared my now mutilated feet. I was too weak from dehydration to stand anyway.

At least I was still alive, so I struggled and got up, and thanked the Allfather and made an oath that I would give a fine portion of my booty to the priests of the Kutaal.

After some looking around I crawled to find my ill-fated companions, nor did I recognize their bony white faces from which smiling lips had so recently hung, forming smiles so delighted by their fortunate finds, which presaged their demise. I could not carry their bony remains so I buried them to rest under one of the minor rock overhangs, and I reflected considering how much burning horror they must have endured. And as for me? How will I return crawling across those vast stretches of desert without even water?"

The overhang which had protected me had a crevasse within, which I just noticed, dropping several feet into a cavern. I crawled down inside and dropped to the sandy floor, lo, into a pool of subterranean water. Light poored in from the shaft and all around me was glittering innumerable golden and silver treasures of ornate beauty impossible to describe, including gems and stones of rarest degree, and every manner of precious jewelry and artistry from all over the Illystran continent. It was stretched out into farther reaches of the

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cavern. This was the treasure of Hermius. I gazed at it for some time and finally concluded that, even if I could carry something back, it could not grant me the gift that Allfather had. Aye, water was the treasure that noble ghost of Hermius preserved for me, the greater treasure indeed in these parts. I filled my canteen and crawled out. Then I began crawling home."

So he finished his account.

Recognition now came to me. I had been wondering about this person who told the story. Indeed, I now saw through the disguise. This was no young man. Rather it was a young woman trained in the arts of battle. She had shorn her hair short and taken on a masculine garb. She had done this in order to be counted with warriors and take some leadership of them who had accompanied her.

"Surely, Phaedra," I said with a smile, "You could have found me and brought me along, and perhaps avoided such troubles in the search for your brothers. How long have you been training in the art of combat?"

"For three years, and since no wars came to Ayr's I was allowed to take leave of the soldiery. This desert was my first taste of reckless adventure. If only you had been there professor, perhaps those others might have been saved."

"I was unable to save thy brothers from the mantis." I reminded her. "Thy companions most likely would not have been saved in the end, overwhelmed not so much by the demon as by their own greed. Nevertheless, now ye see that thy calling is not so much to be a warrior, but rather another call is given."

"Another calling...? All I hope is for my kin, my own brothers, if only to know of their safety...or even just to bury them."

"The intermundian caverns are vast. It is very likely that they entered some time-distortion and will not surface for years. I believe they may indeed be alive, but ye shall not be united with them in this life. Thou shall not, of course, be convinced of this, so ye will continue your search and finally enter into the lower world. So it is that the calling thou hast been given is appropriate, though it must be tempered with prudence. remember that Zachred's duty is a great one, for his battle-hand will be greatly needed by the elf queen Ariandol, especially because, as I have of recent heard, the wrymhels have found a collection of dragon eggs that were preserved from the second world in the state of suspended animation.

"Calling?" She wondered, perplexed, rising from her bed.

"Thy encounter with the Aerial One has intimated much to me. Thou art called to be a Banisher."

"A Banisher?" She said with alarm.

"Indeed it is so."

"I thought that only a cleric, such as an Ammouric Selva, could be a Banisher."

"Usually that is the case. There are however certain holy women of prayer that drive off demons, not by recitation and utterance of formulaic exorcism, but by their very chaste and prayerful presence! They are among the most effect of Banishers. Thy added ability at battle will also aid thee in thy voyage through the realms beneath."

So it was that such things came to pass and Phaedra became the powerful Banisher that she was called to be. Of her voyage in the intermundian caverns I have heard only fragmented reports, of her victories against trolls and bolgoth, and

that she has banished even Nephilim and Netherbeasts.

recorded the incident in his work *Oceanicon*, though it was no natural terror from which those rats fled.

## RATS

(*rodens immanis*) The main food source in the hollows and Underdyrth are rats. If thou find thyself low on food supply ye may hunt these creatures and slay them easily. They are nutritious and edible when cooked properly. Simply roast them in the fire coals along with their fur and do not bother to skin them. when they are well cooked, use a knife to shave off their charred fur and eat them like a sausage. rats can also be boiled along with underworld mushrooms and make for a tasty soup. (As far as selecting mushrooms, there are several that must be avoided, but by no means eat the red mushrooms). A combination of cavecats, snakes, and hungry goblins keep the rat population low, for if not, the entire Underdyrth would be overrun by them. Some areas there are, I must warn thee, where the rat population is very high, and huge swarms of rats destroy anything in there paths, for they are voracious eaters. Usually these areas have been marked out with a dead rat on a stake. Now if ye see a mass of rats coming toward thee and they swarm past thee, not even bothering to take a nibble off thy leather boot, quick turn and flee in the same direction as the rats and do not look back. Consider how many animals have a power of sense that has been closed to thy race, and these animals may sense an impending catastrophe, such as a cave-in, flood, or earthquake.

Rats are bold creatures, they do not know fear, and of all the creatures which I will discuss there is not one which would make a rat flee. Such fleeing rats I have never seen, but I have heard of this from others, notably Duke Ikonn who has

## GIANT RATS

(*rodens subterraneus terribilis*): Huge rats on the otherhand can be a problem, they are a constant nuisance because unlike normal rats they attack humans on sight hoping for a dinner. They can be the death of the man who, in his reckless battle-pride, allowed his body to take crippling wounds. They have a voracious appetite and will sniff out the proud man's wounds, for they have no fear and are skilled and tough fighters, some as large as sheep. Try to scare the rat off with thy torch by striking it once solidly between the eyes and it will usually go away. If more than one attacks thee, ye must smite each on the head sternly with thy weapon, and they will likely seek their meals elsewhere. If thou end up at the bottom of some pit with a broken leg and a pack of giant rats find thee, make peace with thy maker and do thy best.

## GREAT BAT

(*Vespertillio Intermundiae*): There is a creature not unlike the rat but with featherless wings, and less vile to behold, and this is commonly called the bat, or in regulian tongue vespertillio. Thou need harbor no fear of these, since it is said that they are excellent flyers in the dark and feed on little bugs.

Batwing is said to be excellent for making sacks and gloves. Wizards also value bats, for some adepts are able to extract hidden fluids in the bat's brain and produce the faculty of dark vision and so concoct a potion. To hunt these strange creatures is very difficult for they are so