

INTRODUCTION

This *Risus* adventure module is for the Game Master's eyes only. Players should *stop reading immediately* unless they intend to cheat, in which case they should tattoo the maps in discreet locations on their bodies (send relevant JPEGs to Cumberland Games). Fair warning: *everything* past this sentence is a spoiler.

Toast of the Town is an adventure module for *Risus: The Anything RPG* in traditional-fantasy mode, designed for a single session of play. *Toast of the Town* runs well for as many as six Player Characters and a Game Master, but works best with small groups (2-4 PCs), or as a one-on-one adventure with a single Player Character. *Toast* plays well with nearly any power-level: maxed-out clichés and magic toys will have their uses, but won't erase any of the adventure's core challenges, which are social, ethical, moral and logistical. The adventure's core *delights* are those of character interaction, environment-exploration, and creative problem-solving.

The adventure's tone leans toward the *pulpy* and *heroic*. There is a *villain* with *victims*, and the PCs should be the sort motivated by a desire to help innocents in need. Purely mercenary delvers might be tempted by the potential for secondary rewards, or driven by curiosity, but the adventure's *immediacy* depends on a streak of empathy in the group, even if they tuck it under the surface in that scoundrel-with-a-heart-of-gold way. *Toast of the Town* is not specifically *comedic*; it's *swashbuckly*, where comedy elements will emerge from the eccentricity of the townsfolk or the general madness of Player Characters. The basic situation is, honestly, a bit grim.

The events of *Toast of the Town* stand alone, but also provide the foundation for the *Saint August* series of modules, each set within reach of the same town, and the same mountain lake (Lake Araghost; see page 25). These modules may be enjoyed independently, or linked to provide a campaign foundation.

ADVICE FOR THE GM

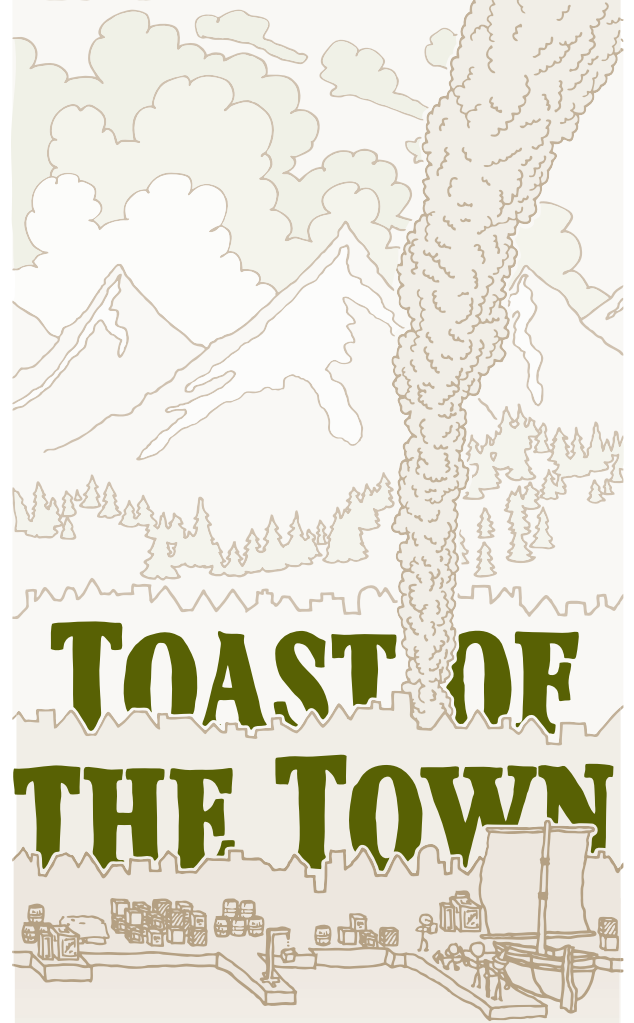
Toast of the Town drops the Player Characters into a volatile situation due to erupt within a span of *hours*, giving them little time to get their bearings and bring their abilities to work on the problem. Without their interference, this night will see innocents killed, and an entire town made party to the slaughter.

Toast has been designed with an eye toward the needs of beginning Game Masters. The number of factions is small and the situation is simple ... but it plays with some *perilous* ingredients, including the self-worth of townsfolk who consider themselves decent and fair, and the ego of a man determined to maintain his own importance. Success with *Toast of the Town* will depend on immersing the players *quickly* in the scenario, allowing them to get up to speed, and then watching them tear loose. This is a *nonlinear* adventure, with no set "path" to follow, and no set ending. The PCs must gather their wits and resources, and forge a conclusion that satisfies their own need for justice.

Read the entire module before attempting to run it for your group! This is a simple adventure, but a smooth, well-paced run requires a clear knowledge of its parts, including several tools included to help you manage the pacing, tension, and dangers to thrilling effect.

RISUS

THE ANYTHING RPG



Risus Module SA1

The town looks peaceful enough, but there's a pillar of smoke from last night's fire, burned corpses from the wreckage, and a demon strung up against the church in the market square. Dolemon Drake, a local hero, gives the call to all brave souls to join him in eradicating the devilish creatures infesting the sewers. Will our heroes join in Drake's noble fight?

CUMBERLAND
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Toast of the Town and Uresia: Grave of Heaven

The *Saint August* adventures are set in Cumberland's "house" fantasy setting, *Uresia: Grave of Heaven*. You can read more about Uresia in its own world-book; it's one of the niftiest things Cumberland has for sale (and there's a tricked-out version of *Risus* called *Uresius: Grave of Anything*). However, *Toast of the Town* and its sibling adventures stand alone, and require zero familiarity with heaven's grave. They're all set near a semi-remote mountain lake, designed so both the adventures and background material will re-socket neatly into *any* fantasy world of the Elfy-Dwarfy, You-Meet-In-A-Tavern variety. If you like this module, you'd *probably* like *Uresia*, but it's not necessary: you need only *Risus* to play.

Major NPCs, Minor NPCs

In this module, important Non-Player Characters (like Dolemon Drake) get chunky "stabslocks," organized according to their adventure role. One NPC might have his clichés followed by an examination of his *morality* ... while another might have his *obsession with stamp-collecting* highlighted in the same space.

Less important NPCs (like Alderman Calway, next page) don't get their own boxes, and they're typically assigned a *single* cliché as they're introduced. RPGs are, however, a delightful chaos, and it's often the case that NPCs *meant* to hurry through a scene become snared into a larger role just because the PCs like talking to them, or because a throwaway detail takes on expanded meaning in someone's imagination and/or harebrained scheme.

New GMs sometimes struggle *against* this process. Don't! Rolling with unexpected curves is one of the purest joys of being the Game Master. When a minor NPC suddenly becomes more important than anyone imagined in advance, *something awesome just happened*, something that doesn't happen in other forms of fiction or other kinds of games. It's a great opportunity to strut your stuff by bringing that character to life. Don't be shy about adding new clichés, personality traits, concerns, ulterior motives ... whatever you feel they need. Be true to what you know about them, but be open to discovering more in the heat of play.

Module Target Numbers

Target Numbers vary by *cliché*, so the numbers offered within a module will typically be attached to a cliché *category* to provide a baseline. For example, a lock might be described as "TN 8 for a burglar," which means TN 8 for the cliché "Burglar" or anything similar, like "Cat-Burglar" or "Thief" or "Second-Story Man" or "James Bond." It also means a *lower* (more favorable) TN for a cliché like "Locksmith" (because a for-real-actual locksmith will be even *better* with locks than a thief or spy) and a *higher* (less favorable) TN for a cliché like "Latin Lover" and an even *higher* higher one for "Violinist" or "Jack of All Trades" or "Cake Decorator." As always, *any* cliché can try *anything*, but the TN changes to suit (often dramatically), based on how distant the cliché stands from the challenge.

TROSTIG: ARRIVAL BY WATER

The following Groovy Boxed Text (or some improvised substitute) should be sufficient to set the scene and get things quickly in gear:

You've been adventuring around the High Lakes, the realm of the Fog Barons, where you've delved a few ruins, solved a few mysteries, and helped the locals. As the winter closes in, they've begun to extend their grateful hospitality: warm food, strong drink, and good beds. For a time, you've enjoyed these gifts, and rested.

Early this morning, an exhausted courier delivered a troubling missive, interrupting your rest. You stand now on the creaking deck of a trader's boat. Around you, Lake Araghast is glassy and black, fog clinging in scraps to the surface. Ahead, you see the warm lights of a town, Trostig, as the sailors row you in. A faint column of smoke rises from some rooftops in the distance, as if a blaze has just been extinguished. You can't help but worry that the trouble you fear has already begun.

Your players may want to know what sort of thing drew them from warm beds and put them on the lake in icy weather. Hand them a copy of the letter they received this morning, written on the back of a map:

My old friend,

I've heard you are near the High Lakes, so I will send this note of welcome by the finest courier coin can hire. Do not miss a chance to see Trostig, finest town of the mountains, where I live peaceably as a servant to Dolemon Drake, a skilled explorer and hero to many here. He is a man you should know. Remember Roquetal? Dolemon is every inch a gentleman such as he. I serve Drake in his hall, and in a shop he maintains in town, selling his potions and incense – treasured secrets he won from the mystics of the east.

In the evenings, I all but live at the tavern of the Headless Horse, right on the town square, across from the Temple of the Ellantines. Should you visit, find me there, merry in my cups. Maxwell, master of the tavern, knows me well, and he will be a friend to you, as he has to me.

Come and raise a glass, my friend, and remember the good times!

Yrs, Lionel Draeger

Drakeshall, Trostig

Select a PC to be the addressee for this note – the character who knew Lionel in years gone by – and when presenting the letter, refer to that player directly as the recipient. Lionel has a long history of working for families across the kingdom as a carpenter, animal-keeper and more, so nearly any type of PC might know him from having worked alongside him in his labors, or (for wealthier characters) as a family servant from their own house. Look to the end of the module for printable versions of the letter and map.

Messing With the Missive

If you've got some time to spare, doll up a replacement for Lionel's letter using the *blank* version provided, personalizing it to the recipient. "My old friend" works fine in a pinch, but something more personal is fun to make, and will have more impact.

There are two things out of order. First, it's *highly* unusual for anyone, even someone rich and powerful (and Lionel is neither) to send such a casual greeting by "the finest courier coin could hire," but that's clearly what Lionel did. The **Letter-Carrier [3]** (a young girl, Penelope) was fit and fierce, and faced winter weather to deliver the note at its greatest speed without carrying notes or parcels for any other client. Like any dutiful courier, she knew nothing of the letter's contents, but confirmed she was hired two days ago at the Headless Horse in Trostig, by an older man named Lionel. Then, she rode boats from lake-village to lake-village, asking questions and following the PCs' recent reputation, until she could deliver the letter to the proper hands.

Second and most crucially, Lionel's letter makes reference to "Roquetal," who the PC *will* remember ... as a scoundrel who murdered Lionel's dog out of spite, years ago, and who bragged openly of his habits as a rapist and robber in his army days. By comparing Dolemon Drake to Roquetal, Lionel is clearly making a cautiously coded, but unmistakable, cry for help.

Step backward in time for a moment, if need be, to go over any last-minute preparations the PCs might have wanted to make before embarking (stocking up on healing potions, that kind of thing). The courier, Penelope, is not with them. After delivering the letter, she took a room in the town or village where she found the PCs, and fell quickly and soundly to sleep. When you're confident the PCs understand the concern and are ready to begin, they reach the town of Trostig:

In very little time, the boat is butting against the dock. Around you, the sailors attend to their business, and the town beckons, nestled against a sharp rise of pine-wooded mountainside.

A man in official-looking dress and a drooping mustache approaches the boat. He takes no interest in the sailors, who obviously know him. His attention is fixed on *you* – the newcomers.

The official-looking fellow is Alderman Calway, a friendly local who'll take their names and ask them questions about their weaponry and/or magical trappings. He's legally empowered to summon the Watch to confiscate things that seem dangerous, but unless the PCs are stomping around like destructive idiots he'll feel no need to. "Adventurers" are a rare sight in Trostig, welcomed for their spending-money and stories of distant lands. He's glad to see them.

Calway's only notable Cliché is **Well-Meaning Local Bureaucrat (3)**. He can explain to the PCs, if asked, that there was indeed a fire overnight, which destroyed a couple of buildings, but the blaze was brought under control. He'll be a bit more *reluctant* to admit that the



fire was caused by an infestation of demons living beneath the streets (and that there's to be a gathering of brave men in the town square, to go and battle them), but he'll ultimately offer that information if asked, because he recognizes the PCs as people who might be able to *help*.

Calway isn't dishonest; he's just accustomed to being the "welcome to our fair town; enjoy our baked goods and charming folkways" kind of guy, and not the "welcome to our fair town; we're infested with demons who set us on fire" kind of guy. He's adjusting poorly to the change. Like most of the locals, he regards Dolemon Drake as a hero.

Expanding The Arrival



By default, the adventure begins close to the action: the PCs are on the lake, Trostig looms ahead, and the arrival of Lionel's letter has *already happened*. Owing to the nature of Lionel's warning, the PCs begin the adventure *aware* that Dolemon Drake is a problem to be dealt with. This sets both the mood and the pace, and it's the best way to run the adventure as a one-shot (in its basic form, the adventure plays through in approximately 3 hours, making it ideal for convention or game-shop runs).

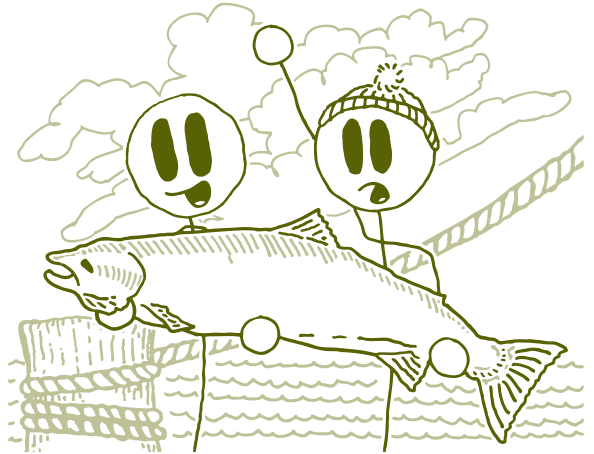
When inserting *Toast of the Town* into a campaign, there are many details you may want to change. For example, the letter could arrive at the *end* of the PCs' prior adventures, to establish where the next session might lead. The journey to Trostig, too, could be fraught with bonus peril and/or inconvenience: a reluctant boat-captain who must be convinced, a cutthroat robber aboard the vessel, hostile beasts or mournful ghosts from the depths of the lake.

To change the tone of the adventure, and to make it much more difficult, *omit the letter entirely*. The PCs simply arrive in Trostig in the course of their travels, and the first hint of adventure is the smoke from the recent fire, and the demon hanging in the square. This *subtraction* will *expand* the adventure into a dangerous mystery, because the PCs must learn the hard way that Drake is no hero, and that Drake's call for help in exterminating the "demonic threat" is bogus. Similarly, since they won't be known to Maxwell, they'll have no easy ally in the town. To keep such a scenario from being *entirely* bleak, make good use of Firemaster Yosh (page 17) to establish that not *everyone* trusts Drake so blindly. Without *some* kind of fair warning, the PCs could end up party to the slaughter of the innocent Huzrael. This kind of change is for expert gamers who know each other well.

Trostig: The Nickel Tour

Along the shore of a mountain lake, nestled against the rising rocks and evergreens, stands the prosperous town of Trostig, a market and harbor for a community of smaller lakeside villages. It's the seat of a barony, and home to a kind of secular "monastery" for alchemists and mystics. If you're running *Toast of the Town* in heaven's grave, Trostig is in south Rinden, in the Saint August Mountains, on the shore of Lake Araghast. If you're running it in another world, it's wherever it needs to be (see Adapting the Module, page 30). For more on Trostig, see page 26 (for a fancy town map to hand the players, see the end of the module). Don't let the potential complexity of a town setting trouble you; only a handful of locations are crucial to the adventure:

- **Trostig Square:** The heart of town. This is where Dolemon Drake rouses the locals to his cause, where an innocent "demon" hangs waiting to die, and where the PCs are likely to seek shops and taverns (including the Headless Horse, to which they've been invited). See the Trostig Square map on page 5.
- **The Headless Horse:** Max Holligan's tavern is a full-fledged inn, and might end up serving as a safe "home base" during the adventure. See page 8.
- **Drakeshall:** The home of Dolemon Drake (adventurer, entrepreneur, gentleman) and his servants. He's the villain, and this is his house – a stately manor in the exclusive end of town, on a rise overlooking Trostig proper. Drakeshall consists of the main house, a small stable, and a kitchen building (for more, see page 19). Beneath the kitchen, a secret tunnel leads to:
- **The Nest:** Trostig sits atop several tunnels that predate the town. Many of these have been repurposed for sewage, storage, and irrigation, but they also contain *secret chambers*, some of which Drake discovered as a curious teenager. One such chamber has been his private hiding place for years. Now, he's using it to house a family of otherworldly people called the Huzrael. Because his secret is beginning to spring leaks, he intends to lead an angry mob into the sewers, expose this "nest of demons," and have the Huzrael slaughtered by the townsfolk. The Huzrael are innocents, and the useful magic oil Drake takes credit for is really *their* creation. See page 12 (and the maps on page 13 & 20). *The central goal of this adventure is for the PCs to learn of the Huzrael, and rescue them.*
- **Remnants of the Fire:** When the PCs arrive in Trostig, they can see a pillar of thin smoke still rising from a quarter deep into the town. Overnight, just before sunrise, a blaze destroyed one building and damaged others, and some townsfolk were killed before the fire was extinguished. Drake is blaming the fire on the Huzrael, presenting it as evidence that the town is under attack by demons. The creature strung up in the town square is one he claims to have captured while fighting them amidst the blaze. See the section beginning on page 9.
- **Temple of the Ellantines:** The burned corpses of those killed in the fire – Lionel Draeger and two friends he worked with, Emilia Green and Dan Lakewood – are in the care of the Ellantine clergy, preparing them for funerals and cremation. The PCs might go there to examine the corpses (see page 11).



Casting Call

Trostig is a prosperous trading-town of more than five thousand souls, but only a dozen or so are critical to the adventure, and one of them – Lionel – is already dead. The following remain:

- **Max:** Maxwell Holligan (page 8) is the owner and tavern-keep at the Headless Horse. He was Lionel Draeger's best friend in town, and Lionel shared secrets with him. Maxwell will be a true friend and ally to the PCs, to whatever extent he can. Poor Lionel is dead (burned in last night's fire) before the PCs arrive, but he was very recently in the employ of:
- **Dolemon Drake:** Local hero, celebrity adventurer, and the sole source of an amazing "alchemical" creation he learned in the mystic east ... which is to say, a con-man with an imprisoned family cranking out his product in a secret sweatshop beneath the streets. See page 18.
- **Boraz Gravas:** Dolemon's right-hand man and house steward (page 20) is every bit as capable as Dolemon himself, and he's in on all the nasty plans. If Dolemon falls, Boraz will rise to take his place as the adventure's chief problem-child. He helped murder Lionel and the others on Drake's orders, but in truth, he co-authored those orders himself.
- **The Huzrael Family:** Ten "demons" in all, they're the victims in need of help. They were stranded in the woods years ago, summoned from their homeland, and they lurked in the forest for some time on their own. A couple of years ago, they saved Dolemon Drake's life, and Drake convinced them he could "thank" them by helping them earn social acceptance. Instead, he kept them a secret, and made them his prisoners and slaves. See page 14.
- **Firemaster Yosh:** A wild card at the edge of the game, Yosh *isn't* crucial to the adventure, but keep him in mind as though he were, since he's a valuable pacing tool for the Game Master. He's one of the leaders and teachers of the alchemists at Purewater Academy (page 17), with a professional interest in Drake's apparent skill as an untrained master of emerald-smoke "alchemy." Since he's one of the few prominent locals *suspicious* of Drake, he can become a useful ally to the PCs. He can also, if need be, help nudge the PCs in constructive directions.

LEADS, LAYERS & LOCALES

Beyond the opening set-up, there's no scene-by-scene structure to follow. Once the PCs are standing at the docks, they're on their own. They begin with some clear leads, which can in turn lead them deeper and deeper into the adventure.

The most obvious lead is the Tavern of the Headless Horse (page 8) ... and the most direct path there is right down Market Street and into the square, which will expose them immediately to the sight of Hirash hanging high in the scaffolding. A second clear lead is the column of smoke, marking the remnants of last night's blaze (page 9). Lionel's letter also refers to Drakeshall (page 19) as his home, and some players might notice the inverted mark at the letter's bottom ("Mollis," indicating the scrivener, page 7).

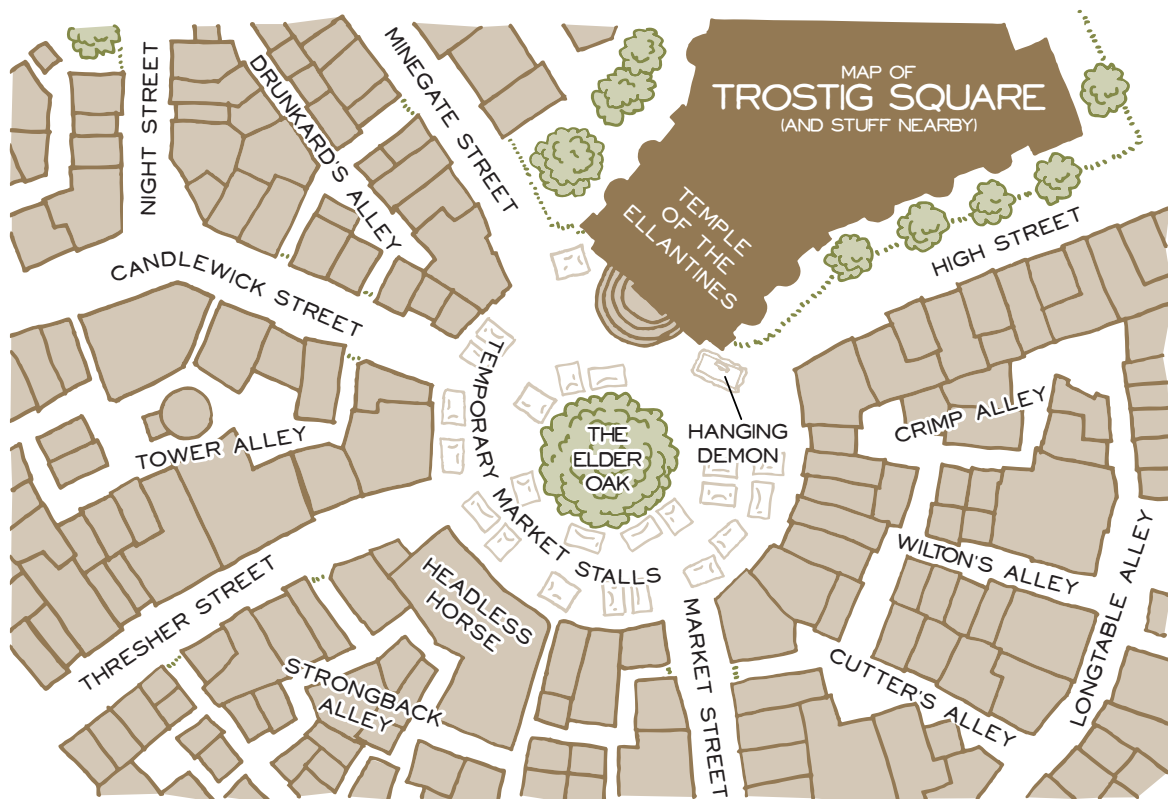
Alderman Calway, as the first NPC voice of Trostig, can offer *additional* leads. He'll be happy to brag about Emerald Smoke, for example (page 30), reminding newcomer PCs to "be sure and sample Trostig's pride," which could lead them into any number of shops. He might also mention, in passing, the presence of the Purewater Academy (page 17), the town's enclave of alchemists ... and if he mentions that Emerald Smoke is made "by a secret process unknown even to our alchemists," the PCs might assume – correctly – that those alchemists are worth talking to. Given that the PCs might *look* like adventurers, Calway might hope they're heroic, and if he does, he'll urge them to the town square, where "Dolemon Drake has put out the call to all brave souls to help our town with an infestation most dire." Cagey parties might play the "volunteer heroes" angle for all it's worth.

Trostig Square

The town square (see map below) offers direct access to the tavern of the Headless Horse (page 8), the Ellantine temple (page 11), assorted shop-fronts, an ever-changing crowd of locals, and temporary stalls hawking food and simple crafts. Ordinarily, the looming edifice of the church, along with the Elder Oak (a single, massive tree in the center of the square), are the first things to attract a visitor's attention, but today, they're competing with a more distressing sight: a freshly-constructed stage and scaffolding, where a demonic creature hangs by his bound wrists, awaiting execution. Burly swordsmen stand guard to keep the crowd clear of the stage. The guards and random locals don't know it, but the creature's name is *Hirash*.

Hirash hangs very high above the square (a full-grown man standing on the stage, reaching upward, could touch his feet, but only just). The burly swordsmen guarding him are **Burly Swordsmen (3)**, and there are as many of them as there are PCs. They are, professionally, town guardsmen, but they've been hand-picked for their admiration of, and loyalty to, Dolemon Drake. They aren't privy to any of Drake's secrets: they buy into the bogus story Drake and Boraz are spreading around (see below). If the PCs approach them politely, they'll invite the PCs to come back at sundown to join the righteous cause of clearing out the "infestation of demons" in the sewers. If the PCs are rude, they'll be rude right back – with steel, if need be.

Everyone here knows the same basic version of the "hanging demon" story: Last night, there was a fire on Batterman Street, at Drake's incense shop, where a small pack of these demons emerged from the cata-



Hirash

Description: The tallest of the Huzrael family (page 14), Hirash is the second-oldest male (though still quite young), and shoulders more guilt than he should for their predicament. Visually, he's an ordinary Huzrael, though at the moment he's also visibly and thoroughly beaten (his Clichés operate at a *single* die each until he's healed, when they operate at all). His eyes are swollen half-shut, he can barely speak, and he's hanging high on a scaffold where he's meant to be killed sometime after sunset. At ground level, amid the merry noises of a market crowd, his weak and rasping whispers go unheard.

Clichés: Self-Effacing Huzrael Mason (3), Reluctant-But-Determined Hunter (3)

What He Wants: In the short term, Hirash wants to live. He wants to see his fellow Huzrael again, most especially his mate, Jaina. His long-term wants are more convoluted, and potentially troublesome for the PCs. He feels responsible for basically *anything* that goes wrong among the Huzrael, and he feels an overwhelming need to prove himself to them (even though they do everything they can to let him know he already has). If the PCs can save him from execution, they may *also* need to save him from throwing his life away on self-destructive heroics.

What He Knows: Drake and Boraz bragged to Hirash that "his little friend Lionel" had been murdered, and he's despairing since he knows Lionel had been the Huzrael's greatest hope among the townsfolk. Beyond this, his part in the general timeline (page 24) and the knowledge implied by his Clichés, he knows what the other Huzrael know (page 13).

Troubles and Limitations: Hirash is an empathetic, moral fellow ... but he's also terrified, desperate, and humiliated, which is eating away at his better judgment. He'd never cross the line to cruelty, but he's at the point where, were he granted an *opportunity* of vengeance against Drake, he might not stop himself from being very brutish and childish about it. If that comes to pass, and nobody stops him, he'll either spend his life regretting it or simply (in the short term) spend his life.

Backstory: Back home, Hirash was a tile-mason, a daydreaming craftsman with nary a thought of bloodshed. When he and the others were left on their own in an alien forest, he and Jaina (page 16) stepped forward to become the group's hunters and *de facto* protectors. Since then, he's drawn blood many times, both for the hunt and to defend the Huzrael from attackers ... but *building*, not killing, is his nature.

combs beneath town. Drake (along with his faithful steward, Boraz Gravas) responded swiftly, driving the demons back into the tunnels and extinguishing the blaze. Drake captured one of the demons (Hirash, now hanging from the scaffold) and he's putting out the call for brave citizens to join him in exterminating the demonic threat beneath the streets, this very same night.

This is the story Drake and Boraz have been spreading, a calculated falsehood (see pages 9-10 for a more elaborate version). It's spreading nicely, and it's already beginning to sprout some embellishments and pet theories.

Many suppose the demons struck the incense shop because Drake's products are "instruments of purest good health," and thus *obviously* abhorrent to creatures of icky diseased nasty evil. Drake and Boraz never bothered dreaming up any kind of rationale. The townsfolk, because they *believe*, are busy spackling the gaps for them.

Boraz in the Square

At any given time during the afternoon, there's a 50-50 chance that Boraz Gravas (see Drakeshall, page 20) is here in the square, overseeing a few **Workmen** (2) on last-minute construction details on the stage/scaffolding. Boraz will pay the PCs no mind unless they draw attention to themselves. Adventuring-types are rare in Trostig, but not *that* rare, and travelers are a common sight in the square. If the PCs approach Boraz (he stands out from the crowd with an obvious air of authority) he'll behave much as the burly swordsmen do in general terms ... but he'll also gently grill the PCs for information if they do *anything* to trigger his suspicious nature. He knows the truth about Hirash (and many related truths) but he's not about to share that information: he's the author of many of the relevant lies.

Joining the Mob

Very slow PCs might be interested in answering the heroic call for brave souls to gather and slaughter the demon infestation (to be led by Dolemon Drake; see page 22 on the gathering). Quicker PCs might be interested in *pretending* to answer the call, to infiltrate the ranks. The process for either is the same: express interest to the guards standing on duty, or to Boraz Gravas if he's around (he is, about half the time).



It won't take *any* guile to convince the guards. They'll happily invite any volunteers to come gather at sunset, and to bring whatever arms they own, and whatever skills they possess, and any like-minded friends they know. Simple as that.

Boraz Gravas won't be *suspicious*, exactly (unless the PCs say or do something idiotic), but he's more likely to question the PCs a little about their motives or expectations, since they're clearly from out of town, and thus might expect hard coin (which isn't being offered; Drake plans to pay the volunteers with a wine-soaked *feast* when the smoke clears).

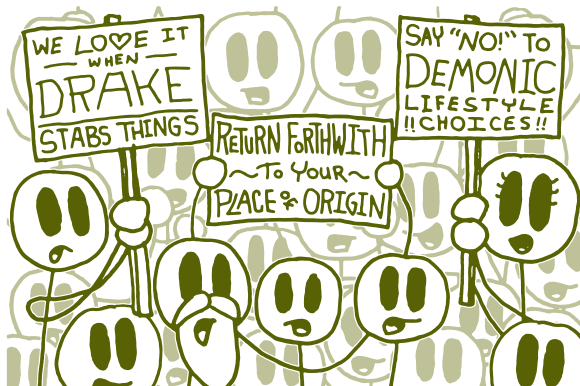
Play Boraz as cagey, asking smart questions, but ... if the PCs claim simply to be heroes seeking to do good, he'll peg them as idiots and invite them cheerfully. If they present themselves as mercenaries, he'll try to size them up for worth. If they seem confident but not brilliantly intelligent, he may even offer them some coin on Drake's behalf, to keep appearances (he knows the threat isn't real, so neither is the advertised *need* for capable fighters).

If the PCs seem too bright, *that* will ring some alarm bells with Gravas, who knows the *last* thing they need is nosy, *intelligent* adventurers snooping around. If the PCs play their cards without caution, they could label themselves opponents of Drake long before meeting him.

Hawkers and Citizens

The town is a *little* nervous about the revelation that their sewers are "demon-infested," but Dolemon Drake's *bona fides* as a hero are well-established, so mostly they're just excited by the impending *event* of the heroic Drake, leading a band of brave townsfolk and guardsmen down into the dark to save everyone. With Hirash strung up above the square, and the news that Drake will host a big gathering at sundown (complete with thrilling tales of danger, and a demon execution!), the square is bustling to bursting. Food-vendors and other small-time hawkers (as well as pickpockets, gamblers, street-preachers and more) have descended here, including those who normally haunt some other corner of town. The crowd gets denser, rowdier, and happier as the day goes on.

What this means for the PCs is (A) the rest of the town is a bit quieter, and they can skulk more effectively there, if skulking is what they're into and (B) the square is a one-stop-shop for nearly anything they might seek, whether that's goods, information, or the guards' attention.



Hirash Heroics

Take special note of the "What He Wants" text for Hirash! He's a good guy and he loves his fellow Huz ... possibly to the point of making some *stupid* decisions to prove himself, especially if Jaina is watching. Hirash *needs* to be the Big Heroic Protector, but he feels he's *failed* everyone, so if the adventure needs some added peril, a healed Hirash can become a well-meaning bit of trouble, endangering himself in misguided attempts to restore his self-image. The other Huzrael, for their part, are grateful for Hirash's many sacrifices, and most love him in absolute terms. He just doesn't see himself as clearly, or as favorably, as they do. Hirash's self-image problems are a mirror of Dolemon Drake's: they're *both* infected to the bone with concerns about how others see them. Hirash is just, when it comes down to it, a better man than Drake, and more likely to *self-destruct* than behave cruelly to others. He'd never become a *villain* ... but if he's pushed into the wrong emotional corner, he could become a *problem*.

Scribe David Mollis

Eagle-eyed players might notice the scrivener's mark at the bottom of Lionel's letter, and seek out the man who penned it. Mollis is a humble **Scrivener** (2), earning his living with a portable writing-desk he tucks under one arm, mostly by reading and writing letters for those who can't read and write (or for those like Lionel, who technically can, but feel self-conscious about their meager grasp of it). He works the town square, or sometimes down Market Street. He nearly lost his life to Summer Fever (page 30), and treatments of emerald incense are what cured him, so he thinks Dolemon Drake is the best thing since pickled awesome. Lionel kept him in the dark about the meaning of things like the "Roquetal" reference, so if the PCs seek him out, he can confirm that he did the job, but his perspective is skewed, and he'll just feel terribly sorry that Dolemon Drake lost a loyal servant to those wretched, horrible demons.

Player Curveballs vs Module Text

A note (mainly) for new GMs: *Toast of the Town* takes place in a busy, populated environment. The essentials are all here, along with just enough digression to give a *sense* of the rest. Using these, you must bring the whole to life for your players, who aren't obliged to focus on matters the module details explicitly! They will (if you're *lucky*) concoct elaborate, unexpected plans involving a minstrel troupe, three sacks of beans, a blind fisherman and a dancing bear, at which point you must decide (in an *instant*, as if you've *always* known) if there's a minstrel troupe, blind fisherman and dancing bear to be had (Trostig explicitly has beans; see page 28) and if so, how difficult it might be to secure their services and/or costumes. *Don't stop the game to search the module for dancing bears*. Instead, be confident that you know *your* version of Trostig best, and that you'll make the dancing-bear call based on what will give your players the best time: the best chances to solve problems their own way, to show off their abilities and interests, to feel the thrill of danger, and to learn this town that you're building before their grateful eyes.



Tavern of the Headless Horse

Once upon a time, it was the tavern of the Parading Palfrey, perhaps, or the Poncy Plug or Pirouetting Palomino. Once upon a more *recent* time, vandalism or a really acrobatic sword-fight nicked the top right off the beautifully-carved shingle hanging over the Town Square, and it's been the *Headless Horse* ever since.

Maxwell "Max" Holligan is the stout and merry owner, and he'll be one of the truest friends the PCs can find in town, just as he was to Lionel Draeger. His barmaids Edith, Adelle and Wendra wrangle the crowds of drunken louts while Max plays host.

The Headless Horse has all the amenities the players might seek from a cozy inn & tavern, complete with a coal-pit in the center of the room (providing warmth for the patrons, and for three bubbling cauldrons of lake-trout stew, beans, and hot water, respectively). There are trestle-tables, wine-barrels, casks of ale, bottles of mead, wheels of cheese, and assorted surfaces to slide across, get pinned to, or dance atop, as PC behavior might dictate. There are rooms for rent upstairs, and a cellar below. The fare is satisfying, but ordinary, and the drink selection is mostly local (or shipped up from lowland regions just beyond the mountains). If the PCs request some kind of rare Dwarven puts-hair-on-your-face super-stout or something, Max can only shake his head sadly and remind them how really good the local meads are ("This one here's the piss of rainbows, milord, and I means that.")

The Path to the Huzrael



Max will urge the PCs to meet the Huzrael trapped in the Nest as soon as possible, and he's even willing to personally guide them to a back-alley sewer grate in the Snarl (page 27) and point the way from there ("Straight up the north line, sir, and the second tunnel widdershins seems like a dead end, but it ain't ...") To add some roleplaying possibilities, Max might also recommend a catacombs-guide from among the Snarl guttersnipes (see Jackie Regal, page 16).

That the PCs must navigate *from* the inn *to* a nearby sewer-grate adds a layer of difficulty depending on how things go: if the PCs decide to sneak the Huzrael into a rented room, for example, they have to discreetly move them through the streets. It can be great fun seeing how they improvise the necessary discretion (buying lots of long cloaks, using magical illusions, and so on). If you're GMing on a generous schedule, this is a rich vein of expansion potential.

If you're keeping things tight, however, it may be desirable to *remove* all of the above. In that case, the Headless Horse *itself* has sewer access from its cellars (for a dignified approach) or through a privy (if *indignity* would be more entertaining).

Maxwell Holligan

Description: Portly, jolly, warm and caring. Max wears a leather apron and is usually hoisting one or more mugs or jacks of something with foam on it. Sometimes, he leads the whole tavern in song. It's that kind of inn, and he's that kind of innkeeper.

Clichés: Beloved Innkeeper With a Song in His Heart (3), Dedicated Mixologist Disappointed That His Customers Never Order Cocktails (2)

Lucky Shots: □□□□□□



What He Wants: Justice for Lionel. Fair dealings for his town (including the Huzrael, since Max understands, thanks to Lionel, that the Huzrael *are* part of his town). Peace. Food. Rest.

What He Knows: Max was Lionel's best friend and confidante, and he's privy to everything Lionel knew, including how to get to the Nest, and how to get *into* the Nest (page 12). Max was also approached by Boraz Gravas just an hour or so ago, and offered money to provide food and wine for a great feast to be held for "all heroes who lend their might to Drake's cause." Since Max knows about the Nest, he understands *why* Drake is hiring local innkeepers to provide the feast, instead of his own kitchen staff ... Drake's kitchen cellar at Drakeshall (page 20) is one of the two passages leading to the Huzrael, and certainly the passage he'd have used to smuggle Hirash to the surface.

What He's Got: A well-stocked inn and the will to use it. He's also got the affection of much of the town (not nearly in the same league as Drake's "town hero" cachet, but if the PCs can get Drake looking shaky, Max can be a real help if they try to engineer any big social changes, like getting the Huzrael accepted by the locals).

What His Limits Are: Max isn't brave in the physical sense; he'll wet himself (metaphorically, probably) if anyone draws a blade in anger, and do his best to stay on the sidelines, koshing the occasional ruffian over the head with a bottle of one of his less-expensive ales. Max is, however, willing to sacrifice his standing and reputation, and even his inn, if he's certain it'll contribute to the cause. In that sense, he's one of the bravest men in town.

Remnants of the Fire

Nobody's going to *recommend* the PCs visit the place where Lionel Draeger was murdered, because nobody's going to think it's a good idea to go poking into the ruins of a burned building. But that column of smoke, and the desire to see what happened to an old friend, might be powerful enticements.

Drake's Healing Oils and Incense stood proudly at the corner of Greenapple and Batterman Street until last night, when it burned to the ground, taking two neighboring shops with it. The blaze was caused by demons emerging from the catacombs. Thanks to Drake himself, and his right hand Boraz Gravas, the loss of life was minimized. Sadly, the dead were three of his own loyal servants, including his shopkeeper Lionel Draeger. Despite the grief and terror of such loss, Drake and Gravas were able to act quickly, evacuating neighboring buildings, fighting the invading demons (capturing one, currently strung up in the square) and even extinguishing the blaze with some help from a neighborhood bucket-brigade. It's no mystery why the demons would strike at Drake's shop: it's the home of a wondrous healing substance, after all ... inimical, no doubt, to their diseased, wicked natures.

That's the *story* the PCs will hear from anyone in the area. In truth, Drake and Gravas murdered three people and torched the shop themselves (see below). The ruins are still smoking heavily, much moreso than if the building *hadn't* contained potions and magical oils. In today's deathly-still air, the smoke ascends in a vertical column: thin, but visible for miles.

The shop itself is a charcoal shell, with unsafe remnants of pillars and walls, all of it half-crushed by the collapse of the uppermost floors. Many surfaces are coated in the remnants of shattered pots, bottles, bales and urns of magical ingredients. Some patches of wood are softly glowing, or sizzling, or humming. Magic-sensitive (or psychic) PCs might notice unpleasant sounds others can't hear.

A single **Guard** (2), named Bascombe, has been assigned to the site, and it's his job to keep anyone from wandering into the burned wreckage (partly because it's private, also because it's genuinely unsafe). Bascombe is as polite, reasonable, kindly and corruptible as any guardsman you'd ever meet, so he's easy to bribe. He'll be very firm, otherwise, that it's just not right for strangers to go poking around in there. This area has the following to offer:

Witnesses: Use the locals' accounts of last night to direct the PCs wherever is most constructive. If the PCs come here *first*, they'll learn a crucial bit of informa-

tion: Lionel Draeger, the old friend who sent them the coded warning, was among those killed in the blaze. He was well-liked, and his loss is mourned. The witnesses might be any sort of NPC you enjoy roleplaying: scrappy children who demand coin or tobacco for information, concerned elder citizens ruminating on the collapse of society, no-nonsense workmen with inexplicable Cockney accents, and so on.

Everyone here believes Drake's story and will repeat it, adding their own scraps of experience with the event. Most heard only noises, including Lionel's voice, unmistakable, chilling, crying out for help, and then ceasing. By the time anyone ran to the street to see what was going on, flickering firelight danced in the shop windows, with the silhouettes of battle, the popping sound of bottles exploding as the fire boiled their contents. Smoke began to pour, multicolored, from the door. It wasn't long before Drake was hauling the demon into the streets, beaten, while Gravas ran out calling for help with the fire, which was now roaring, consuming everything. The neighborhood answered the call, the neighbors were evacuated, and with everyone's cooperation, the blaze was ended.

Most NPCs will be eager to focus on their *own* contributions ... running for water-buckets, shouting sleepy neighbors awake so they wouldn't be caught in a blaze unawares, speaking folk-charms and prayers. Each is the star of their own recounting.

Most of the locals won't be sure what happened to the corpses of those who died in the fire, but the second or third local questioned (if the PCs press that issue) will know the answer: the remains of all three have been taken to the Temple of the Ellantines, to be prepared for their final rest.

Neighboring Ruins: Drake's little potion-shop was obliterated by the fire, but two neighboring structures suffered severe damage as well. These were Eversham's Fine Carvings and Hoovey's Hides and Leather, both high-end artisans. The craftsmen, their families, and their apprentices all lived in/above their respective shops, and everyone evacuated safely, but all three businesses have been destroyed for now. The Evershams and Hooveys will be rooming at Canning Hall (see sidebar, page 10) for the next few weeks, pending the rebuilding.

The Fumes: If the PCs want to poke into the wreckage itself, and they can get past Bascombe, the next challenge is dealing with the heavy, lingering fumes. Until very recently, this shop was stocked wall-to-wall with alchemical and other potent substances. The remnants of these are still *smoldering*, and most of the smoke is from *that*, rather than burned wood and plaster. The smoke can overcome anyone entering the ruins with dizziness, confusion,



Fire! Fire! Toasting Even More of the Town

In a moment of quiet, as the PCs explore the town, raise the sounds of alarm: there's a *new* fire! *The demons have struck again!*



Drake has a strong hand of cards where the Trostig townsfolk are concerned, and he *knows* that. But he's also a businessman, with rivals. He's also a Lothario – and there are women who've turned him down. He's also a gambler, and there are those he owes coin. He's also often a jerk, frankly, and there are those who've called him out on it, despite his “town hero” status. So, not everybody loves Drake, and he knows *that*. As long as he's stoking the fires of the town's fear, and as long as he's “cleaning house,” it might occur to him to *use any of these troublesome people as kindling*, either personally or (more likely) by the hand of Boraz Gravaz or some nameless thugs.

If there's any way Drake might have gotten wind of Max Holligan knowing what Lionel knew (or if Max, in the course of helping the PCs, has been making public noise against Drake) ... then the Headless Horse makes a fine target, and right across the square from the stage, no less. “How usefully dramatic,” Drake might muse to himself.

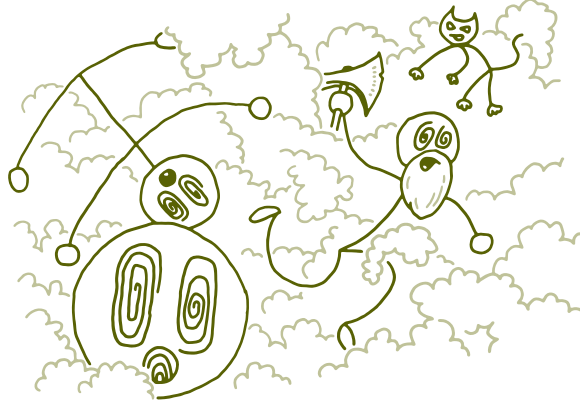
In any case, the pattern will be an echo of last night's event: a building roaring with flame, vague stories of demons that appeared and were driven back into the ground by brave defenders. Sorrow at the loss of innocent citizens burning to a crisp in the background. Bucket-brigades rallying the townsfolk and – perhaps – the PCs arriving on the scene. Some of the more frightened townsmen will begin shouting for an *immediate* descent into the sewers. Drake and his men will insist on calm ... *we cannot let these demons force our hand before we're ready!* The gathering in the square will take place, as scheduled. If the PCs investigate, they may discover: someone who died in the new fire was someone Drake didn't get along with. Hmm.

A new fire is an optional note of expansion. It can goose the pace, reinforce the adventure's themes, and open new opportunities for the PCs to demonstrate their talents ... but it can also (for some groups, in some runs) be needless padding. Keep your finger on the adventure's pulse, and trust your instincts.

Canning Hall

Also known as the “House of Small Guilds,” Canning Hall serves as home for several town craft-interests too small or poor to operate a proper guildhall of their own. This includes the Brothers of the Hide (the leatherworker's guild), the original founders of the hall, and a dozen they've made deals with since, all to adjust for the overspending of Arthur Canning (The King of Tanning), a leather-master who blew his fortune on the place 45 years ago, just to have a really big guildhall his guild *couldn't* afford. Tenants include the tiny Woodcarver's Guild, which is why both surviving families from the fire (page 9) are rooming here, pending the reconstruction of their shops and homes. Canning Hall is located in the Tradehouse Quarter, near the road leading out to Miner's Gate.

intense nausea and more. Rolls against difficult Target Numbers (TN 12-15 for most Clichés; TN 6-8 for those which might have special breathing or breeze-producing powers) might be necessary to explore safely, or it may do to treat the smoke as an opponent, and make working through it a matter for Combat against its **Weird Alchemical Fumes (4)** Cliché. At any rate, it's



a tool for the GM to underscore the special nature of the place, and to discourage (or *encourage*) the curiosity of investigating PCs.

The Fume Clue: If the PCs have already learned about Emerald Oil (page 30) and how it works, it *might* strike them as curious that the entire neighborhood (indeed, the entire town) didn't get pleasantly stoned when (presumably) so much Oil was burned in the shop fire. And the lingering fumes, while clearly a cocktail of many odd ingredients, don't have *any* of the effects associated with Emerald Oil or Oil-infused incense. If the PCs haven't yet learned about Emerald Oil, there's no reason for them to notice. This isn't an essential clue, so there's no need to *ensure* the PCs get it, but it can be a delight to watch when they notice on their own.

The Cellar Tunnel: The cellar beneath the shop is made of earth and stone, so if the PCs fall through the burned-out floor above (or make their way down, deliberately) they'll be able to safely stand. In most versions of the story going around, the demons came into the shop directly from this cellar, which has a tunnel accessing the town catacombs (through which the other demons fled – Drake is said to have fought anywhere from *three* to a *dozen* demonic assailants). If the PCs examine this facet of the rumor, they'll discover that there *is* a tunnel from the cellar ... but it goes 40 feet into the earth before dead-ending at collapsed masonry. It's possible that the tunnel collapsed in the battle somehow, but it *seems* like old damage, a notion reinforced by its obvious role as storage space, filled with barrels of herbs and roots, still smoking from having cooked at high temperatures from the fire, but not directly touched by the flames. Specialists in herbalism or alchemy may be able to (TN 4) confirm that most of the items stored here are commonly used in preparations related to simple health-aids, like sleep tinctures and pain relievers. There are also bare shapes on the dirty floor indicating that there were a dozen more crates or barrels here until recently (these were some of Drake's supply of Emerald Oil, hauled to Drakeshall yesterday and stashed in the main house cellar; see page 20).

The Ellantine Church

There are a number of churches in town, but none as impressive as the Temple of the Ellantines, directly on the town square. It's humble compared to the cathedrals in distant lowland cities, but as far as the mountain lakes are concerned, it's as magnificent as a church can be, and the locals (even those who aren't Ellantine) take pride in it, even moreso than in the baron's castle. The castle is *nice* and all, but while it looms *over* the town, the Temple is *of* the town.

Three Burned Corpses: If the PCs visit the Temple, it's probably to see the remains of those killed in last night's fire. It isn't widely known that the bodies are here, but a few of the locals who witnessed the blaze (see page 9) will be able to confirm that some Ellantine priestesses came to collect the remains in the wee hours, to prepare them for ritual blessings, cremation, and burial. Of those killed, Lionel Draeger and Emilia Green were both of this faith. Dan Lakewood wasn't (he was Lathaldian; see page 27), but the Ellantines prepare many dead for the Lathaldians, anyway; they have better facilities for it, and more clergy with the necessary skills.

Since the PCs are from out of town, the clerics will raise an eyebrow at any requests to see the bodies ... but as long as the PCs are polite, reasonable, and/or charismatic (TNs, in this case, will depend mostly on *good manners*) a priestess called Sister Alifred will step forward to be their personal guide into the crypts. Sister Alifred and her assistant, Brother Ulster, have been preparing the bodies for mourning and cremation in the Ellantine tradition, which involves a lot of scented oil, linen wraps, sprinkles of herbs, entreaties to saints, and folksongs. All three have been wrapped like crispy-corpse burritos on stone slabs in the crypts. The chamber is refrigerator-cold and smells of the bodies, the preparations, and the torches providing light. Alifred and Ulster are both **Well-Meaning Clergyfolk** (3).



The corpses haven't been *examined*, only *prepared*. The clergy have no cause to suspect foul play (because they *know* it was foul play, *committed by invading demons*), and this isn't **CSI: Trostig**, so they've simply done their jobs, which is to dress the bodies in their holy ritual things. This presents a mild obstacle. The bodies are currently wrapped so that only the faces are exposed (each has been arranged into the nearest equivalent of a peaceful, rested expression), so if the PCs want to examine the bodies more closely, they'll need permission to *undo* the sacred work of Alifred and Ulster, while the clerics stand there watching. The PCs might learn and/or reconfirm the following about the dead:

- **Lionel Draeger:** One of the PCs will recognize Lionel's face immediately among the three. He's visibly older, but very much "the same old Lionel" the PC remembers, and his expression is one of peace (thanks to the artistry of Sister Alifred). His body is badly burned, but also suffered a lot of beating, stabbing and slashing ... wounds that the burns make difficult to identify without great care. Lionel put up a fight to defend himself, and it shows ... though any of the locals (including the clerics) will simply assume the injuries are *demonic* work, instead of the work of Dolemon Drake.
- **Emilia Green:** Emilia, like Lionel, worked at Drakeshall as well as the shop (she's the one who made the oil-infused incense). She was slain by a blow to the back of the head. There are severe burns all over her lower body as well, but she burned as she lay dead on the floor, and (mercifully) never felt the fire. Of the three, Emilia is the only one who *lived* at Drakeshall (in the attic chamber, with the house servants), while Dan and Lionel lived in rooms above the shop (rooms that no longer exist at all; the upstairs collapsed when the shop burned).

Rabbit Holes Lead Home

Toast of the Town isn't a mystery adventure. Not exactly. It has a mystery *layer*, but it's thin and simple, because the adventure is really a *rescue*, focused on the fates of the Huzrael. Most parties grasp this instinctively, but not *every* party will. Careful GMing prevents the mystery elements from becoming a "rabbit hole:" just ensure the hole leads somewhere they can do some good. In practice, this means that speaking to "unimportant" NPCs should be just as much fun – and offer just as much *progress* – as speaking to those closer to the core of the problem. Keep track of things the PCs *need* to know ... or NPCs the PCs *need* to meet. Just about anyone in town can point them somewhere useful, because everyone knows about last night's fire (even if they don't know the *truth* about it), everyone can wax rhapsodic about the miracles of Emerald Oil (or share anecdotes about a suspicious Firemaster Yosh) and so on. Always keep this guiding principle in mind: even in a full-on mystery, the GM's job isn't to *hide* the clues, but rather to *reveal* them in exchange for sincere effort (and because it's fun watching the players' faces as the truth emerges).

• **Dan Lakewood:** Dan was a boy who worked primarily at the shop, where he lived. Dan's throat is crudely slashed open, as if by talons, but closer inspection will reveal that one cut is very neat, as if made by a blade. Such inspection would require close attention, since the crude slashing was added deliberately to mask the cleaner cut made by Boraz Gravas. Ulster will insist that it must simply have been the *middle* talon, typically the sharpest on any beast of prey, and presumably demons as well (Ulster will say this as if it's common knowledge among naturalists of any worth, even though he's just making it up to feel useful).

Drake's Odd Request: Alifred and Ulster *might* provide one more piece of information. They're both still deciding what to do about a request made by Drake himself: he asked the Ellantine clergy (when they were collecting the bodies) if they'd consider *putting the corpses on public display this afternoon*, so that "they could be mourned, and their terrible loss recognized." Trouble is, public display prior to cremation is *not* the Ellantine tradition, and Drake, himself an Ellantine, certainly knows that. Since the clergy assume Drake's motives are pure, they haven't even considered that he made this request in the hopes of stoking the town's sorrow and anger ... they're leaning toward the idea that he was simply shaken with grief and regret, in a heroic and manly fashion (when he made the request, he was still covered in blood and soot, after all). Since "this afternoon" is *right now*, that's the question they were discussing just prior to the PCs' arrival, and because it came from Drake, they're seriously considering it.

The PCs will learn about Drake's request if they're quiet and stay out of the way (in which case Alifred and Ulster will begin discussing the lingering issue in a way the PCs can overhear, offering details if asked politely), or if they're insistent about unwrapping the bodies (in which case it's one of the obstacles they must gingerly negotiate). Even if the PCs never learn of the request, they might influence the choice ... and the bodies might, indeed, go on display outside the church. If the PCs *never* inquire at the temple, but the GM would like them to see the bodies anyway, the public display is an easy way to make that happen (asking to remove the holy wrappings *in public* will be hopeless and offensive to many, if the PCs are insensitive enough to try).

Necromancy

If any of the PCs are wizards, it might occur to them to *speak* to the departed victims of the fire. This is simple enough (trivial TNs in the 2-8 range for a dedicated Necromancer cliché, 8-12 for generalist wizards, 12+ for non-mages with sufficiently creepy occult scholarship), but it'll upset the clergy if they're *present* for it. The spirits might or might not be in a talkative mood: they're still traumatized, frightened, and confused as to why they're translucent and floating above their own corpses. Their ability to manifest might be limited to just *two or three questions* before the connection fades on a note of sadness (or resignation, or a request for mortal vengeance) ... but if Lionel, in particular, sees the old friend he sent the letter to, he'll be glad of the reunion, even in death, and rest better for it in more ways than one.

The Nest (and the Trostig Catacombs)

Trostig sits atop networks of ancient catacombs, and the town's "sewer system" is, in part, repurposed from these old tunnels (others have been repurposed into wells, rubbish pits, storerooms and root-cellars). The old catacombs are largely crushed, dark, and mysterious. Many tunnels lead nowhere in particular.

Toast of the Town isn't concerned with tunnel-crawling, *per se*, so the catacombs are left hand-wavy. When traveling the tunnels, PCs are unlikely to meet anyone more unusual than homeless squatters (who can be hired as lookouts or runners) unless, in the GM's opinion, a **Pack of Rats (4)**, or something more outré (vampires, tentacle-beasts, sewer mimes), would add spice.

Some of the tunnel-walls bear faint, engraved sigils. Dolemon Drake, in his youth, discovered that at least *one* of those sigils is powered by *still-working* magic. He found *this* one, in particular, by scraping the grime from a wall near a dead-end:

It's *not* a puzzle, though young Drake imagined it was (and thought himself clever for "solving" it). It's simple: put three fingers in and turn slightly to the right, following the furrows. In response, a great stone door opens, revealing a large chamber, and more crushed corridors. Drake calls the sigil the "magic lock," but "magic handle" seems more likely (stone doors are, after all, *heavy*). What makes the door special is just that nobody ever *noticed* the grooves on that grimy wall except young Drake, so the trick isn't knowing *how* to open it, but knowing it exists at all. For reasons relating to his work, Lionel Draeger was entrusted with this secret. For reasons relating to *that*, he's dead now ... but Maxwell Holligan knows much of what Lionel knew, and he can share that knowledge with the PCs.



Beyond the Stone Door

The secret chamber was, for years, Dolemon Drake's personal hideaway, his sanctum, his secret lair. He fancied then (and fancies now) that it was part of an ancient temple of some kind. It's round, domed, and carved with sigils. Drake kept the secret carefully for most of his life. It wasn't until he needed a place to hide the Huzrael that the chamber became *the Nest*.

The Nest offers little privacy or comfort. The large, central room has only flimsy dividers, so some of the Huzrael live in the crushed corridors radiating from it, behind curtains begged from Drake and Gravas, and *supplied* by a caring Lionel Draeger. What space isn't devoted to basic living is devoted to alchemical equipment. It's a secret *factory*, for the day-and-night production of Emerald Oil.

The Nest isn't much of a prison. There are obvious fissures in the ceiling large enough for someone slender to wriggle out of (it's how Drake got out, and sometimes in, as a youngster) and a full-scale walking tunnel

to Drakeshall (see below). The stone door, at least, is secure from the inside: there's a corresponding open/close sigil, but the Nest-side enchantment is long dead, and the door closes on its own. What's kept the Huzrael imprisoned, though, is mainly *lies* and *fear* (plus a few complications, including a needy infant). The PCs are meeting the Huz just as they're *realizing* they're imprisoned. And while they now have ample reason to question Drake's lies, they still face the fears he instilled.

The most-used exit is the tunnel Drake constructed connecting this place to his kitchen cellar at Drakeshall. There's a locked iron gate blocking it, to which Drake and Gravas each carry a key. The lock is strong but simple (TN 8 for a burglar to pick it; TN 15 for a brute to break it). An alternate exit is the ceiling fissures, choked with rubble but a serviceable escape-route for someone determined enough to pile furniture or crates, clear the rubble by hand or claw, and wriggle through with a modest TN (6 or so) if they're slender and athletic. The fissures lead to upper conduits in the catacombs, and from there to street and alley exits.

From Then To Now: The Huzrael

Five years ago, the Huzrael were summoned by a wizard, Koldun Barth, who lived in the mountains alone. The wizard died, leaving the Huzrael stranded in this world, where they lived as peacefully as they could in Barth's ruined tower (ruined by the explosion that killed him). Early, hopeful encounters with local woodsmen went poorly. The Huzrael learned that the locals considered them monstrous. They became a mountain folktale: *the demons in the old hermit's tower*. They had to defend themselves, occasionally, against beasts or parties of robbers, but for the most part they managed to just *live*, surviving in an alien forest on an alien mountain.

Three years ago, Dolemon Drake was in their woods, mortally wounded in a fight with a great wolf and his kin. The Huzrael found him and saved him, nursing him to health using their ability to share life-essence through ritual ... and through Emerald Oil. Drake, grateful, invited the Huzrael to come live in the Nest, in secrecy, and create *more* oil for him. He promised to use their creation to *prove* to the town that Huzrael are good people. *When the time is right*, he promised, *they could emerge as welcome citizens*. For most of three years, they've done as he bid them, producing oil at a soul-crushing rate. The labor was backbreaking, but at least they had something to *look forward to* ... a people, a home. Drake fed the Huzrael tales of terrors lurking in the tunnels, and the dangers of angry townsfolk, warning them to stay hidden, stay quiet, stay safe, stay *busy*.

As the trade in Emerald Oil grew, it became necessary for Drake and Gravas to entrust some of that secret to a loyal servant: Lionel Draeger. The Huzrael met Lionel less than a year ago, and everything unravelled from there. Lionel took pity on the Huzrael, smuggling them small comforts, and agonizing over the lies they were told. He let secrets slip to those he worked with – Dan and Emilia – creating questions without easy answers, and pacts of uneasy silence. Lionel confided the *entire* secret, as he understood it, to his best friend, Max.

The number of worried glances and awkward silences grew. Over the course of the last few weeks, they grew *noticeable* to Boraz Gravas. Once he was certain, he informed Drake. Yesterday morning, Drake came down to the Nest, with Lionel in tow. He ordered Lionel to gather some of the oil-brewing equipment and *all* the finished oil, to bring it to his wine-cellar at Drakeshall ... and he ordered Hirash to help carry it.

The Huzrael knew something was wrong. Lionel's face was a mask of worry, and Drake had *never* asked any Huzrael to carry things to the surface before. Lionel

whispered something to Grandmother Oria when Drake wasn't listening: "Grandmother, I've sent a secret letter to a friend; I've asked for help."

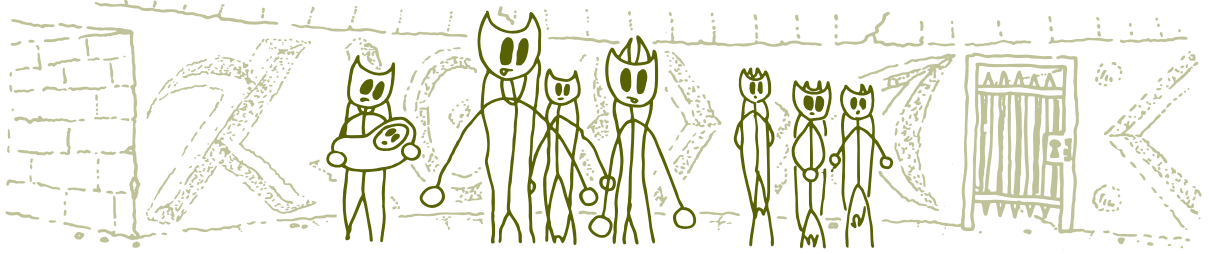
Exhausted by their labors, the Huzrael had no strength to resist Dolemon Drake (though they knew, then, that they should). They complied, hoping Lionel had a plan. They watched as Lionel, Drake and Hirash marched to Drakeshall, and they listened as the distant trapdoor slammed, and they listened some more, and waited.



That was the last the Huzrael saw of Drake, Lionel, and Hirash. Deep into the night, Jaina (mate and hunting-partner of Hirash) had feelings of dread and panic, and insisted she could no longer pace in concern while her lover suffered somewhere above. Over the objections of Grandmother Oria and the rest, she left the Nest via ceiling-fissure, and they haven't seen her since (she's hiding aboveground; see page 16).

The Huzrael in the Nest don't yet *know* that Hirash is strung up in the square, nor do they know that Lionel (and two of his friends) are dead. They'll need to learn it (if they learn it at all) from the PCs. The Huzrael have heard of Maxwell Holligan from Lionel's stories of the surface world (and know he's a friend), but they haven't met him. If the PCs bring him along, he'll be wonderstruck to meet them, literally in tears.

The Huzrael are running low on trust, but if they can be convinced the PCs are friends of Lionel, of Max, or both, they'll put what little they have left in the PCs.



The Huzrael Family

There are ten Huzrael in all (including one infant, born here in the Nest). The first three listed (Hirash, Jaina, and Grandmother Oria) are the most “mission critical,” certain to be important in every run of this adventure. The remaining Huzrael *might* huddle like sad silhouettes in the background, but they don’t always. Follow the lead of the PCs on the others (some may serve as kindred spirits to help the PCs feel more empathy for the Huz, for example) or just bring them into the spotlight when circumstances make it feel right.

Hirash – The first Huzrael the PCs are likely to meet isn’t in the Nest at all; he’s Hirash, strung up in the square outside the church (see page 6). A reluctant warrior, Hirash is one of the Huzrael’s protectors (along with Jaina, below), and he needs rescuing. He also suffers some self-image issues which echo that of the villain, Dolemon Drake. If things go very wrong, Hirash could become a destructive force, himself.

Jaina – Jaina is the second *absent* Huzrael. She’s currently hiding in the town above, weakened and exhausted, but determined to rescue her love. If she were at full strength, she might manage it on her own, but as it is, she may be signing up to get herself killed by the town’s archers or ill-informed citizens. See her writeup on page 16.

Grandmother Oria – The unquestioned leader of the Huzrael, Grandmother Oria is the eldest, most powerful, and most skilled. She’s ancient, clinging to the last years of her life with ferocious tenacity. She is likely to be the “voice” for the Huz as far as the PCs are concerned ... If the party ventures into the Nest to meet the Huzrael, that means, above all, meeting Grandmother Oria. See her sidebar, page 15.

Kiria – Kiria stands near Oria at all times, eager to help her, to remind her to sit and rest, and so on. While she behaves like Oria’s nurse, she’s really Oria’s *apprentice*, and impressively skilled: mechanically much like Oria, but with each cliché a die lower since she’s still learning. She’s has one additional cliché, **Restless Daydreaming Musician (3)**, specialized in a Huzrael art analogous to one practiced by a PC, if applicable (if one of the PCs plays the harp, for example, Kiria has an alien, *harplike* instrument, and perhaps they might jam). Amrad is her husband, and Bistan is her child.

Amrad – Amrad is a bit older than Kiria, and visibly sadder, but he’s holding it together for the sake of the family. Since Kiria is essential to Grandmother Oria, Amrad is typically cradling their baby boy, Bistan. Back home, Amrad was a **Woodworker (3)**, and in this world, he’s still been seeing to the repair and maintenance of what few bits of tool and furniture Drake gave them access to.

Bistan – The infant son of Kiria and Amrad, usually found in Amrad’s arms. He’s healthier than any of the adults, since he’s the *only* Huzrael excused from the manufacture of Emerald Oil, but he was born here in the Nest just over a year ago, and he’s not yet consistently toddling, let alone unfurling his tiny wings. Bistan’s main role is as a **Troublesome Complication (3)**. He has some amazing pipes on him, and if anything frightens or hurts him, he might cry very loudly.

Inris – The youngest of the men (still in his teens), Inris was a **Fisherman (3)**, of sorts, back home, which means he’d probably have a lot of common ground (or water) with many of the Trostig townsfolk, if only they could sit down over a brew and get to know each other. His best friend is the only girl his age, Buraska.

Buraska – The youngest of the women (same age as Inris), Buraska was a **Cloth-Mistress (4)** back home (a combination seamstress, weaver, and embroiderer, a respected “high craft”). She copes with the fear and misery of captivity by having the group’s darkest sense of humor. She and Inris are good friends, though they both feel the pressure of the older Huzrael assuming they’re a couple, and they just don’t see each other that way.

Drigo – The oldest of the men, somewhere at the older end of Huzrael “middle age,” Drigo was a **Ranch Hand (3)** back home, cleaning the stables where the great riding-serpents slept, carefully mucking the mud-pool where the milk-bearing orb-beasts tumbled, and other homey alien things. More personally, he tells corny old jokes and knows all the comforting old songs. He’s a kind of honorary uncle to everyone.

Shanna – Back in the homeland, she was a **High-Ranking Bureaucrat With Political Goals (3)**. Here, she’s living a life of forced labor among working-class Huzrael, the kind she lived her whole life feeling *above*. The Huzrael have done everything in their meager power to make her feel like family, but she struggles, because it all feels like a special hell designed to punish *her*. The irony (that she sees the plight of her group in Shanna-centric terms) eludes her, and she resents her new family and rejects their love, politely and quietly. She does *everything* politely and quietly, unless someone inspires her to open up. She just performs her work, emptying her life-force into the oil, hoping something changes.

Huzrael Speech

The Huzrael have learned the local language, but speak it slowly, doubtfully, and with a very thick accent (whatever kind you’re comfortable devising and performing). Ideally, it should be *so* thick that the players sometimes ask you to repeat yourself!

Grandmother Oria

Description: Back in the Huzrael homeworld, the *hiria lusa* (“quiet witches,” approximately) are spiritual leaders, and the “speakers” for the poor in the halls of rulership. Their magic (via spell, herb, song and ritual) is magic to *heal, calm, encourage and soothe*. Grandmother Oria was – and is – an excellent Quiet Witch, though she had been years deep into retirement (just helping take care of her grandchildren) when she was yanked into this world by the summoning. She’s had no difficulty rising to the role of leader, however; she’s drawing on decades of experience. Speaking to the Huzrael means, above all, speaking to Oria.

Clichés: Quiet Witch [4], Historian (3), Teacher (3). Note that Oria’s Quiet Witch cliché is a *double-pump cliché* in games where pumps are allowed (see page 4 of *Risus*), but since she’s operating at half-dice due to exhaustion (see sidebar to the right), she won’t be doing a lot of pumping in her current state.

What She Wants: Oria *trusts* and *loves* very completely, and so the dream Dolemon Drake sold her – of a real home for the Huzrael here in Trostig – is something she knows is still possible, even though she certainly understands (now) that Drake was never offering it. She’s practical, though, and if she can’t get the Huzrael *accepted* here, she’s willing to settle for getting them *safely away*. The Huzrael are her entire purpose. She’s lived a long, accomplished life, and has no ambitions beyond the well-being of those in her care, and maintaining a basic dignity.

What She’s Got: Oria has few *physical* resources (some broken furniture, a patchwork family of exhausted Huzrael). Her *magic* is stable, powerful stuff ... but it’s also slow, craftsmanlike, mostly-useless in an action scene, and crippled to half-dice due to her exhausted condition. What Oria has intact is profound emotional strength, a razor-sharp intellect, and freedom from dogma: while the Quiet Witches are keepers of tradition, they value a flexible view of the *present* far beyond any kind of reverence for the past, and Oria applies that philosophy globally, at every scale of her life (including, for example, to her mistake in trusting Drake, once upon a time). She’s a powerful contrast to Hirash, who agonizes every past misstep to the point of self-loathing. Oria is physically weak, but she’s decisive and clear-minded. If she messes up, she works forward from it, spending nothing on regrets and feeling no need to cling to a wrong decision just because it was hers. Once she’s convinced the PCs are worth trusting, she’ll give them her best.

Extreme Circumstances: Grandmother Oria is (among other things) a magical healer, and her magics are rooted in self-sacrifice (that’s what Emerald Oil *contains*: sacrifice from her and her fellow captives). She’s also nearing the end of her life, and she’s known that for a long time. If there’s ever a situation where she’d consider it worth it, she could sacrifice her *entire* reserve of life-energy to *completely* heal and refresh a single Huzrael or other person. She’s much more likely to do this for a Huz than for a random adventurer she’s just met ... but if a PC impresses her sufficiently, and *needs* it sufficiently, she’d be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the good of those she cares for.

The Huzrael Are Exhausted

Mechanically, while Hirash is the worst off, *all* the Huzrael are exhausted, both physically and emotionally, and operate at half dice (at *best*) when doing anything where their physical health or level of energy might be relevant (which is most of the time). When in doubt: they’re at full dice for *knowing* things, but half dice (or worse) for *doing* things.

Four vials of prepared Emerald Oil (or a single vial from Drake’s stash of *pure* oil) can refresh a Huzrael to full strength, but they don’t currently have any. Four days of rest (with good food and water) could do the same, but there’s no such luxury of time. Any Huz completely refreshed would be capable of flight under their own power (as it is, most of them – Jaina excepted – couldn’t even manage a pitiful glide without injuring themselves; they’ve been cooped up and *used* for too long).

Expansion: More Severe Huzrael Injuries

The Huzrael are already difficult to rescue: they’re exhausted, numerous, unable to use their wings, and they have an infant in tow (Bistan) with all the potential for noise and neediness an infant entails. And yet ... if you *really* want to twist the knife (or just adjust the pace), you can complicate the rescue further.

Koldun Barth, the wizard who summoned them (see page 13) died in an explosion that blasted part of his tower to rubble. In the default backstory, this *killed* the wizard but only *stranded* the Huzrael. But ... it could have left Drigo without legs, Grandmother Oria with an arm twisted to the point where she can’t climb the ladder to Drake’s kitchen, and Amrad with a splintered wing (injuries no amount of Oil will fix). This will increase playing time and difficulty, so choose it only if it’ll create problems your group will *enjoy solving*. While you’re at it, use it to highlight the determination of the Huzrael, who’ll keep trying no matter what ills you heap on them.

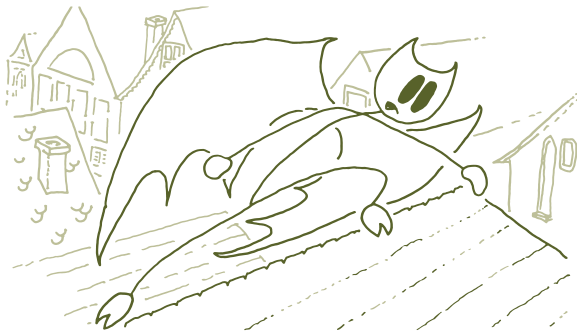


Expansion: Amrad Bound

Another expansion to consider: instead of extracting Hirash alone, Drake had both Hirash and Amrad help Lionel carry the oil-production equipment. Drake and Gravas beat Hirash within an inch of his life and strung him up in the square ... but what became of Amrad? He might be bound and gagged in the wine cellar at Drakeshall (a “fallback demon” in case Drake needs another prop for his theatrics). He might be *dead* in a warehouse somewhere (maybe Drake and Boras tried roughing *him* up first, and roughed a little too hard). He might – most terribly of all – have bargained with Drake to spare his life in exchange for servitude (in which case he’s lurking wherever Drake has ordered him to lurk). If the latter, maybe Hirash was privy to their negotiations and maybe not. This complication will add at *least* a half-hour to playtime, and can make the tone much bleaker.

Jaina's Rooftops

Not so much a location as a *category* of locations, literally covering the town. If the PCs go looking for Jaina, they'll likely be successful if they turn their eyes *upward*. There are something like two thousand rooftops within the Trostig town walls, and she's on *one* of them, peeking into windows, prying at tiny attic hatchways, or just perched watching (most especially, watching Hirash hanging in the square, considering her options on how to rescue him).



Jaina, like the rest of the Huzrael, is currently unable to fly, but she's strong enough (or just stubborn enough) to *glide* if she absolutely needs to, and she's a good (if currently very *slow*) climber.

NPCs on the Fringes

Chapman Gaeleg: If the PCs look upward in search of Jaina, they may well find Chapman Gaeleg looking down. Gaeleg is a part-time burglar, and a full-time **Shady Dealer in Shady Things (3)**, who regards the Trostig rooftops as his sovereign territory. He's been aware of Jaina for an hour or two by the time the PCs meet him, and he's *terrified*. He believes that if there's a demon on the roofs, it's because his own sins are catching up to him, and he's facing some kind of spiritual judgment. The PCs might make his panic worse, or might find a way to make it useful, or both. He has a secret "house" made of canvas tarps atop one of the warehouses near the quay.

Johnny Dhulin: Johnny is a **Genial Beggar (4)**, sitting quietly by himself against a barrel in some quiet alleyway. He'll keep to himself (watching the PCs with idle interest) unless approached. He's friendly, and believes that his left hand is a person named Billy. If the PCs talk to him without including Billy in the conversation, it might hurt Billy's feelings. Johnny was a fisherman, once upon a time, until tragedy took his family and made him terrified of the lake. He's seen Jaina peering into windows as if she was looking for something ... and he's seen a little of anything else that might make him useful.

Jackie Regal: Jackie is a **Soot-Faced Urban Ragamuffin (4)** living in the Snarl. Age 12, indeterminate gender (Jackie will be offended if anyone asks, and answer "It's bleedin' obvious, innit? Creep!"). Jackie knows the alleys, rooftops, and even the *catacombs* exceedingly well. For a little coin, Jackie's an honest guide. "Regal" is an affectation; Jackie has no family beyond the other gutter-snipes.

Jaina

Description: A lean, serious-looking Huzrael. Jaina was a street-dwelling thief for most of her childhood, in a great city in her homeworld. When the summoning forced her into a new family in *this* world, it was almost a blessing: a new beginning, a group of others who cared about her, and a purpose. She turned her old scavenging instincts into *hunting* instincts, with Hirash as her learning partner, and she became essential to her new family.

Clichés: Gleeful Huntress (3), Former Thief and Scavenger Who Doesn't Mind Returning to Old Habits (3)

What She Wants: To rescue Hirash, and to find some Emerald Oil. Owing to her weakness and exhaustion (she's observed Hirash in the scaffolding, and knows she'd never be able to free and carry him in her present condition), the *second* goal has been taking priority all morning, and she's traveling from roof to roof, trying to figure out which shops or homes might have some oil she could steal. She's in for an unpleasant surprise if she gets some (see below). In the long term, Jaina would like to return to the woods again. She enjoyed the flow of life in the old tower, and doesn't really trust that the Huzrael will ever fit in among the townsfolk. She loved life in the woods a lot more than she ever loved her life back in her homeworld.

Challenges: Jaina doesn't know the PCs, so if they go hunting her, they'll need to establish their good intentions before she'll regard them as anything but something to hide from (if possible), run from (if necessary) or fight (if cornered). They'll need to find a safe way to just say *hello* without setting her off (mentioning Lionel will help, as would visibly helping Hirash, who she's watching intently when she can). Like Hirash (page 6), Jaina is in need of careful handling ... and like Hirash, she could flip to "problem" status if things go poorly ... *especially* if they go poorly for her love. If Hirash dies, Jaina will be enraged, and her judgment will suffer. So might anyone who gets in her way. If the PCs can give her the help she needs, she can offer a lot of help in return.

Short-Term Plans: Jaina's staying as high as she can, reasoning that if anyone *catches* her on a roof, and she can't manage to scare them away or fight them, she has a last-ditch *gliding* escape available, which the locals can't imitate. Fortunately for her, most of the soldiers and guards in town are currently carrying hand-weapons in anticipation of this evening's festivities, and aren't bothering to carry their ranged weapons (the only exceptions are stationed at the walls, but if Jaina's spotted, someone *will* start yelling to arm crossbows).

An Important Mistake: Jaina "knows" that if she can find just *one* small bottle of oil, she can refresh herself completely, and fly again. She's *wrong*, because the Huzrael have no idea that Drake dilutes the powerful raw oil into larger batches of less-potent, but still-impressive oil he can *sell*. So, if Jaina manages to find a cache of the stuff, she'll need *four* bottles to do the trick. Of course, there's raw (pure) oil at Drakeshall (in the wine cellar), and the PCs might have some by the time they find her.

Purewater Academy

Purewater is a collection of grand-ish buildings huddled in private walls at the south edge of town, along a stream called the Fenny Brook (old-timers say “Fenny Rill”). With a town map in hand, the Academy is hard to miss (many players will inquire about it early in the adventure), but from the ground, it’s less obvious, since its buildings aren’t notably tall (none more than three stories, same as the tallest shops in the market). From the streets, the Academy only stands out when you walk *near* it, and then it’s less about its buildings and more about the *orchard* it maintains, spilling out into Trostig proper.

Purewater is an academy of *alchemists*, a combination university, guild, and secular monastic retreat. The Araghash region is home to several herbs and trees that grow nowhere else, and most of them have useful alchemical properties. Here, those unusual plants become unusual *potions*, made by a cast of unusual people. Firemaster Yosh (see right), is their “face” in this adventure.

It’s unlikely that much of the adventure will take place *within* the Academy’s walls. If the PCs do visit Purewater, draw on whatever monastic/academic/nutty-mystic-scholar/craftsman imagery appeals to you. The school has all the facilities anyone might expect: libraries, laboratories, classrooms, and ordinary living quarters.

It’s much more likely the PCs will come to know Purewater through the alchemists themselves, especially the outspoken Yosh. Dolemon Drake is making a fortune selling something that seems awfully *alchemical* to them: Emerald Oil. Legally, the Purewater alchemists are a *guild*, and thus entitled to a monopoly on useful magic fluids, balms, incense, powders and so on. Beyond that, they’re just *offended* that a dabbler like Drake – lacking their years of dedicated study – seems able to crank out a super-useful “potion” and incense just because (as he claims) he learned a secret recipe and beat up a wolf. So, the alchemists of Purewater are keeping an eye on Drake ... and that makes them potential allies for the PCs, in a city where almost everyone thinks the sun rises from Drake’s heroic backside.

From Ruin to Enclave

Purewater Academy is the oldest *aboveground* part of Trostig, predating even the earliest known fortifications. Centuries ago, it was a kind of secular “monastery,” home to an enclave of wizards studying the even *older* catacombs and – romantic rumor has it – communing with spirits and other beings dwelling in those subterranean mysteries. For much of Trostig’s early history, Purewater was in ruins, and stood either abandoned or as a storage outpost for the earliest version of the town walls. The alchemists acquired stewardship of the Orchard Quarter 90 years ago, and all buildings (and plants!) in the quarter are Purewater’s, including shops, homes, and even inns dedicated to the Academy’s interests and visitors.

Firemaster Yosh

Description: A tall, older gent with a bushy beard, bushy eyebrows, and an exquisitely-tailored caftan and hat. He’s obviously a man of some influence and means, and just-as-obviously a mystic of some kind. His beard and eyebrows are as violently red as his fire motif demands.

Clichés: Incendiary-Themed Alchemy Teacher (5), Incendiary-Themed Mage (3), Incendiary-Themed Businessman (2)

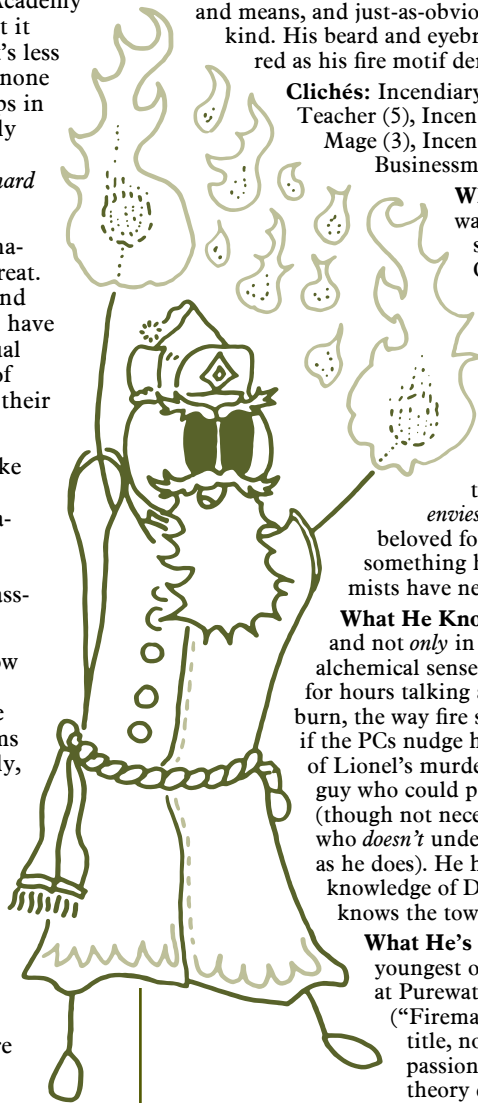
What He Wants: Yosh wants to know the *real* story behind Emerald Oil. He’s not sure what Drake’s trick is, but he knows it’s a *trick*, and not a legitimate work of alchemical craft. He’s also concerned about his enclave’s reputation, and just plain *envies* Drake for being beloved for potion-making ... something his legitimate alchemists have never managed.

What He Knows: A lot about fire, and not *only* in the magical and alchemical sense. He can bore you for hours talking about the way things burn, the way fire spreads, and so on ... if the PCs nudge him toward the scene of Lionel’s murder, he’s the kind of guy who could prove it was arson (though not necessarily to anyone who *doesn’t* understand fire as well as he does). He has a rudimentary knowledge of Drake’s life story, and knows the town pretty well.

What He’s Got: He’s the youngest of five Elder Masters at Purewater Academy (“Firemaster” is an office and title, not just his personal passion), and could in theory draw on the entire

Academy as a resource. Personally, he carries more fire-oriented substances than anyone should (fortunately, he’s also pretty good with fire safety). In social terms, he has the respect of the townsfolk, but in a distant, even fearful way. They know the alchemists are a big deal, but they’re a kind of *arm’s-length-and-creepy* big deal to the average townsperson.

Loyalties and Concerns: Yosh came here years ago, pursuing his art, but he loves Trostig, and spends more time in public than the other Elder Masters. He’s in charge of the guild/business aspect of the Academy, and he really wants the best for his adopted town as well as his colleagues. He lives in his own head most of the time, though, and might need the PCs to direct him toward things he should be noticing ... but once they *do*, he’ll do the right thing for Trostig, not just for his enclave of mystics.



Dolemon Drake

Description: From childhood, Dolemon Drake was restless, curious, and bold. He spent his adolescent years exploring both the catacombs beneath Trostig and the mountains, forests, farms and villages surrounding it. His family's mercantile interests gave him chances to travel, too, and he developed a worldly perspective which separates him from many, even those in his own social circles. He's been a soldier, both in the castle guard and in the baron's army (fighting wars against the lowland fiefs), and an adventurer. He's personable, brave, and caring (or at least it seems that way, even to him).

Clichés: Charismatic Man of the People Entirely Capable of Believing His Own Lies (5), Cunning Warrior (4), Worldly Ruin-Explorer (3), Soulful Poet Shy About His Artistic Genius (1)

What He Wants: Drake's desire is simple: he wants the town to keep on loving him, keep on admiring him, keep on acknowledging him as their hero. If that means the Huzrael must, regrettably, be exposed as a demonic infestation and slaughtered down to the last infant, he's willing to see that done. More distressingly, he's also capable of revising his own version of his life-story to make it the righteous, heroic thing to do. He'll not only see the Huzrael dead, he'll know in his heart that he's a good man for doing so. Being acknowledged as Trostig's benefactor is *essential* to Drake. Being known as someone who cares about the town, and being its most beloved son, are critical to his sense of well-being. If anything – even his own cruelty and selfishness – threatens his reputation, he'll shed any blood necessary to make things “right.” He's already started. He's very nearly done.

What He's Got: He has the comfortable manor known as Drakeshall (page 19), a chunk of secret catacomb known only to himself and a few confidantes (the Nest, page 12), he owns multiple caches of Emerald Oil and related incense (page 30), and – most crucially – he has the love, confidence and support of the men and women of Trostig (including the well-armed town guard, and the favor of the nobility). He *used* to have a nice shop for selling his “alchemical creations,” but he had that burned to the ground last night (page 9). He owns two fine boats that trade on the lake. He owns one of the warehouses near the dock. He's got an **Expensive Horse** (3).

What He Doesn't Know: Drake knows all the particulars of his own crimes and schemes, but there's one gap in his knowledge that might become relevant: he believes the Huzrael's wings are *useless* in this realm, that they're only capable of flight in their other-dimensional homeworld. He came by this error both by conflating the Huzrael with other demons he's read about, and by observing the Huzrael's difficulty with flight firsthand and being told “Here in your world, our ability to move about is diminished.” It's true that the Huzrael have great *difficulty* flying here (and can't soar

with the strength and grace they can back

home), but they *can* fly if they're sufficiently rested – something concentrated Emerald Oil can achieve (see page 30). Drake is also unaware of Lionel Draeger's letter to the PCs, and while he suspects Draeger may have leaked secrets to friends,

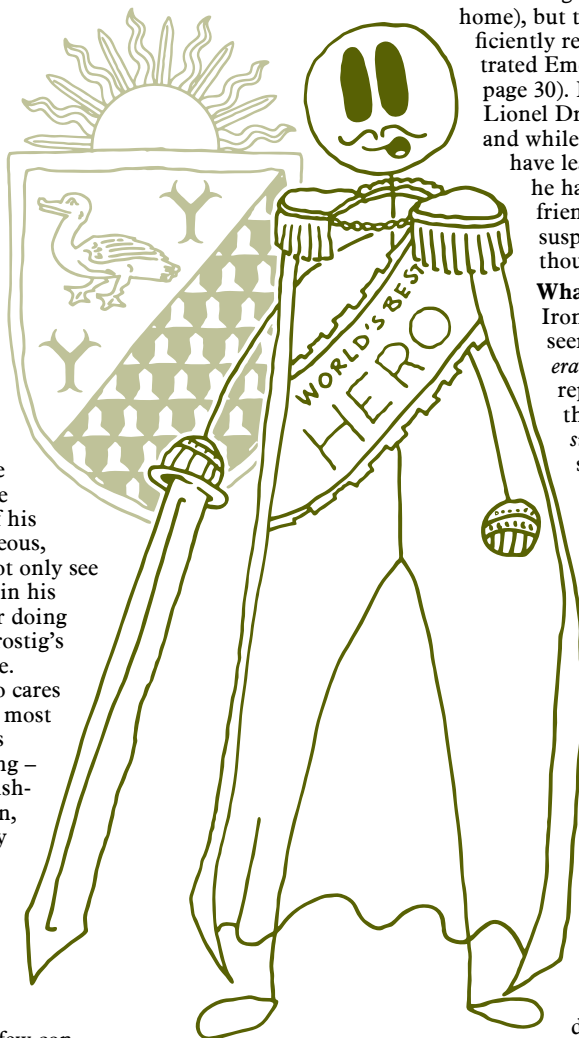
he has no idea who Draeger's friends *were* (so he doesn't yet suspect, or even give a second thought to, Maxwell Holligan).

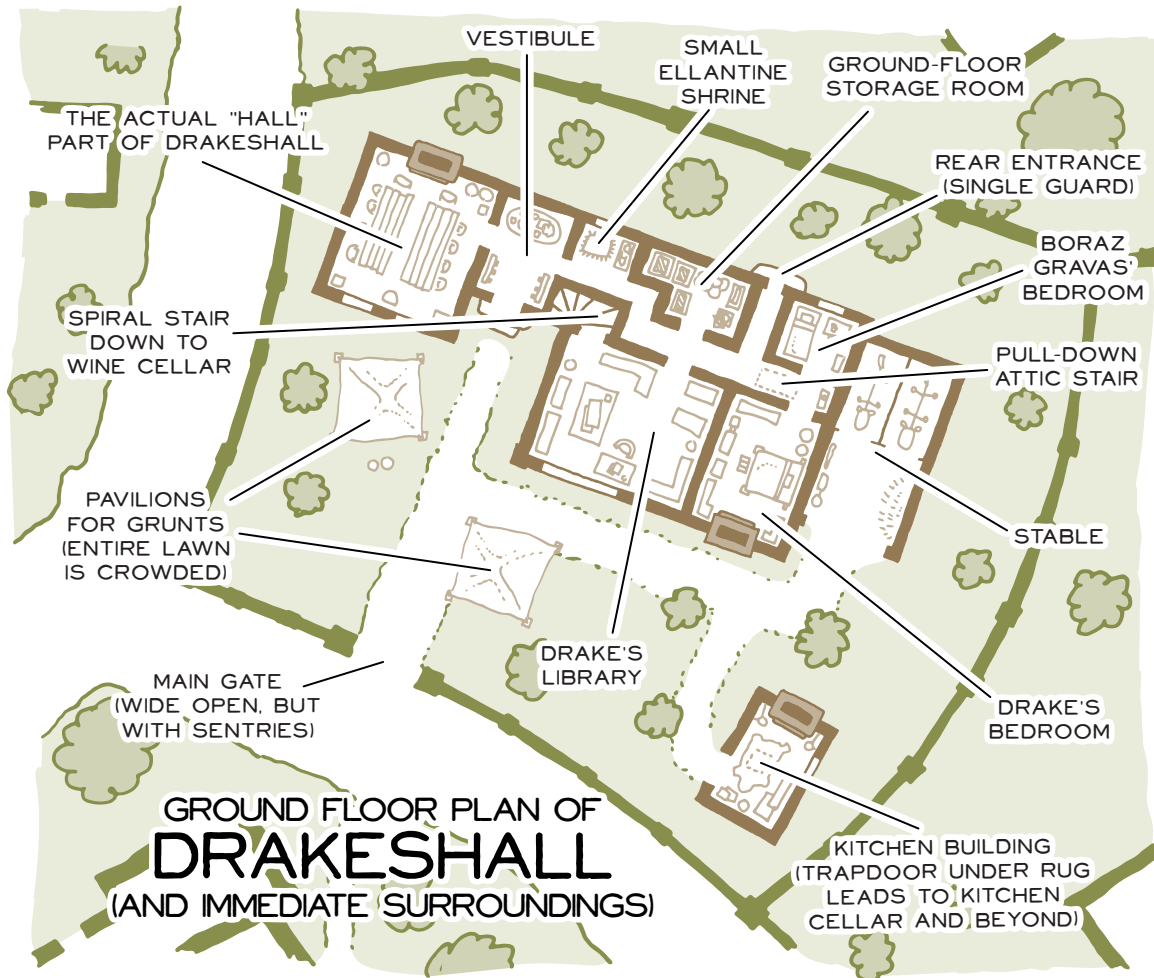
What His Limits Are:

Ironically, his need to be seen as a righteous hero both *eradicates his moral limits* and replaces them with something that bear a *remarkable similarity to moral limits*. In scenario terms, this means if the PCs try to engage with Drake diplomatically, appealing to his *heroism*, they might be able to convince him of alternate solutions that involve no further bloodshed ... *provided* those solutions keep Drake looking the part of the dapper savior. Whether that's palatable to the PCs will depend on their *own* moral limits, and their own sense of justice and expedience. Lionel Draeger and others have *already* been murdered, the Huzrael have suffered as virtual slaves, and the entire town has been duped. Is it worth it to let those crimes go unpunished,

even forgotten, if it prevents further bloodshed and suffering? See page 31 for more to consider.

A Dangerous Mistake: If the PCs try to appeal to Drake's greed or ambition in some way (or even make it plain that they *see* him that way) it'll drive a hard wedge into amicable solutions, because those are *villain* traits, and Drake (according to Drake) is a *hero*. If the PCs want to deal with a man open to parley, they'll need to recognize what really drives him.





Drakeshall

When Dolemon Drake was a child, his family lived in town, in a row-house just beyond the church, near the guildhall of the Trostig Grain-Traders, for which his father was guildmaster. When Drake was 14, he discovered the secret portion of the catacombs which currently serve as “the Nest” (page 12), including an incomplete tunnel leading from there to a spot just below what is now the High Borough. In those days, the High Borough was just a few houses, outside the town walls, among the trees.

As Trostig’s mercantile power grew, the merchant-lords petitioned the Baron for a walled quarter overlooking the town, but still respectfully in the shadow of the Baron’s castle. Drake had favor with his father and favor with the Baron, and when the gold poured onto the hill to make the High Borough a reality, Drakeshall’s plot of land was in *just* the right place. Later still, when the elder Drake had died and Dolemon became master of the household, Drake dismissed his kitchen staff for a stretch of summertime, and with his own hands and tools connected his kitchen cellar to the tunnels he’d loved in his youth.

Drakeshall isn’t a complex location. Really, it’s just a house, with a small stable and kitchen building. As an adventuring locale, the tricky part is how *busy* it is

right now. In terms of payoffs, there are three things of notable interest here: Drake’s remaining stash of Emerald Oil, the secret tunnel to the Nest, and (sometimes) Drake himself.

Outbuildings: There’s a small stable directly abutting the house, where Drake and Boraz keep an **Expensive Horse (3)** each (both horses are present all afternoon, though Drake will mount his for the procession into town at sunset). There’s also the kitchen, a separate stone structure across the lawn. The tunnel from the Nest leads directly beneath the kitchen’s cellar, via a trapdoor hidden beneath a heavy, woven straw floor-mat. The trapdoor connects to the tunnel below via a long, creaky ladder attached precariously to the wall of an earth-and-stone shaft.

The House Proper: Each room is labeled on the map above, and is exactly what you think it is. Drake doesn’t keep any damning secret diaries or anything, but if the PCs go searching for one (many will) he *does* hide some pretty awful poetry in his table in the library. The storage room contains enough crates of carefully-packed Emerald Oil vials (and a few crates of incense) to serve any needs the PCs might have for the substance, including more than enough to restore the entire Huzrael family to their full health (they’d be able to operate at their listed cliché values, *and* they’d be able to fly, except for Bistan, who hasn’t learned to

Boraz Gravas

Description: In a distant kingdom called Koval, House Gravas was a respected family, laced with noble blood and bolstered with gold from the tea trade. Several years ago, a great war changed everything for House Gravas, and much of their wealth burned in the fires of battle. Their able sons, too, were cut down ... but Boraz was, in those days, still a child, and his mother fled the war with what money she could carry, and made her way safely here. She became a servant in the Drake household, and so her son, Boraz, was a friend to Dolemon, fed whispered bedtime stories of his family's lost glory. He is today as he has been since: right-hand man to Dolemon Drake, with dreams of power, and the intellect to one day realize them.

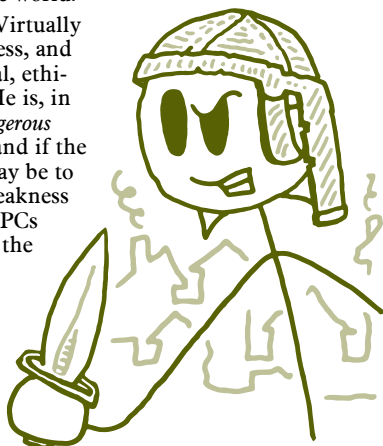
Clichés: Ruthless Killer Doggedly Loyal to Dolemon Drake (5), Slick Political Schemer Who'd Sell Drake Down the River If the Payoff Was High Enough (4), Experienced Mercantile Manager Unbothered By Contradictions (3)

What He Wants: For as long as his position and comforts depend on Dolemon Drake, Boraz wants Drake to be wealthy, beloved, and shoulder-deep in his own self-righteous backside. In truth, he's genuinely fond of Drake, and if he can someday shake the mud of this provincial lake-town from his boots *without* ruining Drake in the process, he intends to do so. But Gravas lives at the corner of clear-eyed realism and coldhearted pragmatism, so if he ever spots a door to wealth and power that happens to slam on Drake's fingers, well ... he'll remember to *apologize* when those fingers hit the floor, because his manners are *impeccable*. As it happens, the fortunes of the two men have always intertwined, and they have a friendship forged of compatible needs, shared pleasures, and secret murders spanning years and miles. Boraz *understands* that Drake needs to be the hero, so Boraz does both the blandest managerial work *and* the blackest deeds, and he can't wait to do more, every day.

What He Knows: Everything Drake does, plus quite a lot about torture and murder that would gross Drake out.

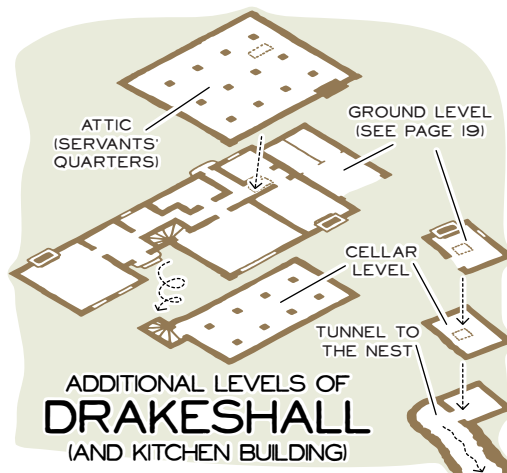
What He's Got: All of Dolemon Drake's resources are available to Gravas, except: he *doesn't* have the love of the town. He's good with a crowd, but in an officious, distant way. He's got a powerful voice, nice clothes, and a known connection to a man the locals *do* love, but even on their dimmest days, they can sense that Gravas holds them all in contempt. Despite living here since childhood, he still has (affects?) a faintly foreign accent, and walks as if the dung can't touch his boots. Gravas has a few resources all his own, too: stashes of money pilfered from his boss, swordsmen specifically loyal to *him* (just in case!) and a collection of poisons from every corner of the world.

What His Limits Are: Virtually none. He's brave, ruthless, and unencumbered by moral, ethical, or legal concerns. He is, in many ways, a more *dangerous* opponent than Drake, and if the PCs overlook that, it may be to their peril. His main weakness is his own ambition ... PCs with worldly power (or the wherewithal to fake it) might be able to tempt him in useful ways, but they'd need to be very sharp (and nearly as wicked as Gravas himself) to pull it off.



use his wings). See also *Burning Down the House*, page 21. Note that the oil stored on the main floor is the *prepared* variety, one-fourth as potent as the *pure* oil stashed in the cellar. Drake stores some of his money at Drakeshall; there's a strongbox in the cellar, and a smaller coffer in his bedchamber, filled with as much gold and gems as the GM cares to dispense. There may be other, more exotic treasures from Drake's adventures, too.

Upstairs, Downstairs: Above, there's an attic (a single room accessible from a pull-down ladder in the corridor). Below, there's a cellar (a single large room accessible from a tight spiral stair in the library). The attic is where Drake's servants



are quartered: four beds, claustrophobically low (angled) ceiling, no windows, and no privacy. It's unoccupied during the day. Unlike his cooks, which have been temporarily dismissed, the servants – apart from Emilia (page 11) – are busy running back and forth between Drakeshall and the town on errands, and can serve as informants, inconvenient alarms, and so on at need. The cellar is typically used to store wine (it's a trove for any wine-loving PCs), but it's also packed with *pure, uncut Emerald Oil*, in crates moved here in anticipation of the torching of the shop last night. As with the storage-room stash on the main floor, the quantity is “all the PCs might need for just about anything.” The equipment used by the Huzrael to create the oil is also stashed here.

The Hustle and the Bustle Beforehand

Drakeshall is a dangerous place right now, because Dolemon Drake is gathering nearly two-dozen thugs (guards directly in his employ, and some town and citadel guardsmen eager to be part of the action) on his front lawn. Either Drake or Gravas (or both) will be here at any given point in the afternoon, speaking on the lawn, shouting instructions for where the thugs can wait and/or sit and check their gear, or holding grim conversations describing the horrors of the demons beneath the streets, and the challenges

ahead. Boraz Gravas is moving back and forth between Drakeshall and Trostig Square (page 5), getting everything ready for tonight, and being Drake's public face to answer questions and encourage volunteers. Dolemon Drake is *mostly* at Drakeshall all afternoon, but might be away on private errands if Gravas is here to keep things running smoothly.

Several **Assorted Grunts** (2) are on the lawn, and a few are in the great hall picking through baskets of bread, dried fish and root vegetables. They're not exactly a disciplined force, but if aroused to direct confrontation, they would combine to form a fearsome **Grunt-Squad Made of Actual Grunts** (8) and provide impressive backup to Boraz and/or Drake. There's a single **Bored But Competent Guard** (3) standing watch at the Drakeshall rear door. Drake isn't expecting anything like the PCs, but he *is* worried about neighbors or poorer citizens trying to plunder his wine-cellar while he's busy being heroic.

Drake might also be receiving visitors: priests from the Ellantine church he's asked to say prayers and bless the soldiers, representatives of the guilds demanding assurances that their business interests are being considered in the attack, etc. Anyone sufficiently *important* will have Drake's ear, but he's avoiding the public rabble on purpose: he's "saving himself" for his dramatic appearance at the sunset gathering (page 22). If the PCs try to approach from the street, they'll be stopped by swordsmen at the gate, demanding some indication of their need to be there. Any PCs able to pass as wealthy or important (or any PCs who happen to *be* wealthy or important) will be given benefit of the doubt and invited in to await audience with Drake. Scruffy rogueish types will be turned away, urged toward the market square.

It's more likely, however, for PCs to approach Drakeshall from *below*, since most groups visit the Nest (page 12) early on, and the Nest has a ladder leading straight to the Drakeshall kitchen cellar. That's an excellent way in, because the kitchen is currently empty and unattended. From inside the kitchen, interlopers can sneak peeks across the lawn, and size up the problem. They can also, if they're capable of stealth, attempt to sneak across the lawn to the stables without alerting the front-lawn guards (TN 7 for any *obviously* stealthy cliché, more for others), though the rear-door guard is a separate problem. Very ambitious sneaks might try a more aerial route: from the kitchen *rooftop* (accessible for very small or slender characters by the kitchen chimney), it's possible to leap across to the roof of Drakeshall itself (TN 5 for a sufficiently *athletic* cliché).

Drake's kitchen is empty (his cooks dismissed while he uses the Nest passage for skulduggery) but he's filled his hall with cold food brought up from inns and bakeries in town to provide pre-slaughter refreshments. After the Huzrael are dead, he'll be pouring coin into the hands of those innkeepers *again* to pay for booze and hot food as a celebratory feast for everyone who helped out. Max Holligan, as one of the town's well-regarded innkeepers, knows of this (see page 8), since he's one of the innkeepers asked to provide food. This might provide another front-door approach – "*Delivery! Baskets of cheese! Smells like crotch so you know it's good cheese! Wouldn't want to keep the soldiers waiting!*" – for PCs who prefer theatrics to stealth.

Nella and Helmina

Dolemon Drake dismissed his cooks, Nella Horrocks and Helmina Ruth, yesterday morning, giving them a couple of days off and implying that he'd have someone else coming around to clean the kitchen and perform some necessary repairs. Nella is an **Older Cook Slowing Down a Bit These Days** (3); Helmina is a **Much Younger And More Easily Distracted Cook** (2). Both are glad of the time off, and gladder of the "repairs" they believe are underway, since some of the kitchen gear definitely needs work. Both believe absolutely in their employer, and of his goodness and virtue and heroism and all the other things he believes about himself. Both of them consider Boraz Gravas a jerk, especially Helmina, who's had to fend off a few of his oily, groping advances. They both know the layout of the kitchen building intimately, including the cellar under the kitchen's bearskin rug, but only Nella's noticed the *second* trapdoor under the cellar's own straw mat. She noticed it ... and decided long ago it was none of her business. Whether she'd share this information with the PCs depends on how she feels about them (which basically means: if she feels they respect Drake as much as he deserves, and are seeking the information to *help* him in some urgent way). They might be found anywhere in town the GM needs them to be.

Burning Down the House

Drakeshall contains a lot of Emerald Oil (in the main-floor storage area, and in the cellar) and infused incense. *There's almost no wind right now*. If someone were to set fire to Drakeshall, and the fire were to spread without challenge, the resulting smoke would be thick and vast, and it would gently roll down from the High Borough and fill the town walls to overflowing with a haze of magical, healing green.

"Dosing" the entire town would have some other noticeable effects. In addition to healing any number of minor ills and injuries, the hallucinogenic properties of the smoke would send the entire town into a pleasant haze of psychedelic joy, and disarm just about any kind of aggression or fear, for a time. The PCs – if they aren't too busy marveling over how welcoming the soft grass seems or how pretty colors are or how much gratitude they feel toward one another – might be able to take advantage of such a thing, which will make *some* Target Numbers soar to impracticality (it's a bad time for precise math or fine hand-eye coordination) and others plummet to ease (it's an *excellent* time to convince people to do nice things, feel nice feelings and think nice thoughts).

As the Sun Sets ...

When the last daylight begins to fade to rich pink and orange, the crowd at Drakeshall will be organized into a march down into Trostig Square, for the big sunset gathering (page 22). Gravas will head into town a few minutes in advance, in order to serve as a kind of Master of Ceremonies, getting the crowd ready. Drake will lead the procession on horseback. He'll leave four guards behind: one (still) at the rear entrance, two at the gate, and one seated in the hall, ready to come running if the others cry out.

THE GATHERING & DESCENT

Prior sections describe key Trostig locales as they are through the afternoon. As the sun sets, if the PCs *haven't* curbed Drake's plans, everything will come to focus on the town square (sometimes, letting things focus on the town square will be essential to the PCs' plans, too).

The gathering is a *spectacle*, by design: With Hirash hanging from the scaffolding (artfully lit by torchlight to display his plainly devilish features, and the mighty wounds inflicted by local heroes) Boraz Gravas will recount the tale of the fire, his story ending just as Dolemon Drake himself rides his horse into the crowd, flanked by local soldiers, armed and ready.

Drake will dismount, step humbly but surely into everyone's attention, and reiterate the nature of the threat. Once the crowd is roaring (it'll be dense with townsfolk of all kind, eager for a show and/or terrified of the underground invasion), he'll set the scaffolding aflame, and let Hirash burn and writhe a bit before gutting him with his sword. Cue applause! Cue demands for justice! Cue demands for slaughter! *Save the town! Save us from the devils below!* Cue Drake, eating it up.

Drake, the soldiers, and any volunteers will descend to the catacombs via a drainage grate in the shadow of the Elder Oak. Most volunteers will be carrying weapons of whatever sort they can gather from their homes. A few will carry lamps or torches to light the way.

During Drake's big show, Boraz Gravas will have slipped ahead to the catacombs alone. His first job: to open the "magic lock" door to the Nest, so that nobody

The Unguarded Surface World

Drake's mob, due to the darkness of the catacombs and the pace of moving *that many* people down ladders, will take a fair amount of time (40 minutes or so) to reach the Nest. The mob's descent won't leave Trostig empty (95% of those gathered in the Square will *still* be gathered in the Square), but it *will* reduce the topside collection of *guards, grunts* and *soldiers* to a skeleton crew (and many of those left are *elderly* watchmen, eager to help Drake but no good at clamoring in the dark). If the PCs are stuck for an angle, a helpful NPC might help them notice this (it's a much easier time to sneak the Huzrael through the streets if they're already hiding at the Headless Horse or in the Drakeshall kitchen), and if the GM is eager for some fresh *complications*, some *unsavory* NPCs might decide to take advantage, adding an opportunistic crime-wave to the town's troubles.

needs to see Drake operate it. His next job: to chat with the Huzrael, to extinguish their lamps, to feed them whichever lies seem necessary.

The mob will arrive, Drake at the lead, to slaughter the Huzrael in the dark, fueled by stories of their savagery, and warnings not to listen to their bewitching voices.

Then, Drake is the hero, the Huzrael are dead, the Emerald Oil at Drakeshall will last for seasons to come (prices may have to go up) and all is right with the world. That's Drake's plan. It would do well for the PCs to lob a wrench or two into the gears.



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Toast of the Town allows for several degrees of success. There are multiple problems to be solved, and not every group will solve every one, or solve every one *completely*. As the adventure proceeds, the GM should be keeping each of these goals in mind, and checking progress to help the players find their own conclusions. The core goals are:

- **Helping The Huzrael Family:** The family of Huzrael trapped beneath the streets should be saved and freed and, if possible, restored to full strength.
- **Saving Hirash:** Hirash, strapped to the scaffolding in the square, should be saved and freed and, if possible, restored to full strength. **Conditional:** If Hirash becomes a problem, the PCs should prevent him from doing anything stupid or self-destructive.
- **Locating Jaina:** Jaina, weakened and desperate and hiding above the streets, should be found and, if possible, restored to full strength. **Conditional:** if Jaina becomes a problem, the PCs should help her contain her rage.
- **Dealing with Amrad (Optional):** If some version of the *Amrad Bound* expansion (page 15) is in play, the PCs need to locate Amrad and either rescue him or otherwise deal with him, depending on what role he's playing.

- **Protecting Trostig:** Drake and Boraz, if cornered (or if you're using the *Fire! Fire!* expansion, page 10) could easily become a danger to the town itself, or to friendly NPCs like Max. The PCs should see that no innocents come to harm.
- **Credit Where It's Due:** The townsfolk have been duped into believing the Huzrael are an "infestation," when in fact they're the source of the Emerald Oil that cured a disease ravaging the town. Trostig should learn the truth, with the Huzrael publicly recognized as benefactors. **Conditional:** if the town *mob* forms, and the Huzrael are still in the Nest when that happens, the PCs may have to deal with the mob directly.
- **Infamy Where It's Due:** Dolemon Drake and Boraz Gravas should be revealed as scoundrels, liars, arsonists, enslavers and murderers – and as conspirators to make the townsfolk accomplices in these crimes.
- **Promises Kept:** In some runs, the rescued Huzrael make for the high forest, to restore a home for themselves in the woods as they lived before. In others, the people of Trostig will learn enough about the Huz, and enough about Drake, that they welcome the Huzrael to the community, as Drake promised them long ago.

There's no set "ending" to this scenario. Innocents on both sides might die. Justice might or might not be served, by degrees. Simply killing Drake won't solve

anything; it would only turn Trostig against the PCs, since the locals will assume the PCs must be *instruments of evil who just killed everyone's favorite hero*. It might also promote Gravas to "main villain," which is a setback, not a victory (if the cause is clearly lost, Gravas will excuse himself quietly to the shadows, but if he sees a win, he'll be terrifyingly good at pursuing it).

In one playtest run, the PCs cornered Dolemon Drake in private and *cut deals* with him to rescue the Huzrael, get them safely out of town, and make it *look like* Drake slaughtered them. This let Drake get away with murder and preserve his reputation (it was simply a less-bloody

version of Drake's own plan!) but it saved the lives and won the freedom of the innocent Huzrael. In other runs, Drake was exposed and/or humiliated and/or killed in the town square, or on the lawn at Drakehall, or in traps laid in the sewer tunnels. In one run, the PCs staged a passion-play to *compete* with Drake's own evening performance. In another, a public debate with Drake turned chaotic, and Drake was *shoved into an open sewer-grate by a belly-flopping Giant Penguin Sea-Monster*. In your run of *Toast of the Town*, any of these endings – or one of thousands more – might be waiting. All we can do, as Game Masters, is be ready.



Rewards & Farewells

In game-terms, PCs might get rolls to improve via the *Character Advancement* option (*Risus* page 4), or other mechanical options as described in the *Risus Companion*. In character terms, rewards will depend on *who*, when the smoke clears, feels indebted to the PCs for their efforts. Some guidelines:

- Trostig Townsfolk/Officials:** Alderman Calway would like nothing more than to appear in a little callback to his own existence by publicly thanking the PCs, offering them a gift-basket of Emerald Oil and local crafts donated by the guilds, and declaring that the first few fish of next year's fishing season will be named after them. These announcements will be followed by folk-dances. If the PCs are interested in any further role in Trostig society (if they want to plant some roots here, or mingle in any particular circles) he can help those things happen. Local merchants will offer nod-and-wink discounts on goods and services, and *any fish-related cravings will be satiated to the limits of piscine avarice*.
- The Court of the Baron:** In general, the castle looming over the town just *looms* there (atop a 60-foot cliff). Baron Elian is away in the lowlands, and this affair isn't a matter of baronial interest (it *should* be, but isn't). If the PCs succeed *spectacularly* at exposing Drake and Gravas, however, and at changing the hearts and minds of the town, the Baron's nephew, Viscount Rillian, might crawl from his puddle of wine long enough to make a grand public show of congratulating the PCs and inviting them to spend some nights at the castle. That *might* be bad. The Viscount is a long-time friend of Drake and his family, and has the power (if seldom the sobriety) to seek revenge for Drake. This friendship is no secret, however, so if the PCs seem likely to garner the Viscount's attention, they'll receive fair warning from someone like Max.
- Dolemon Drake:** If Dolemon Drake feels indebted to the PCs, it almost certainly means they helped him maintain his standing and reputation ... which means any rewards will be delivered *discreetly*, probably

by hand in Drake's library. Drake will be generous with gold (equal to the value of a good sword or two, per PC) and – of course – some Emerald Oil for the road, from his private stock. Then, he'd prefer they be moving along, not lingering on his territory.

- Boraz Gravas:** If the PCs have helped Gravas achieve *any* of his goals (his loyal or self-ish ones), he'll toss the PCs a fat purse of silver or – if they seem to be kindred spirits – some of his private collection of rare poisons.
- Firemaster Yosh:** Yosh can offer such favors as free access to the Purewater libraries and laboratories, small supplies of interesting and dangerous fire-potions (including burst-on-contact firebombs), and other perks appropriate to his *motif*. If Drake's "alchemical" scam has been exposed, Yosh and the Elder Masters will be *especially* generous, and will be instrumental in inviting the Huzrael – as colleagues! – to stay in Trostig if that's even remotely practical. The Huzrael and PCs alike may be offered quarters at Purewater, and if any of the PCs are alchemists or sorcerers, Yosh will be eager to swap trade secrets.
- The Huzrael:** The Huzrael have little to offer. At worst, they have nothing but the tatters they wear, but may each step forward to offer personal tokens (lucky stones, interesting buttons, a handmade tool). At best, they have a ruined tower moldering in the high forest (of possible interest, but devoid of real wealth). What they can *always* offer, however, is a *lifetime* of gratitude and loyalty to those who've been kind to them ... and of course, Grandmother Oria, given time and access to fresh herbs, can be a powerful, if subtle, source of aid.
- Maxwell Holligan:** If things go well, Max will make it plain that the PCs have beds for free at his inn, whenever they need them, and all the feasting and wine they can handle. He'll also want to spend some post-adventure time with them in private, to reflect, to raise drinks to Lionel, to speak well of his memory, and to express hope that he knows, somewhere, that his courage on behalf of the Huzrael was not wasted, thanks to the PCs.



THE MASTER TIMETABLE



If the PCs just sit on the boat playing cards, Dolemon's plan ticks along without a hitch. It's up to the PCs to be as *hitchy* as they can be. Here's a rundown of what's happened so far, and of what *will* happen if Drake gets his way. For a *bare-essentials* version, see the *Toast of the Town* Cribsheet.

Five Years Ago: High above Trostig, a hermit sorcerer called Koldun Barth summons a group of demons to do his bidding – they're yanked from their homeworld, strangers to one another. Barth dies in a magical accident soon after, leaving his tower ruined and his summoned demons – the Huzrael – stranded in this world. The Huzrael, unbound from Barth's will, learn to survive in the woods, and make the ruined tower their home. Contact with the locals is minimal, and the Huzrael become “devils in the woods.”

Three Years Ago: Dolemon Drake is mortally wounded fighting a wolf-pack in the forest. The Huzrael find him and take pity on him, nursing him to health with Emerald Oil, an infusion of their own life-energy. Drake makes them an offer: come and live secretly in Trostig, Drake will sell Trostig on the Huzrael's value as citizens, using Emerald Oil to demonstrate their worth and good nature.

The Last Three Years: The Huzrael dwell in the Nest, and their lives become an increasingly back-breaking schedule of Emerald Oil production, as Drake and Gravas feed them lies about the world above, painting the locals as filled with hatred and fear and prone to violence, painting the catacombs as a series of deathtraps in the dark, painting the Emerald Oil as the one and only way out – eventually. For most of this time, the Huzrael have contact with no locals other than Drake and Gravas. Then:

Over the Past Year: Drake decides to trust his servant and shop-keeper, Lionel Draeger, with some aspects of the Huzrael secret, to reduce his own workload (possibly in response to the birth of Bistan). At first, Lionel responds dutifully, but as his role grows, he befriends the Huzrael and struggles with being accomplice to their abuse. He does his best to keep his unease a secret, but he's a terrible actor, and Boraz Gravas takes notice. Gravas also notes that the Huzrael themselves have begun forcing their smiles, and deduces the truth: Lionel Draeger has been telling them stories that contradict the lie they've been fed.

Last Couple of Weeks: Gravas brings his observations to Dolemon Drake, and together they establish the scope of the problem, and lay plans: murder Lionel and those closest to his work, expose the Huzrael as an “infestation,” and lead a lynch-mob to *scour Drake's slate clean*. Lionel, having caught word of an old friend's heroics nearby, ponders asking for help.

Day Before Yesterday: Lionel hires a scrivener (David Mollis) to write a letter to an old friend (it's the letter the PCs begin the adventure with), on the back of a town map. Then, with the last of his savings, he hires a courier (Penelope), to deliver it by following news of recent heroics. Penelope sets out with the letter.

Yesterday Morning: Dolemon Drake descends into the Nest with Lionel in tow, and orders Hirash (and Amrad, optionally) to help Lionel carry the oil-production equipment up to Drakeshall. This is a clear sign that something is wrong, and the Huzrael begin worrying.

Yesterday Evening: Drake has all the Emerald Oil (and finished incense) moved out of his shop and into storage at Drakeshall. At the same time, he makes sure all paperwork relevant to the Emerald Oil business is moved from his desk at Drakeshall to his shop, where it can be destroyed by fire. Drake and Boraz take turns beating on Hirash to prepare him for his role, knocking him from “too weak to fight” to “almost too beaten to walk.” Then they bind him, gag him, and wrap him in a cloak for clandestine travel to Drake's shop. Unable to wait any longer, Jaina leaves the Nest to search for her love.

Overnight, Just Before Sunrise: Gravas and Emilia Green walk to Drake's shop (Emilia is told she'll be helping with some after-hours cleaning). Drake and a cloaked Hirash arrive a few minutes later. Drake murders Emilia quickly and quietly, and knocks Hirash to the ground to wait while they finish the remaining business. Lionel Draeger, a light sleeper, overhears the activity downstairs, and does his best to put up a fight, but he and Dan are no match for Drake and Gravas, and they're killed and arranged to be burned. Working quickly to build from the noise, Drake and Gravas set fire to the shop, and stage a fighting retreat as it burns, dragging the beaten form of Hirash into the street as the sleepy locals begin to take notice. They take command of bucket-brigades to extinguish the blaze they started, which collapses the shop but doesn't spread much beyond it.

Early Morning: Drake and Gravas set to work spreading the tale, and the locals help. They hire men to erect a scaffolding and hasty stage from which to display Hirash, gather volunteers, and provide a focus for this evening's festivities. The murder victims are moved to the Ellantine church. Maxwell Holligan learns of Lionel's death when one of Drake's household servants visits the Headless Horse seeking provisions for Drakeshall's gathering of guards and soldiers.

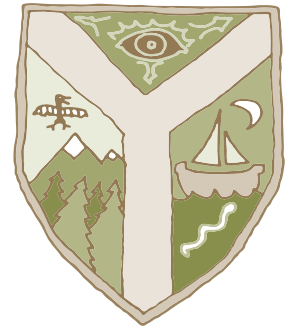
Lunchtime: The PCs arrive as the adventure begins. The scaffolding is up, Hirash hangs from it, the stage is being completed. Drake is preparing at Drakeshall; Gravas is moving back and forth between there and the square.

Throughout the Afternoon: The key locations are as described in the main text of the module.

As the Sun Sets: The market square is packed to capacity with curious locals and would-be volunteers. Drake arrives, the hero! Speech! Speech! Drake stirs the crowd to heroic patriotic fervor; brave men to arms! Town guards in attendance to serve as leaders, but everyone is invited to join. Drake guts Hirash with his sword and sets the scaffolding aflame, a symbolic performance to rouse the crowd.

Night Falls: Drake, the guardsmen and the volunteers descend into the tunnels. Drake leads them to the Nest (Boraz will have hurried ahead to open the secret door in advance). The Huzrael are butchered, and then Drake leads everyone back to the surface, triumphant. The town is saved; they saved it together. Drake is the hero, with a clean slate and a goodly supply of Emerald Oil to trickle out while he ponders alternatives (statuettes of himself? Ale? Commemorative armor?)

Tomorrow & Beyond: Drake enjoys his hero status in a guilt-free haze of glory. He treats the town to a feast, and himself to groupies.



RESOURCES

You've made it past the adventure proper! The following sections explore aspects of the module's setting, both for the sake of GMing it, and as a springboard for follow-up adventures in Trostig and around the lake.

THE HIGH LAKE COUNTRY

The St. August Mountains are a broad and craggy range, draped in evergreens and mist-shrouded. The mountains are remote, culturally, from the rest of the kingdom, with strong dialects, strong mead, and strong *opinions* on where the King's hands are let to grope.

The High Lakes are the realm of the Fog Barons, rich with the treasures of their land (silver and lead and gemstone, honey and timber, leathers, herbs, aromatic resin, and more). The richest of these is the Barony of Araghash and Solestis, occupying the largest of the lakes, its shores and nearby mountains. Those who dwell here are the *Araghasti*, and their lord is Varighal Elian. His Castle, Lake's End, overlooks Trostig.

Lake Araghash fills a cleft in the mountains, with steep sides oscillating between rock-face and blankets of evergreens. Most of its shores are hilly, rough, and difficult even for the locals to traverse. The southeast banks are much more level, and dense with farms and orchards. Meltwater streams and underground fissures feed the lake, which is the source of the southbound *Reghari River*. Unlike most of the High Lakes (which are crystal clear) Araghash is slightly *murky*, with visibility limited to just one fathom in most weather. It's well-populated with fish, turtles, frogs, and lake mussels. There's vegetation in the shallows, and some (scant) algae growth.

Some of the lake-life is dangerous: two of the local snakes are venomous, there are deadeye pike large enough to bite a man in half, and the pintooth mottled eel, when encountered in large numbers, are aggressive swarming predators. Other threats include some famous hauntings: the lake's most well-known ghosts tie to legends many centuries old, from the days when Araghash was bloody with local ethnic wars.

There are things more ancient still. Trostig sits atop tunnel networks crafted by ancient hands. Some of the passages are dry, others are clearly designed to carry

water. Many of the dry tunnels are populated by (relatively benign) Troll and Goblin tribes. Many of the “fissures” which *feed* the lake might actually be extensions of these networks (the Araghasti are ill-equipped to explore submerged areas). The ancient tunnels play a minor role (the Nest) in *Toast of the Town*, but other St. August modules explore them in greater detail.

The Araghast region is *still* an ethnic slurry, but the wars of old are just songs and tapestries, now. The Fog Barons united the mountain-clans and swore allegiance to the king ... in the name of exploiting the mountains’ riches without interruption. Trostig boomed as the seat of the barony, as a market for its community of villages, and as an outlet for the rich west-shore silver and lead mines. Most recently, Trostig has prospered by encouraging craft guilds, in imitation of the lowland cities.

But *some* Araghasti, the saying goes, are *more* Araghasti. There’s a rift between the townsfolk and the trappers, hunters, farmers and miners *beyond* town. Even the fishers, once predominantly village-dwellers, have congregated in Trostig and Gaelton to begin a fishing *industry*, which has made unspoiled (often dried) fish more plentiful, while turning the fishers into “townies.”

Baron Elian, as a child, cultivated a taste for the *royal* court, and spends most of his time there, far from the mountains. He hasn’t set foot in Lake’s End in a year, leaving it to his nephew, the drunkard Viscount Rillian of Chapel Dain. Meanwhile, royalty doesn’t *matter* much in Trostig town, tended by its council of aldermen and guildsmen. The whole town has been infected, some would say, by gold from the Merchant Brotherhoods, quietly and *fiscally* invading from distant seaports.

One of the reasons Dolemon Drake earns so much affection is he’s a prominent man of the town with a *conspicuous* love of Araghasti lake and land. His ambitions may be toxic and his morals crumbling, *but he’s Araghasti to the core*, and isn’t shy about it. To townies who feel their roots eroding, and the dismissive glare of their rural cousins, loving Drake means, at least in part, proving they’re still Araghast.

NOTES ON THE LAKE MAP

Most of the sites, villages and holdings indicated on the Araghast map (previous page) are left to be fleshed-out by the Game Master. A few, though, will be important to other modules in the St. August series. A few notes toward a basic understanding of the region:

Holdings and Settlements: The lake and nearby lands are the domain of Baron Elian. Baron Elian, in turn, assigns his barony’s holdings to a dozen *Viscounts*, a non-hereditary role somewhere between a well-armed reeve and a very petty noble. Holdings are marked on the map as collections of settlements with names like *Leadshore*, *Chapel Gory*, the *Granier’s Fens*, and *Sunderwall*. Dots representing hamlets and villages are limited to settlements of 15 souls or more (but the mountain folk are more scattered than that, with many “settlements” consisting of just a trapper’s hut huddling against a mossy outcropping in the woods).

Patrolled Roads: There are many trackways and trails beyond those indicated; the marked roads are the Baron’s *maintained* roads. Others are a *lot* less safe.

Gaelton: The lake’s only other town-sized settlement is humbler than Trostig, with one-eighth its population and no fortifications (Viscountess Walghari has a fine half-timber manor, typical for the Vicounts). Gaelton is a kindly place, gently-paced and neighborly. It’s where the PCs had been resting when Penelope found them.

Memorials, Ruins, Warnings: The lands around the lake are peaceful for the moment, but historically, it’s been a region of wars, feuds, and terrors. The shades of all three linger, and the Araghasti find it prudent to mark them to warn travelers. Sites like Wurdic’s Beacon, VanHouser Manor, the Eyes of the Mountain and War-Father Araghast’s tomb are kept clear of brush and bramble by the Araghasti, because they’re feared as haunts in the supernatural sense, and deserving of cautious respect. An exception is the Flooded Stair, since the Araghasti can attach it to no legends of their own kind. It’s barely visible in a thicket of flowers and thorns, spiraling to black waters beneath the earth. According to custom, it leads to an entire cave city.

MORE SCRAPS OF TROSTIG

By the standards of its kingdom, Trostig is a *town*, and would require more inhabitants, more streets, a *much* larger church and a charter from the king to qualify as a *city*. The locals disagree, and when they say “the city,” Trostig is exactly what they mean. There’s been some sort of settlement on the site since long before any reliable version of history, but Trostig has been *Trostig* for nearly three hundred years, since the earliest days of modern Araghast tradition. Some supplemental notes:

Celari District: Most of Trostig’s easterly quarters are its *poorer* quarters; Purewater (page 17) and the Celari District are the exceptions. Once upon a time, the Celari District was the legally-bounded quarter where non-Araghasti were *required* to settle, a necessity during the rapid growth when the mines were booming. It’s no longer a “foreign quarter” in the legal sense, but it still has a lot of non-Araghasti character provided by a mix of lowland business interests. It’s also not specifically Celari (one of many cultures present; think of them as approximately Swiss/Swedish/German for shorthand), but the two large guildhouses *are* (visible on the map as having their own slightly arboreal plots of land).

Elder Oak, The: The most direct route to the catacombs from the town square is an iron grate near the base of the Elder Oak, where Dolemon Drake intends to lead his mob after sundown. Unless the PCs are very stealthy, they’ll need to use other grates (like the one in the Snarl), but the Elder Oak *itself* might be of interest, as a point of curiosity, a hiding-place, etc. The Oak predates the town, and is poorly contained by a brick circle meant to provide a clean break between the square’s cobblestones and the grassy earth in which the tree lives. That worked for a time, but the tree’s roots have made it plain who’s boss around here, warping both the brick circle and a lot of the cobbles beyond. The tree is faintly magical, and its foliage endures for a month or two beyond what might be expected for the seasons, creating an impressive canopy in which (if they’re quiet) a whole party of PCs (and perhaps an injured huzrael) might hide, as long as nobody on the ground looks *directly* upwards. Climbing on the Oak is illegal, a law enforced mainly against local children.

Koldunhouse: One of the largest wooden structures in Araghasti territory, Koldunhouse is an abandoned (?) manor surrounded by thorny woods and iron fences. It's no relation to Koldun Barth (page 13), but it means the same thing: "koldun" is an old term for *sorcerer* in these parts. Its owner, Koldun Viranar, had an arrangement with both a Baroness and a *King*, generations ago, and he and his family did their business so quietly it took years for Trostig to *notice* they'd died, or vanished, or ... something. When they finally *did* notice, it was unclear what anyone should do about it, because Viranar's charter was generous, and his land legally sovereign in many ways. Both the Baroness and the King involved are long dead, but their laws respected, Koldunhouse feared, and ... they were *wizards*. Maybe they're *not* gone, exactly? Maybe they're just doing something nobody understands. In recent years, the town has allowed the pearwine merchants to build some guild-related housing on the Koldunhouse lands (along the south edge), and nobody got turned into newts or anything, so the question begins to open up ... but nobody's yet explored Koldunhouse past the "knocking on the door and running" stage. Koldunhouse *isn't* relevant to this adventure, but if the PCs decide to explore ways to get the Huzrael to their home dimension, Firemaster Yosh might mention that Koldun Viranar was rumored to be expert in cross-dimensional gate magic, in his day.

Lathald's Quarter: The dominant faith in Trostig is that of the Ellantine church, but the followers of the Prophet Lathald (practitioners of *Lathaldianism*) are more common in most Araghasti territory, and have a small neighborhood in Trostig proper called Lathald's Quarter. It's visibly poverty-stricken, much like the Snarl (q.v.) and Canvas District, which are *also* heavily Lathaldian. The details of the faiths aren't critical to the adventure; the important thing is that they're *not* different faiths at all, just slightly different *flavors* of the same religion, and their division is more about trivial details (as spiritually profound as spoons-to-the-left vs spoons-to-the-right while praying over the evening meal, and cosmological hairs split beyond mortal experience) and political ties (the Ellantine Church is the *royal* church, the religion allied with the distant court of the realm). Ellantines are presumed to be "townies" and crown loyalists by default, Lathaldians to be back-country rubes who hate their king. Both are unfair stereotypes. One of the reasons this whole "demonic invasion" is stimulating to many is that it melts such lines: *everyone* in town can get chummy on the subject.

Oiler's District: In an adventure about *oil*, it's not uncommon for PCs to wonder about the Oiler's District. In many cases, the simple names of the districts can be misleading, but the Oiler's District really *is* the best place in Trostig for a choice in seed oils, fruit oils, fish oils, herbal oils and more. Those in the oil trade can talk a PC's ear off about this-oil-putrefies-too-quickly and this-one-produces-the-nicest-smoke-if-your-ventilation-is-lousy, and they've *all* sold oil to Dolemon Drake ... and they all agree he buys "any of the cheapest oil he can get his hands on, and by the barrel, not the bottle." His source for walnut oil, however (the actual base for pure Emerald Oil) is across the lake, and not in Trostig at all (which the Trostig oilers might be vaguely aware of, or not – he does that kind of business via boats he owns, so it's pretty private). To

acquire any of this information, the PCs may have to buy some tacky-looking table lamps (the oil merchants and lampmakers are, predictably, in bed together, to a degree as literal as you find amusing).

Snarl, The: The poorest quarter in town, the Snarl is as wide and well-cobbled as any street, but *treated* as a filthy crime-infested back-alley by anyone who might care to lift a snooty nose in its direction. The shops and workshops facing *outward* from the Snarl aren't considered part of the Snarl at all – the Snarl is what's *behind* them, where laborers live who have no place in the guilds, no place in the gentry, no place beyond whatever poor employment they can get from more established members of the town. By no accident, most of its residents are Lathaldian (see Lathald's Quarter). The Snarl twists and fragments into tiny (actual) alleys beyond its own serpentine stretch, which dates back to the early days of the town, the lingering belief that "evil can only walk in straight lines," and a long-dead Alderman's faith that a twisty street would act as a kind of filter against corrupting influences arriving in town by boat. The Snarl was then a wealthy symbol of Trostig's growing prominence, and it used to be longer (extending to the Quayside at one end, and what is now called Small Square at the other).

Tavern District: Named for the Pipe and Bellows, a tavern that burned to the ground 57 years ago, which had been owned by a beloved silversmith (Mather Silverson) in his retirement. Perhaps disappointingly, the tavern district has *fewer* taverns than any other quarter in town, but the locals hugely enjoy confused visitors who explore the neighborhood assuming otherwise. The site of the Pipe and Bellows is now a furniture workshop, complete with stories of hauntings from the tavern days (Mather died in the fire).

Twin Brooks: Two mountain streams – Fenny Brook and Oerbrook – frame the town and do their part to feed Lake Araghast. *Anyone* looking at the map who hasn't yet absorbed the *scale* might mistake them for rivers; they're not. Each averages less than 25 feet wide, and is (except during occasional spring floods) shallow enough for wading at any point. Religious tradition restricts what can be done with them, but that does little harm to the town, which enjoys easy access to lakewater through conduits at the upper levels of the ancient catacombs. Purewater Academy makes regular use of the waters of the Fenny Brook, which generates some social tension (they have special dispensation from the clergy *and* the Baron's court, but the locals ponder loudly and suspiciously how that came to be).

Wolfwood, The: Wolves seldom stray near Trostig, but the mountains extend thousands of feet above the lake, including tracts of high grassland, conifer woods and tundra. Wolves move in *those* areas, feeding on local undersized ungulates (eshtak and silvergoat) and rodents. The local stretch of forest *named* "Wolfwood" is notable not for wolves, but as the steepest local incline (the west corner of the handout town map is 363 feet higher than Lake Araghast) and the way to the higher mountain forest (still technically the Wolfwood by local tradition) where Koldun Barth's ruined tower stands, and where the Huzrael made themselves a home in the forest. Depending on how the adventure plays out, a return to the Wolfwood may be the best outcome the Huzrael can hope for.



CULTURAL SHORTHAND: AN ARAGHASTI GRAB-BAG



*These tidbits of local facts, lore and nonsense have many uses, but my favorite is to treat it as a pile of “NPC Seeds.” When the PCs engage with a random local, let that character **exemplify** or **introduce** one or more of the points below.*

Araghast and August: The St. August Mountains are named for a storied prince from generations ago, whom the locals know as *War-Father Araghast*, but whom the king (and the Ellantine Church) calls *Saint August*.

Ashes: The Araghasti burn *longtrumpet* (a mountain flower that grows on the banks of streams) to ash, and sprinkle those ashes as *seasoning* in stews and beans.

Carvings: Trostig merchants trade in the ornate wood-carvings common on the homes, gates, and churches in the rural settlements nearby, but by religious tradition, such carvings may not be created within town walls.

Cauldrons: Prosperous Araghasti homes have a large, rectangular brick coal-pit with *three* iron kettles; the poorest homes have a tiny square pit with *one*.

Coats: The hide of the deerlike *eshtak* provides the finest local leather. Locals who can afford them wear *eshtak* coats; the caramel-gold color is unmistakable.

Crime: For ordinary crime, it's the Aldermen who'll handle any trial. Only the most difficult, contentious, or high-stakes matters are taken to Lake's End.

Death: The dead are believed to linger for *exactly four generations* as guides for their descendants (manifesting as pangs of conscience, notes of worry, moments of inspiration, etc). The spirits of those without children, or those whose lineage is ended, might become trapped and go mad without special “rites of rest.”

Drums: The *gandibox* sounds like a cross between a bodhrán and someone kicking a barrel in anger. It's named for a distant land, but it's unique to this region.

Fighting: The Trostig Pugilist's League began as a gentleman's joke, three generations ago. Now it's a sport-fighting tradition open to anyone willing.

Fish: Blacktail trout is oily, and the Araghasti like it smoked. Pearl salmon has a bright orange flesh, and they char it directly on the coals of their cauldron-beds.

Fruit: In the lowlands, they call it a “mountain pear.” Here in the mountains, it's just a “pear.” It's tiny, tart, leathery, and unrelated to pears.

Gambling: It's a regional cliché that fishers will bet on *anything*, but *Brandywine* (a card game) is the favorite excuse. Several dice-games are common, too.

Graves: The Araghasti decorate graves, urnbarrows and tombs with tokens of gratitude, including toys, poems, tools, and (most commonly) fresh loaves of bread.

Horses: The Araghasti breed is the *Trandal*, a small and sturdy horse suited to the rough terrain and thin air. Tractable and gentle, they're mostly reddish-brown.

Hot Drink: A minty herb called *eihla* grows wild in the pine underbrush. The Araghasti brew it like tea and sweeten it with honey. Some enjoy mixing it with mead.

Foreigners: Nobody *really* believes that it's lucky to pull the hair of someone with a foreign accent, but quite a lot of locals enjoy *pretending* to believe.

Nets: Fishing goes on for half the year, but fishing-related *crafts* are year-round activities for fisher families. The local gill-nets, for example, aren't very durable, and need steady maintenance and frequent replacements.

Numbers: Local superstition includes several meaningful numbers, which can make things like haggling hazardous (*halving*, for example, symbolizes *dismissal*, while the number 6 represents low intelligence).

Oral Tradition: The *Talifarem* are an informal order devoted to preserving tales of the Araghasti. They're composed of members crossing every social and religious line. They gather twice a year for a lake-shore revel near Gaelton, re-telling and trading their stories.

Pottery: A ritual for luck is to offer a bit of your own blood to a potter, who'll bake it into a work of the local black clay, then fire and glaze it. Break the resulting piece (usually a miniature bowl or pitcher) and the Araghasti believe it drains an ill influence of all power.

Prayer: Every morning, Sister Alifred (page 11) goes into Lathald's Quarter and helps the priests feed the poorest children and lead them in Lathaldian prayer. She makes no attempts to convert anyone.

Rites: The Lathaldians still practice seasonal rites of planting and harvest, which involve both brightly-colored costume and the sudden lack thereof. The Ellantines have several dry jokes about them.

Roots: The most common root-vegetables in the local stews are *clayapples* (enormous yellow-flesh potatoes), *gramble* (similar to turnips or parsnips), and an exceptionally sweet carrot relative called *dulance*.

Sport: They race children in Trostig, in the early summer (the height of fishing season, and related festivals). Some adults bear storied “racing scars” from childhood, and might favor visitors with the tale.

Spring: At the year's first thaw, Dead Park becomes overgrown with pale pink blossoms on the tombs' woody vines. These *dawnflowers* grow nowhere else nearby, and bloom weeks before anything else does.

Staples: Most of the local diet depends on the *charcoal bean* and a rye-like grain called *gory*, with some inevitable gallows humor (“gory stew, eel on a gory bed,” etc).

Strife: A small group of sorcerers led by a man called Koldun Flax arrived a few weeks ago, claiming to be the rightful heirs to stewardship of Purewater.

Tacos: Not really, but a favorite food of the lake-fisher is the “tunny roll,” a moist flatbread wrapped around salty beans stewed with leftover bits of fish or game.

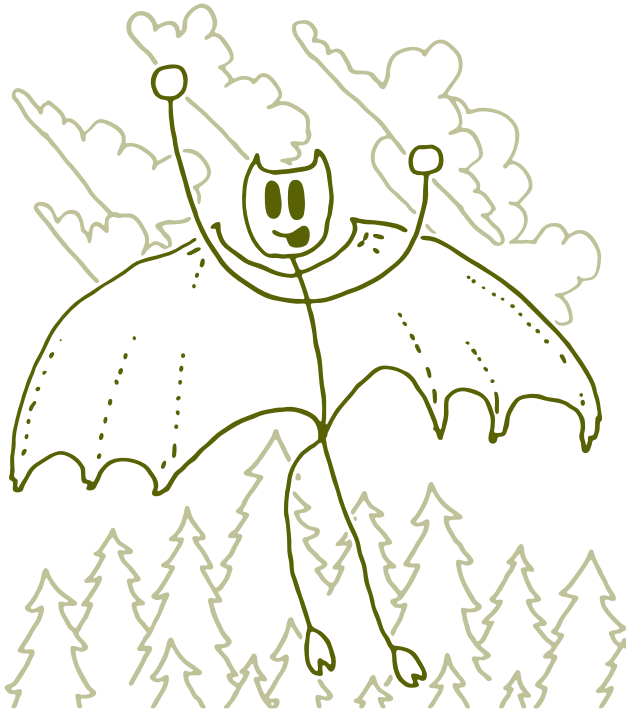
Wine: The locals ferment a dry and bitter pearwine (see *Fruit*) along with several fine meads. They prize the sweeter wines of other lands.

Winter: It's illegal to construct buildings on the Fair Summit south of town, but it's kept piled with lumber, because in winter, town-fires (usually two or three major fires per winter) create a need for reconstruction.

THE HUZRAEL

The Huzrael (also “Huz”), while strikingly “demonic” in appearance (horns, hooves, fangs, batlike wings and dark red skin), are in many ways an unremarkable humanoid race, suitable as Player Characters in future campaigns if the GM permits it. In their home dimension, they’re considered ordinary, and have their own cultures, traditions, bureaucracies, superstitions and so on. They’re *people*, there. They’re only “demons” here because that’s what people call them.

Physically, Huzrael are tall (20% taller than humans) and very lean (33% less body-weight than a human of comparable height). Huz have fangs and claws (some Huzrael societies blunt them), and translucent, leathery wings. In their home dimension, the Huzrael can fly with about as much effort as a human expends jogging (sedentary Huzrael are terrible at flying for more than short bursts, but athletic ones can fly almost indefinitely if they don’t push too hard). Here in *this* world, the Huzrael are much weaker fliers, and flight requires exertion comparable to *hard, desperate sprinting* ... which means, even for athletic Huzrael, flight is exhausting after a short time. In any case, and in any world, the Huzrael can manage *gliding* (gently losing altitude the whole time) with no more exertion than a casual stroll.



Huzrael have near-perfect night vision (they’re able to see in just about *any* light) and acute senses in general. They’re quick, but a little *fragile* compared to humans, due to slight frames and light bones.

Once summoned and freed here, Huzrael (fortunately) have no particular weakness to magical control, but (unfortunately) no talent for interdimensional travel of their own. Depending on the events of *Toast of the Town* in your own runs, helping the Huzrael find a way back to their homeworld could form the basis of another adventure, or an entire campaign.

Pregen Notes for the Game Master

This module includes six premade characters to let players hit the ground running on impromptu sessions or when participating in game shop/convention games. They can also serve as clear examples of what *Risus* characters look like with a little more fleshing-out than Grolfnar Vainsson! They’re 10-die characters selected for variety, mutual compatibility, and thematic sympathy with *Toast of the Town*.

Elena Holtz: A good choice for experienced roleplayers due to her subtlety, Elena is a proper *detective*. She’s likely to notice clues others will miss, so feed the party information through her eyes, ears, and powers of augury (really just another way she can ask for guidance when the party needs it). Augury responses can be cryptic (“You see worried eyes, devoid of piety, but gazing on a great symbol of worship”) or straight to the point (“Jaina’s on a roof just south of the church”) as you please.

Manciple: A simple martial artist/burglar design, but with the addition of a genuine (and slightly disposable) wonder dog. Manciple might be a bit much for a *total* newbie to bring to life, but he’s a breeze for most players and nothing troublesome for the GM (set boundaries early on, if need be, on just how *wondrous* a wonder dog gets to be). For a fun two-player run, encourage a combo of Manciple and Morgain (they’re a nicely balanced pair, and it looks to all the world like a *single* adventurer with two pets ...)

Morgain: Morgain’s size and shape provide excellent advantages when it comes to infiltration (s/he can slip through the bars in the locked Nest gate, navigate the burned potion-shop without collapsing the floor, and walk past guards in plain sight). Morgain’s spellcasting is very “general-purpose,” so set magical Target Numbers from 20-50% higher than you would for a more thematically-focused spellcaster (a fiery spell that would be Difficulty 5 for Firemaster Yosh would be Difficulty 6-8 for Morgain).

Nikolai Bedykov: If you have an uncertain newcomer in the group (someone new to *Risus* in particular, or to RPGs in general), consider steering them toward Nikolai, the simplest of the pregens in most respects. He’s a sturdy “fighter” type with a suite of supporting talents, who draws on accessible pop-culture Dwarf imagery with easy roleplaying cues.

Artiri Apriva: She’s written with adult roleplayers in mind, which means her *sexuality* as a Satyr gets a couple of gentle nods on her sheet. If you’re gaming with impressionable kids and/or easily-terrified parents, you might want to exclude her from the mix. Beyond that, she’s a well-rounded swashbuckling heroine with a nice balance of action-ready talents and abilities. Pairs well (musically!) with Nikolai, and she’s comparably straightforward for a newcomer.

Gin Giria: As a mage, former assassin and dabbling alchemist, Gin has a lot of gentle thematic ties with the adventure, including the ability to do shop-talk with Firemaster Yosh, understand Emerald Oil on both the herbal and magically-enhanced levels, and some personal experience with the blade’s-edge difference between *hero* and *villain*. His/her abilities are simple enough for newcomers and varied enough for jaded old-timers. A strong all-around choice.

EMERALD OIL, EMERALD SMOKE

Summer Fever, as it came to be known, wasn't the slaughterhouse some made it out to be, but it made hundreds miserable, and killed two, including the Baron's own niece. Dolemon Drake – ever the hero – presented Emerald Oil to the town as a cure, a recipe he'd learned years ago in the east, re-created with secret herbs provided by the shamed Wolf King he'd defeated in the woods. Within days, Summer Fever was gone.

What's In It

Emerald Oil is an infusion of leaves and flowers in a base of walnut oil. The “secret ingredient” is the Huzrael themselves. Emerald Oil is a work of ritual spell-craft, not “alchemy” as most understand it. Oria's rituals don't just *infuse* the oil, they *enchant* it, investing the life-energies of the Huzrael themselves. To make the oil is *exhausting*: the Huzrael sacrifice their daily energies for the well-being of those who consume the result. The alchemists at Purewater have deduced something close to the basic herbal recipe (which *is* alchemy, but only to provide a *container* for the magic), and they've detected the enchantment ... but the relationship between the two eludes them.

Emerald Oil is important to the Huzrael; they'd be making it no matter what (they were making it in the tower while Drake was being chewed on by wolves). They'd be making much *less* of it, though ... enough to store some

excess vim for a rainy day, *not* enough to fuel a greedy enterprise, *not* enough to exhaust them and consume their lives. Emerald Oil is, to the Huzrael, a method for storing those little bits of vigor they *weren't going to use* in a given day, to prevent it from going to waste ... to save it for a time of (or a neighbor in) real need. In the Huzrael homeworld, it's a ritual overseen by the Quiet Witches, and one carried here by Grandmother Oria, who carefully adapted the formula to the alien herbs growing here – a feat the Purewater Alchemists would admire greatly, if only they understood.

As it is, the constant batch-producing has kept the Huzrael occupied in shifts, each draining themselves into the oil in turn, then collapsing to sleep while others do the same. The result is four gallons of pure Emerald Oil per week. Drake collects the pure oil and *dilutes* it to 25% strength in plainer oil (any nut, fruit or seed oil he can get his hands on) and sells *that* in four-ounce vials, each as costly as a soldier's sword. He also sells oil-infused incense, hand made by Emilia Green prior to her murder. Each cake contains half as much pure oil as the vials, and is comparably less expensive.

How to Use It

Emerald Oil may be consumed, burned for its smoke, or applied to wounds as an ointment. Consumed directly, Emerald Oil is a hallucinogen and healing agent. Onset is slow (one or two hours for any effects to kick in) but impact is powerful. A single four-ounce vial of prepared Oil (or one ounce of *pure* Oil) provides a hallucinogenic “trip” lasting from 3-5 hours, which is the equivalent of 3-5 *days* of perfect rest and refreshment on the finest, comfiest bedding, along with a full-body purge of many diseases and some magical ills (the GM will determine which). The patient will be soothed *emotionally* as well as physically, so in game terms, this can heal the kind of cliché-dice damage associated with ego, disappointment and heartbreak as well as physical beating (since it's basically a magical *rest*, it won't heal things like lost limbs). During the treatment, the patient is unable to *do* much beyond enjoying the trip, feeling intense love and gratitude, reflecting constructively on life, and snuggling close with anyone willing.

Emerald Smoke, whether from oil (two vials fill a standard table lamp) or incense, is a lot like consuming the oil, but it can be shared by everyone in the same enclosed area. This diminishes the effects to some degree due to wasted oil (lost as smoke that goes uninhaled) and further by the division among multiple patients. However, the smoke acts *much more quickly* than ingestion; those who inhale deeply will be tripping pleasantly within 10-15 minutes ... and for more powerful healing effects, you can always opt to burn *more* oil and/or incense.

The Huzrael don't use Oil as a topical ointment; it just doesn't do much. Drake popularized it in Trostig to sell more oil. It *does* accelerate the healing of abrasions or mild burns, and it'll keep any clean wound from becoming infected, but that's about all. Topically-applied Emerald Oil has no hallucinogenic effect (just a vague “buzz” of heightened sensuality). Oil enthusiasts assume it's much more useful as an ointment than it is, because they've had such positive experiences with consuming it or inhaling the smoke.

Adapting the Module

Toast of the Town has been designed to socket easily into just about *any* traditional-fantasy setting. All it needs is a world where the Huzrael themselves (and their simple but useful magic) might be allowed to exist, even if they exist *only* for the duration of this adventure. There are, broadly, two ways to adapt it:

Inserting Trostig Itself: If your world of choice is *big* enough or *sketchy* enough, and includes at least one temperate-to-cold mountain range, just to drop the module's entire setting, whole, onto the edge of a lake somewhere in those lands. Done.

Moving it to a New Town: The most change-sensitive element in this adventure is actually the townsfolk, who really are *town's* folk, not *city*-folk or *village*-folk. **Toast of the Town** requires a town *large* enough to allow Drake to live in a separate social strata and enjoy a degree of privacy, but *small* enough so Drake is a big fish in this particular pond without being some kind of overly-resourced mega-noble who can stymie resistance just by throwing money or a private army at it. So, ideally, transplant the adventure to a town of comparable scope to minimize added prep-work. In a country village, Drake becomes either more critical to the town or a lesser figure entirely, and the Huzrael's hideaway likely changes to a nearby cave rather than “sewer” catacombs. In a large urban setting, you can achieve the middling-town effect by focusing on a single neighborhood (to which Drake is a very *local* hero) rather than the city entire.

DOLEMON DRAKE: FACES OF VILLAINY

Few choices will change the tone, pacing, and character of this adventure more than deciding how to roleplay the central villain, Dolemon Drake.

The simplest is a kind of “Disney Villain” approach, with Drake drawn in broad, simple strokes: he’s vain, he’s rich, he’s aloof, he’s selfish, he’s abandoned morality to maintain his advantages. His teeth sparkle with well-groomed falsehood and the citizens of Trostig, by default, have to be a pack of morons to worship this guy, but they’re suckers for expensive armor, monogrammed snot-rags, and freshly-laundered capes. The simplest Drake is a polished political cartoon, playing these rubes to his advantage. If it *were* a Disney movie, he’d have a musical number describing his own virtues, probably singing to a dancing mirror that keeps trying to leg-hump him in raw admiration. This version can be a lot of fun to roleplay (with or without the addition of a leg-humping mirror), and works well for shop and convention runs.

At the other extreme, Dolemon Drake isn’t as simple as all that, and he’s something much more dangerous: he’s *convincing*. The “complex” version of Dolemon Drake, if you’re feeling up to it, should *even convince the players*, at least for a scene or two, that Drake is acting in what he believes are Trostig’s best interests. The full-featured Drake doesn’t debate with a sneer and a dismissive laugh; he engages with presence, concern, and apparent empathy (without ever relinquishing his air of command). He doesn’t just speechify; he listens. He doesn’t just attack; he cares. He’s confident, but a bit *wary*, because he’s shouldering a grim responsibility. The lie about Hirash and the Huzrael is an easy one for Drake to tell, because he believes it, sincerely. He’s believed it since he created it, and if he needs to create any *new* lies, he’ll believe those just as completely, and just as quickly. Now, it’s just a matter of shaping the world to *fit* his new beliefs, and the cleanest way to do *that* is to bring his entire town with him down into the fantasy he *needs* to be true. When the Huzrael are dead, all other possibilities evaporate. Drake is a hero, the demons are defeated, the town is safe, and *he’s the one who saved it*. If the PCs are trying to *prevent* that, well ... they might need his help, to understand the rightness of the cause. If they *refuse* such help, well ... *they’re bad people*.

These are extremes book-ending a spectrum. Pausing to consider that, and where you want to aim *your* Drake, is well worth your prep-time. In terms of gameplay, different Drakes will encourage and discourage different *solutions*. Disney-villain Drake is easy to deal with because there’s no reason to not just *defeat* him. While you’re at it, humiliate him a little and then kick him while he’s down; he’s earned it. Complex Drake, on the other hand, opens more doors: Can Drake be bargained with? Reasoned with? Be led to a change of heart? Tricked into adopting some *other* delusional reality that serves his self-image without harming the Huzrael? *Maybe*. Some groups have done it: the Huzrael are smuggled safely out of town, Drake still gets the credit for “slaughtering” the “infestation” and still gets to be the hero. Nobody new gets hurt ... but the murders already committed can’t be undone. A morally-tangled

“Draking” Every NPC

The GMing decisions explored on this page, on just what *kind* of Dolemon Drake you’ll be running, are relevant to every NPC in every module, not just Drake. If you’ve got some prep time to spare, take *each NPC you expect to matter* (Jaina, for example, is a great candidate, as are Grandmother Oria and Firemaster Yosh) and give them the same going-over I’ve done here for Drake. Note their potential *extremes*, find the spectrum between them, and see which version you’re most eager to roleplay.

The Module Cribsheet

Overleaf, you’ll find the adventure’s *cribsheet*: a hyper-condensed summary of the whole shebang. On its own, the crib sheet is just a wall of nonsense, but once you’ve absorbed the adventure, you’ll find it’s a handy summary, NPC stat-reference, and index. It also lays the module bare (serving as a diagram of all its moving pieces), making it useful when performing major alterations, or when adapting *Toast* to other genres (it works well in space opera, post-holocaust, and others, just by toggling the pieces to their nearest genre equivalent) or to less-traditional fantasy worlds.

The Risus Community

This adventure is built to travel. It’s an ambassador, of sorts, for *Risus: The Anything RPG*, and if you found it just by rummaging through the thousands of random gaming PDFs on the Internet, congrats! That tingle means it’s working.

You can find the parent game easily with a web-search, but while you’re looking for the game, keep an eye out for the *community*, as well! For more than 20 years, *Risus* has enjoyed a large, friendly, global family of GMs and players, and they’ve written even *more* adventures, worlds, rules-variants and characters for you to dig into. What’s more, they enjoy discussing *Risus* and things related to it, so if you’ve got questions, concerns, ideas or just a desire to *talk about gaming*, they’re waiting to welcome you.

solution, but a morally-tangled Drake can get the players thinking that way. Drake is, in some ways, the *terrain* on which the PCs will track their boot-marks. The more there is to Drake, the more there *can* be to solving the problems he’s wrought.

For my own part as a GM, I find the key to Drake (even Disney Drake) is something stressed in his writeup: he *seems* to be motivated by greed (just some rich jack-ass with a demon sweatshop) but he’s really not about greed at all. He’s motivated by his desperate need to *be the hero*, to be the *savior*, to be *worthy* of his advantages. He’s fighting – and stealing, and killing, and lying – for the sake of his self-image. This need *connects* him to Hirash (though neither would ever notice; they’re both lunkheads when it comes to self-reflection), and I find that compelling when it’s time to roleplay them. What compels *you* might be very different. If the above excites you about the possibilities, run with it. If something *else* grabs your attention, take a moment to ponder what that means for your Drake. It’ll be worth it.

ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

Introduction (page 2): The PCs arrive in the mountain-lake town of Trostig, responding to a cry for help (a letter of “invitation” from Lionel Draeger, an old friend). They’re met at the dockside by friendly Alderman Calway (page 3).

Major Initial Leads (page 5): The Headless Horse (tavern, page 8, on the Market Square, page 5), Drakeshall (address mentioned in letter, page 19), Column of Smoke (leads to Remnants of the Fire, page 9). See page 5 for additional leads which won’t be as obvious (like “Mollis” on the letter).

Leads to Be Discovered: Hirash (page 6) is easily spotted if the PCs visit the square. Max Holligan can tell the PCs about the Nest (page 12), Grandmother Oria or the other Huz can tell them about Jaina (16). Any townsfolk might hint about Firemaster Yosh and Purewater Academy (page 17) or Yosh might introduce himself if he sees the PCs poking at Drake’s facade. Any inquiry into those killed in the shop-fire might lead to the corpses being prepared at the Ellantine Church (page 11).

Adventure Goals: Help the Huzrael * Save Hirash * Locate/Assist Jaina * Reveal to Trostig that the Huz are Benefactors * Reveal to Trostig that Drake and Gravas are Villains * Sundry Others (see page 22). When in doubt (or in the face of any lag in pacing), kick an NPC into play to help the PCs towards achieving or understanding one of the adventure goals.

CONDENSED TIMELINE

(See page 24 for a less-condensed one)

Five Years Ago: Koldun Barth summoned Huzrael, died soon after. Huzrael are local legend.

Three Years Ago: Dolemon Drake wounded. Huzrael heal him. He invites them to town, fibs.

The Last Three Years: Emerald Oil production, Huz imprisoned in the Nest.

Over the Past Year: Bistan (infant Huzrael) born. Lionel learns bad truths, tells Huzrael and Max.

Last Couple of Weeks: Gravas & Drake plan sundry murders, villainy, artful cackling.

Day Before Yesterday: Lionel hires David Mollis to scribe letter, Penelope to deliver it.

Yesterday Morning: Dolemon Drake gets Hirash to carry equipment from the Nest.

Yesterday Evening: Emerald oil and paperwork moved. Hirash beaten. Jaina leaves the Nest.

Overnight, Just Before Sunrise: Murders at shop, fake “fight” with Hirash, fire set, fresh fibs.

Early Morning: Hirash strung up. Corpses moved to the church. Max learns of Lionel’s death.

Lunchtime: PCs arrive. Events from here down are Drake’s plan; the PCs can/should interfere.

Throughout the Afternoon: Locations as described in module. *Bulk of adventure takes place now.*

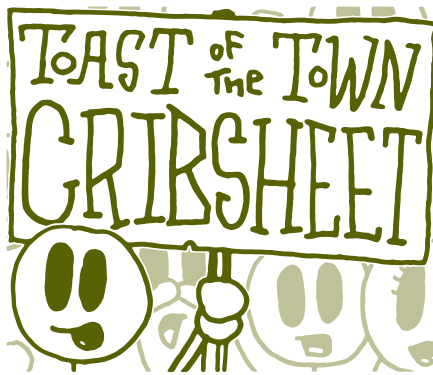
Sunset: Big gathering in the town square. Hirash to be sword-gutted and burned. Mob to be roused.

Night Falls: Mob to descend into the catacombs with leader Drake, to butcher the Huzrael.

Tomorrow & Beyond: Drake wins; gloats; celebrates; is validated as right, good, heroic; indulges in groupies, parades, naps. Gravas: skulls, titters.

EMERALD OIL

May be consumed, burned for smoke (in an oil-lamp or as incense) or applied as a topical ointment. Ointment is mostly useless/placebo, but the other methods provide powerful healing and 3-5 hours of *psychedelic trippery* (which heals other things). Onset for non-Huzrael is 1-2 hours for ingestion, just a few minutes for smoke. Smoke allows the same oil to be shared, but requires more oil for effect. Commercial oil is diluted. See page 30.



PRIMARY LOCALES

Trostig Square (page 5): The heart of town, with Hirash (page 6) strung up on a scaffolding next to the Ellantine Church (page 11). Boraz Gravas (page 20) is here half the time. Sundry **Burly Swordsman (3)** and **Workmen (2)** at the scaffolding. Main entrance of the Headless Horse (page 8) is here. Good place to meet Firemaster Yosh (page 17) if desired. Likely place to spot Jaina (page 16) lurking on rooftops, watching Hirash and pondering rash action. Possible place to see the burned corpses on display after the church is finished preparing them (page 12).

Tavern of the Headless Horse (page 8): Located right across the square from much of the excitement and trouble. Lionel’s friend Max Holligan is the tavernkeep. He can provide chunks of the backstory, the location of the Nest (page 12), the secret to “unlocking” the magic door handle (page 12) and general goodwill, shelter, food, etc.

Remnants of the Fire (page 9): Drake’s former potion-and-oil shop. The site of overnight murders (really) or (not really) a battle between Drake (page 18) and the demons infesting the city. Burned building, upper floors collapsed, cellar accessible but hazardous, corpses were moved to the church (page 11). Clues include: eyewitness accounts, recently-removed barrels and crates in cellar passage, lack of “emerald-ness” in fumes. Challenges include a Guardsman (2) named Bascombe and some Weird Alchemical Fumes (4).

The Ellantine Church (page 11): Corpses of Lionel Draeger, Emilia Green, Dan Lakewood. Two clergyfolk, Alifred and Ulster, are preparing the bodies. Clues include: wounds inconsistent with the public story, Drake’s request for public display. Challenges are mainly social, but especially: the corpses are already linen-wrapped.

The Nest (page 12): Three ways in and out (magic stone door to sewers, gated tunnel to Drakeshall kitchen cellar ladder, narrow chimney choked with rubble). Grandmother Oria (page 15) is the leader (elderly, witchy, groovy). Other Huzrael present are: Kiria (Oria’s helper), Amrad (cradling Bistan), Inris (young fisherman), Buraska (young cloth-mistress), Drigo (older ranch-hand), Shanna (former bureaucrat). Huzrael not present: Hirash (strung up in square), Jaina (town roofs & alleys, hiding). Huzrael are exhausted, scared. Thick speech.

Jaina’s Rooftops (page 16): Jaina is watching Hirash and/or seeking Emerald Oil to refresh herself. She has no reason to trust the PCs until they give her one! Hiding in alleys and on wet rooftops.

Drakeshall (page 19): Dolemon Drake (page 18) is typically here prior to sunset. Lawn crowded with **Assorted Grunts (2)**, rear entrance has **Guard (3)**, horses in stable, kitchen outbuilding connects to the Nest below cellar (page 20). Main building includes both main-floor and cellar caches of Emerald Oil.

Purewater Academy (page 17): Enclave of alchemists, at orchards on south edge of town. Firemaster Yosh is snooping around because he doesn’t trust Drake. Use him to goose the pace, as an ally, strategic consultant, etc.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS (NPCS)

Maxwell Holligan (page 8): Beloved Innkeeper With a Song in His Heart (3), Dedicated Mixologist Disappointed That His Customers Never Order Cocktails (2) **Lucky Shots: □□□□□□**. True friend, knows Lionel’s secrets. Limited resources (inn, knowledge, some public favor) but will do his best.

Firemaster Yosh (page 17): Incendiary-Themed Alchemy Teacher (5), Incendiary-Themed Mage (3), Incendiary-Themed Businessman (2). Hangs at the edge of the adventure, seeking the truth about Drake. Potential ally, excellent resources (Purewater Academy). Handy with a light for your cigar.

The Clerics (page 11): Sister Alifred and Brother Ulster are the Well-Meaning Clergyfolk (3) preparing the corpses at the Ellantine church. They’re also pondering a troubling request by Dolemon Drake: for them to display the bodies.

Hirash* (page 6): Self-Effacing Huzrael Mason (3), Reluctant-But-Determined Hunter (3). Huzrael (page 29) beaten nearly to death and hung from a scaffold in the square. At sunset, he’ll be gutted and burned as part of Drake’s gathering. Needs rescue. May need other kinds of solving, depending.

Jaina* (page 16): Gleeful Huntress (3), Former Thief and Scavenger Who Doesn’t Mind Returning to Old Habits (3). Hiding in alleyways and on rooftops, keeping an eye on Hirash, looking for Emerald Oil, has no idea who the PCs are. Might do something foolhardy. Will be enraged if Hirash is killed.

Grandmother Oria* (page 15): Quiet Witch [4], Historian (3), Teacher (3). Her magic is for healing, comforting. Her leadership is for whatever the Huzrael need; she’s old but made of steel.

Dolemon Drake (page 18): Charismatic Man of the People Entirely Capable of Believing His Own Lies (5), Cunning Warrior (4), Worldly Ruin-Explorer (3), Soulful Poet Shy About His Artistic Genius (1). He’s a hero gone sour, motivated by his own self-image. See Timeline (left, and page 24) for his plans.

Boraz Gravas (page 20): Ruthless Killer Doggedly Loyal to Dolemon Drake (5), Slick Political Schemer Who’d Sell Drake Down the River If the Payoff Was High Enough (4), Experienced Mercantile Manager Unbothered By Contradictions (3). Drake’s right-hand-man and backup villain. Found in the town square and Drakeshall (50/50 chance of each).

The Other Huzrael* (page 14): Kiria, Oria’s apprentice, same clichés as Oria (but at one die less), plus Restless Daydreaming Musician (3). Amrad, Woodworker (3), mate to Kiria, cradles their baby: Bistan, Troublesome Complication (3). Inris, teen boy, Fisherman (3). Buraska, teen girl, Cloth-Mistress (4). Drigo, older man, Ranch-Hand (3). Shanna, quiet and somewhat resentful woman, High-Ranking Bureaucrat With Political Goals (3).

Others (page 16 and elsewhere): Guards and other Grunts throughout the adventure tend to have (2) or (3) dice in their defining cliché. Alderman Calway is the Well-Meaning Local Bureaucrat (3) that welcomes the PCs at dockside. Johnny Dhulin is a Genial Beggar (4) the PCs might encounter while poking around. Scribe David Mollis is the Scrivener (3) Lionel Draeger hired to make the letter. Nella and Helmina are Cooks (3) that Drake dismissed from their posts in Drakeshall’s kitchen, so they’re around town. Jackie Regal is a Soot-Faced Urban Ragamuffin (4) the PCs might find useful as a guide to the catacombs, and Chapman Gaelg is a Shady Dealer in Shady Things (3) who might be a marker on the road to finding Jaina (he lives on the roofs).

* All Huzrael are crippled by exhaustion, operating at half-dice when relevant. Hirash is crippled well beyond that, and operates at a single die or less in all instances. Emerald Oil (4 bottles prepared or 1 bottle pure) can restore one Huzrael to full operating strength.

ELENA HOLTZ

*A Scholarly Golem With Powers of Augury
and No Patience For Your Nonsense*

Elena Holtz is a scholar, detective, and mystic ... and also, a clay statue of one. Her body is a glazed terra-cotta sculpture of a slender, mature woman who squints as though she needs spectacles (she doesn't) and carries her oaken walking-stick as if she wouldn't hesitate to swing straight for the most painful spots (she wouldn't). She's quick to study her surroundings, always scanning for clues, secrets, and items of interest. She wears woolen robes over the clothes already sculpted to her body, and in poor light she can pass for a human being. She's gruff, kind-hearted, and observant.

She's been an adventuring scholar for as long as she can remember, which is about 60 years. Beyond that, her memories shatter to confusing fragments, but she *believes* she was *created* shortly before her useful memories begin. She's always looked like a sculpture of an older woman (possibly her sculptor or enchanter?), so as the years have gone by, she feels she's finally *grown into* her outward appearance.

Elena's scholarship is broad: her *specialty* is occult phenomena and tradition, but she's also expert in history, cultures, natural science, and enough engineering to impress the average Dwarf. She's no wizard herself, but she is a practitioner of *Silver Augury*, an ancient method of divination, and a discipline of *openness to the flow of time*. By covering a willing person's face with a layer of fine silver dust and watching the light while speaking with them, she can gain insight into any topic ... except her own origins, which remain hidden to her. Silver Augury is also her primary tool in battle (which she prefers to avoid); it lets a relatively slow and elderly golem anticipate her opponent's moves, and use her staff as if she had much greater speed and skill.

Elena might be immortal; she isn't sure. But when she's damaged physically, she cannot heal; she must be repaired. There are a few places on her body (including her entire left leg, shattered years ago in a rockslide) where repairs are *obvious* – the sculpt isn't as artful, the glaze not quite even. Fortunately, there are potters in every town who can serve as her "medics," but she's taken an interest in the craft herself, and can manage crude self-repair given access to clay and some way to bake it.

Clichés: Scholarly Occult Detective Made Of Clay (4), Silver Augur (3), Amateur Potter (1)

Lucky Shots: □□□□□□

Notes for Combat: Elena's oaken staff is intimidating and she's not afraid to use it (open to the flow of time, she can achieve some *uncanny* parries and strikes), but she's not really fond of violence, and her battle-ready Cliché is just 3 dice when many others have 4. Whenever possible, *steer conflicts toward a battle of wits*, where you can use your Scholarly Detective powers instead. If things *do* become violent, consider *teaming up* with one or more allies (that way, you can't be targeted directly).

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Cliché: Scholarly Occult Detective

Made of Clay (4)

Tools: Sharp senses, sharp wits, note-paper and other writing supplies.

Tasks: Spotting things, deducing things, knowing things (especially odd or obscure things).

Cliché: Silver Augur (3)

Tools: A leather pouch of fine silver dust.

Tasks: Learning of the future, the past, distant places, and other matters unseen.

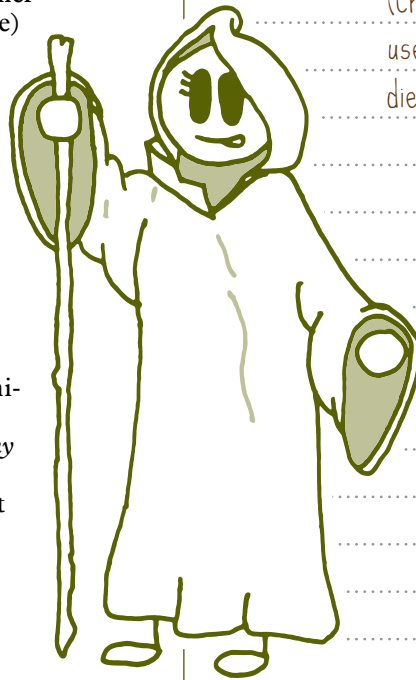
Cliché: Amateur Potter (1)

Tools: None that she can carry along =(

Tasks: Simple sculpture and repair. She could make a flowerpot for a friend, or a crude knee for herself.

Lucky Shots: [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

(Check them off as they're used; each gives you a bonus die for a single die-roll)



MANCIPLE

A Naughty, High-Kicking Rogue With a Wonder Dog named Whisper

Once upon a time, Manciple believed he'd be a mystic ascetic, doing *kata* and pondering eternal truths in some cloud-shrouded mountain temple. He pursued this course with sincerity (of a kind) but he kept sneaking booze & women onto the premises, slacking off from tedious leaf-kicking drills, and creating music the other monks found ... less than meditative.

The master of his order, in kindness, offered him work managing the monastery's kitchen, instead. This introduced Manciple to both his new nickname (which he'd adopt for life) and to his recreational love of fire. The latter spelled the end of his days in the monastery. Soon, he returned to the cities of worldly men.

His next career, as a second-story burglar, brought him a lot of grief, some fun new skills, and his best friend: Whisper the Wonder Dog. When Whisper was killed falling from an icy rooftop, it got him his next best friend: Whisper the Wonder Dog (or rather, a new stray he met the next morning). To date, *fourteen* dogs have answered to the name Whisper, each one loyal, each one amazing, and each one Manciple's best friend for life (Whisper's life, specifically). Manciple has begun to believe that Whisper is some kind of spirit-guide, inhabiting a series of bodies to remain at Manciple's side. This belief is easier than considering the mundane alternative: that dogs simply aren't ideal companions for second-story burglars.

At the moment, he's more a vagabond than anything, exploring the world with his friends, seeking treasure, adventure, dates, booze, music, flammable things, and replacement wonder dogs. He still fancies himself a ponderer-of-eternal truths, too ... he just now accepts that it was never his calling. This is.

Clichés: Acrobatic Brawler With Mystic-Martial-Arts Pretensions (4), Second-Story Burglar (3)

Lucky Shots: □□□□□□

Sidekick: Whisper, the Wonder Dog (3). As a genuine wonder dog, Whisper can obey Manciple's orders (and act on his own) with something approaching human intelligence.

Special Notes For Whisper:

Whisper is a Sidekick (see the *Risus Companion*, but you don't need the *Companion* to play this character; a Sidekick is exactly what you think it is). Whisper also has a special rule: he's constantly dying and getting replaced. *Any* time Whisper is in physical danger, he'll *likely be killed* ... and Manciple will meet a replacement soon after. Replacement dogs will fall right into place as Manciple's new very best friend.

RISUS

THE ANYTHING RPG

Cliché: Acrobatic Brawler with Mystic-Martial-Arts Pretensions (4)

Tools: Hard glare, sly wink, fists of fury, feet of pretty-reasonable fury, elbows of alarming rudeness.

Tasks: Kicking of the posterior, showing of the off, speaking in fortune-cookie gibberish

Cliché: Second-Story Burglar (3)

Tools: Cords, grapnels, soft-bottomed shoes, dramatic theme-music only he can hear.

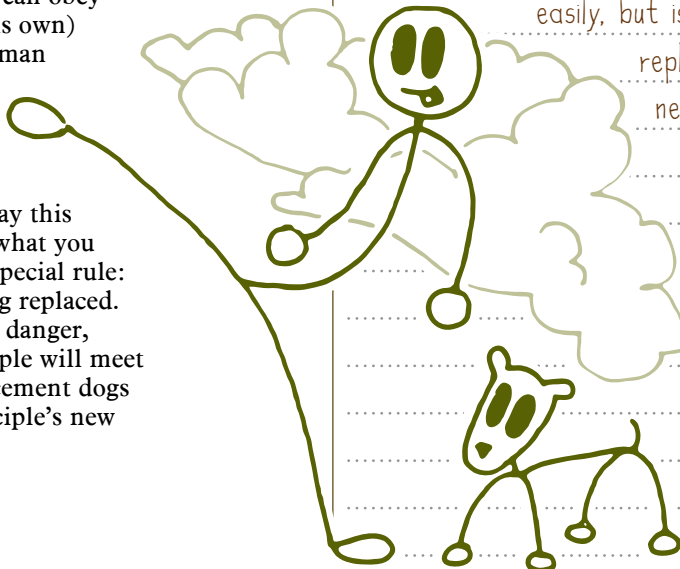
Tasks: Sneaking around being quiet and unnoticed, dealing with locks, traps, windows, slick rooftops, and other impediments to theft.

Lucky Shots: [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

(Check them off as they're used; each gives you a bonus die for a single die-roll)

Sidekick: Whisper the Wonder Dog (3)

(Special rule: Whisper dies very easily, but is just as easily replaced by an all-new Whisper)



MORGAIN

A Wizard's Clever, Talking, Black-Cat Familiar (Wizard Not Included)

Five years ago, the sorcerer Thironaxus Rex, second of the circle of Xan, chronicler of the Outer Dimensions of Ryvok and honorary Chancellor of the Mystic Order of Prang, made his will manifest, ripped your soul from the ethereal darkness, and bound you to physical form as his *familiar spirit*, a magical assistant who rode his shoulder as a sable-black cat.

This suited you, for Thironaxus was an amiable drunk, a clever sorcerer, and a decent hand at chess. He did the wizarding, you did the occasional bit of spying, sneaking, and spell-assisting, and life was good. You honestly don't even remember what *kind* of spirit you were before ... something-something-dark-servitor-something? Technically some kind of demon, you suppose. Must not have been very interesting, because you feel *comfortable* as a cat.

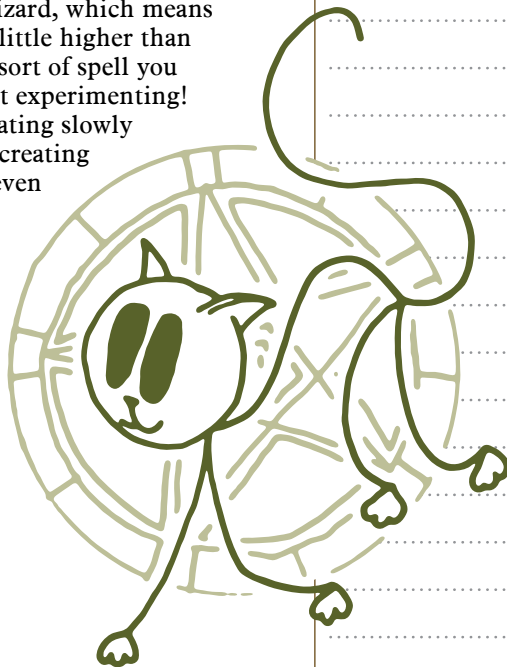
This might be why, last summer, when Thironaxus was beheaded by a Moss Troll in the rain-soaked Forest of Larmoth, you didn't *stop* being a cat. You expected to. As you understood the rules, you *should* have dissolved into a petulant cat-shaped mist and slid back to your home dimension when your master died. Yet here you are: a nimble, bright, erudite and attractive cat (if you do say so) who's also learned a quite bit of magic from the old wizard's shoulder. He was an adventuring sorcerer, in his day. Now, so are you.

Your traveling companions accept you for who you are, but not every country bumpkin does the same. You've learned to speak only around those who can *handle* the idea of a talking cat. But sometimes, the ones who *can't* handle it make such *priceless* expressions ...

Clichés: Sneaky Demonic Talking Cat (4), Talented Dabbler in the Mystic Arts (4)

Lucky Shots: □□□□□□

Magic Notes: You're a *generalist* wizard, which means your Target Numbers might be a little higher than some, but you can at least *try* any sort of spell you can imagine, so don't be shy about experimenting! You can expect minor magics (floating slowly through the air, lighting candles, creating distracting sounds) to be easy or even automatic, but scene-shattering spells (those that render the other Player Characters twiddling their thumbs) might be out of your reach without a Lucky Shot and a pump or two (see page 4 of *Risus* for pumping).



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Cliché: Sneaky Demonic Talking Cat (4)

Tools: Gorgeous black fur, appealing sharp claws, hypnotically beautiful green eyes.

Tasks: Climbing, scratching, purring, gazing into the spirit world, going unnoticed, going distractingly-very-noticed ... all with undeniable panache.

Cliché: Talented Dabbler in the Mystic Arts (4)

Tools: Ineffable knowledge. Just try effing it. Go on. Can't do it.

Tasks: Bending reality to your will with words of power and a supernatural awareness of forces beyond mortal ken (still deciding on a specialty, so your only weakness is that you're a generalist).

Lucky Shots: [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

(Check them off as they're used; each gives you a bonus die for a single die-roll)

NIKOLAI BEDYKOV

A Hard-Partying Dwarf with a Grim Ferocity and Melancholy Soul

When he was 15, Nikolai had grown tired of his noisy siblings, his overbearing parents and the tedium of the tiny mining settlement he'd spent all his life in. He decided to run away. He'd been a promising tunneler, with a good eye for strength and structure, and a good ear for the cracking of unfit stone, but he wanted out. He loved the tunnels, but he craved more sky, and knowledge of what lay beyond his homeland.

Opportunity arrived: a band of the king's own scouts, crossing the mountains for a war to the north. Nikolai and his younger brother, Sasha, met with the Scout Captain as they took rest in his family's mines, waiting for a snowstorm to pass. The scouting orders were all mercenaries, as it turned out, formed into hasty bands by the needs of the war, and open to new recruits who didn't mind the prospect of high-country hardships and eventual battle. The brothers left without ever telling their family.

Sasha had come along because he worshipped big-brother Nikolai, but Sasha never survived the *scouting*, let alone the war. Just weeks after leaving the safety of home, he was lost to a crevasse, swallowed by the darkness between two cliffs of crumbling ice.

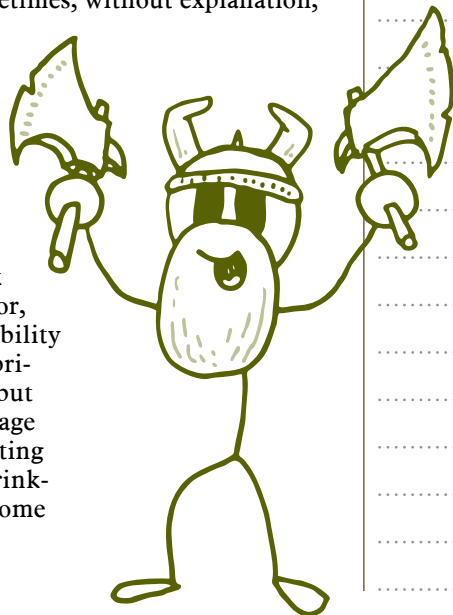
Nikolai forged on, and found his calling, reveling in both the constant movement of the scouts and in frequent bloody skirmishes, at which he excelled. But even when he was made a Scout Captain himself, he still felt restless, straining against the chain of command. Nikolai didn't want rank or title; he didn't want to be in charge; he just wanted out, again. When peace came for a time, and fewer scouts were needed, Nikolai stepped away from the soldier's life, and wandered out from the Dwarf realms, to seek new life as an adventurer. He found it.

Nikolai still mourns Sasha, and still finds ways (when he's drunk enough) to blame himself for coaxing him into coming along. He shares these thoughts rarely; his companions only know that, when he drinks, he *usually* gets very life-of-the-party and loud, but sometimes, without explanation, retreats into grim silence.

Clichés: Hard-Partying Dwarf Warrior (4), Mountain Scout (3), Apprentice Tunnel Engineer (2)

Lucky Shots:

Special Notes: Don't overlook that Nikolai isn't just a warrior, he's a *hard-partying* one. His ability to be the life of the party is (privately) a reaction to tragedy, but it's a real *ability* you can leverage for simple social effects (boosting morale, distracting groups, drinking contests, or just making some new friends).



RISUS

THE ANYTHING RPG

Cliché: Hard-Partying Dwarf Warrior (4)

Tools: Beard. Metal armor, metal weaponry, Also a fair bit of leather.

Tasks: Being the life of the party. Being the death of his foes. Bearding so hard.

Cliché: Mountain Scout (3)

Tools: Nice gloves. Boots suited to both irregular terrain and the need for stealth. Rope and climbing gear. Secret lederhosen.

Tasks: Sneaking, rock-climbing, spotting distant movement, mountain survival.

Cliché: Apprentice Tunnel Engineer (2)

Tools: Metal tools and accessories; a keen eye for stonework and digging.

Tasks: Mining, sapping, tunneling, reading subterranean stonework and earthwork, admiring ancient craftsmanship.

Lucky Shots: [] [] [] []

(Check them off as they're used; each gives you a bonus die for a single die-roll)

ARTIRI APRIVA

*A Worldly Satyr Who Buckles Swashes
and Makes All the Dwarves Cry*

Artiri never grew up among her own kind, the Satyrs. She was raised by an old Human scholar, in a lonely tower at the edge of the world. The strange old man – Harlin Deadmoor, Loreseeker (he always included the title, even with visiting friends) – told her that her parents had been captives in a kind of circus, and that they'd asked him to care for their infant. She doesn't doubt this, since Harlin raised her with all the care he'd give his own child, and as a growing girl, she cared for him in return, as he became too feeble to gather food or even tend to the fire. She buried him next to his garden when she was seventeen.

She ventured into the world alone, then, with only a small pack, a light sword and a desire to see everything she'd only read about in her adopted father's books. She was, really, an adventurer from the day she set forth, but she's gotten a lot *better* at some of the fun parts, and she's gotten more *aware* of what she enjoys most.

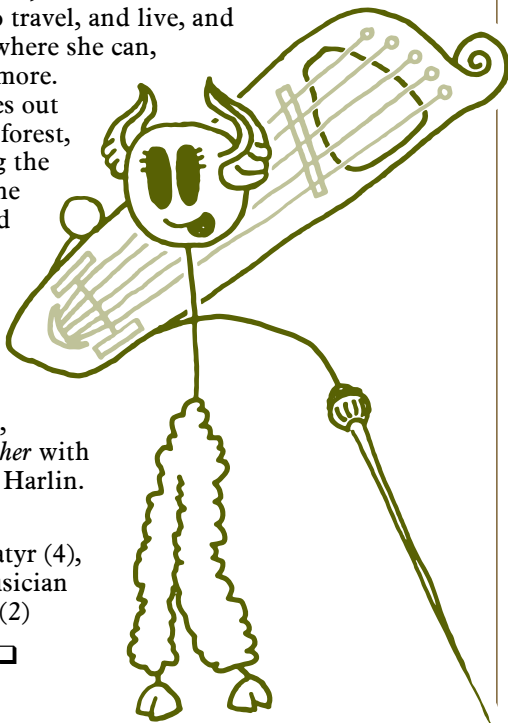
She's been many *kinds* of adventurer, from mercenary to robber to trader to sailor to pirate to delver to castle guard, and she's sailed and hiked many of the sea-lanes and pathways of the world. She took a few years to seek out her ancestral homeland, to get in touch with what it means to be a Satyr (this involved a lot of *getting in touch*, since Satyrs are a people of amorous passion) and she's loved it all.

To no one's surprise, she has a talent for music, but to *everyone's* surprise, including her own, the music that spoke to her most deeply was not the pipe-music of her own people or even some favorite of her father's, but the sad folk-songs of the Dwarves, and the haunting strings of their *gusli*. She can play any instrument placed in her hand, but, musically speaking, the gusli is home.

She's restless, curious, and never wants to slow down – just to travel, and live, and love, and do good where she can, until she can't anymore. At times, she strikes out into some inviting forest, to live alone among the beasts, for whom she has an empathy and respect. But *mostly*, she prefers towns, and company, and friends. She wants to know that when her own story ends, someone will bury *her* with care, as she did for Harlin.

Clichés: Romantic Swashbuckling Satyr (4), Gusli-Fixated Musician (3), Beast-Friend (2)

Lucky Shots:



RISUS

THE ANYTHING RPG

Cliché: Romantic Swashbuckling Satyr (4)

Tools: Slender blades, an athletic build, an eye for romance and an ear for poetry.

Tasks: Swordfighting, athletic derring-do (involving ropes, chandeliers, bannister rails, bartops and so on) and using it all to impress potential bed-partners.

Cliché: Gusli-Fixated Musician (3)

Tools: A really nice gusli in a really nice case (also, some other, lesser instruments, mainly pipes and flutes and things).

Tasks: Performing haunting folk-music that can stir nearly any emotion in anyone capable of feeling some (but in particular, right to the heart of Dwarves, for whom the gusli is traditional and often sentimental).

Cliché: Beast-Friend (2)

Tools: An empathy for animals of all kinds.

Tasks: Reading the feelings of, and getting along with, just about any beast who isn't predisposed to hostility. Also, enduring the inevitable jokes about a Satyr who is also an "animal lover," with tight-lipped, fragile patience.

Lucky Shots: [] [] [] []

(Check them off as they're used; each gives you a bonus die for a single die-roll)

GIN GIRIA

A Mage With a Warm Heart, a Green Thumb and Deadly, Bloodied Hands

For most of your early life, you murdered for a living. As an infant, you were made a charge of St. Lilian's Home for Wayward Children, a grubby urban orphanage. You don't know who your parents were, or if they *intentionally* placed you in an orphanage designed to produce assassins, but there you were. From the age of 3, you were trained in small blades, poisons, garrotes, and how to gain the trust of strangers using big eyes, an artful self-inflicted bruise, a dirty face, and crocodile tears.

It's not a past you like to speak of, or even think about, but that's your childhood. When you were 13, you escaped with a mage you'd been assigned to kill: Shana Rinson, botanical sorceress. She was young for a wizard (just eight years your senior), but talented, kind, and willing to take you on as her apprentice. She introduced you to the magic of crops, trees, grasses, and flowers. You were a quick study, and plant-sorcery became your new life. You went from making things *die* to helping things *grow*.

You were also, by necessity, Shana's bodyguard. For a couple of years, you protected her and yourself from repeat assassination attempts, then finally tracked down the rival sorceress who'd been bankrolling them. To put an end to it, you committed your last murder.

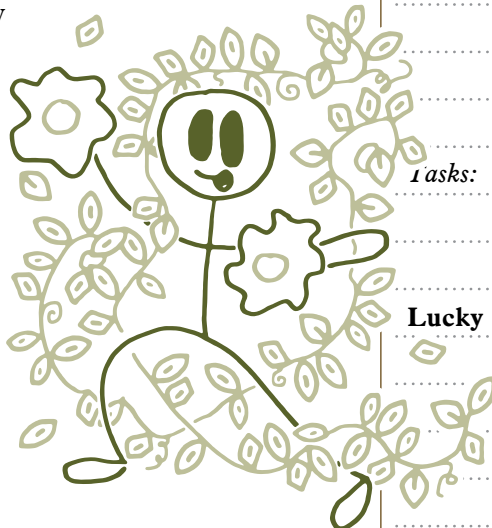
You never told Shana exactly what you did, but thanks to that dark deed, she lives. She's more a homebody than you, and lacks your love of travel and adventure, but now and then, you visit her, and bring her plants she's never seen.

As a Plant Mage, you have a mastery over plants and (to a *limited* extent) plant-based materials like timber and linen. You can control the growth and shape of plants (entangling attackers, creating spontaneous bridges, etc) and use magic to manipulate their natural properties (which makes you a terror or a godsend to anyone with allergies, and also a potent healer, since medicinal plants become even *moreso* with your magic). You dabble, too, in the herbal end of alchemy, but you've not mastered that (given time and materials, you can make a simple sleep aid, or something comparably weak). You carry a supply of useful herbs, seeds, flowers and bark, and collect more as you wander.

You've gotten pretty rusty as a professional killer, but not as rusty as you'd *like*. For better or worse, you will always remember *how* to murder, and hope you never need to again.

Clichés: Plant Mage (4),
Regretful Ex-Assassin (3),
Amateur Alchemist (1)

Lucky Shots: □□□□□



RISUS

THE ANYTHING RPG

Cliché: Plant Mage (4)

Tools: Pouches full of flowers, bark and so on with natural properties you can enhance.

Tasks: Manipulating the growth and shape of live plants especially, but to a lesser extent dead ones or plant-based materials. Enhancing or otherwise fiddling with plants' natural properties.

Cliché: Regretful Ex-Assassin (3)

Tools: You still carry a few small blades and a garrote, in secret. You've been meaning to dispose of them for years, but fear the day you do so will be the day you need them once more to protect yourself, or help a friend in need.

Tasks: Ending the lives of those who don't have any idea they're about to die. Feeling really sick and horrified about it.

Cliché: Amateur Alchemist (1)

Tools: The same plants you carry for your magic can be infused into simple potions (or complicated potions, but you're not very good at that).

Tasks: Making simple potions. Identifying potions or the potion-potential of new ingredients.

Lucky Shots: [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

(Check them off as they're used; each gives you a bonus die for a single die-roll)

My old friend,

I've heard you are near the High Lakes, so I will send this note of welcome by the finest courier coin can hire. Do not miss a chance to see Trostig, finest town of the mountains, where I live peaceably as a servant to Dolemon Drake, a skilled explorer and hero to many here. He is a man you should know. Remember Roquetal? Dolemon is every inch a gentleman such as he. I serve Drake in his hall, and in a shop he maintains in town, selling his potions and incense — treasured secrets he won from the mystics of the east.

In the evenings, I all but live at the tavern of the Headless Horse, right on the town square, across from the Temple of the Ellantines. Should you visit, find me there, merry in my cups. Maxwell, master of the tavern, knows me well, and he will be a friend to you, as he has to me.

Come and raise a glass, my friend,
and remember the good times!

Yrs,

Lionel Draeger

Drakeshall,
Trostig &

6/1/07

Handwritten signature or scribble

Paces 50 100

TROSTIG



The Wolfwood

North Gate

The Lordswood

The High Borough

Lake's End

LAKE ARAGHAST

Koldunhouse

Autumn Quarter

Darkwoods District

Dead Park

Tradehouse Quarter

Chapel of the Ellantines

Darkwoods District

Tavern District

Nobles & Traders

Tooltrade District

Tradehouse Quarter

Chapel of the Ellantines

Darkwoods District

Tavern District

Trostig Quayside

Fishers

Miner's Gate

Moon-Gazer's District

Chapel of the Ellantines

Darkwoods District

Tavern District

Lakeman's District

Fishers

Wolfhead Rise

Hunter's Gate

Orchard Quarter

Lathald's Quarter

Small Square

Farmer's Gate

Tall Pines Hill

Skullbryn Wood

Fair Summit

To the Garter's Fens

To the Garter's Fens

PHOTO of 1871





BIG CREDITS, BIGGER THANKS

This adventure is part of the *Saint August* fantasy module series, which is in turn part of the *Risus Kickstarter Adventure Set*. All of these adventures have been developed in concert, so it's important to note that everyone here helped with *every* adventure in some way, as scenes passed back and forth between adventures across testing rounds (and some of the most critical testing was on adventures *rejected* from the series, picking only the strongest for final development). If you've enjoyed this adventure, *everyone* here helped make it possible, good, or both.

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The *Risus* kick wasn't like most RPG kicks ... it wasn't a preorder of a product in development, it was *kick-to-free* ... every page the kick produces goes into PDFs as free as *Risus* itself. That means all these good people backed this project because they wanted it to be *good, and full of stuff*. Every one of them could have just sat it out, and waited to receive the results at no charge. They did it because they wanted it to exist, and because they wanted *you* to have it, for free. I can never thank them enough for the opportunity. I hope you'll agree the results are something special, because the backers sure are.

Project Patrons: Jerry A!, Aaron, Nathan Tycho Abrahams, Aingeru, Jens Alfke, Allan, William Arnold, badger1stclass, Tim Ballew, Erekipeon Barbagrís, Paul Bendall, bigjackbrass, billk, Adam Boisvert, Duncan Bowsman, Marius Bredsdorff, Fredrik Bridell, Anthony Bridge, Amanda Brown, Larry Bullock, David Buswell-Wible, Andrew Byers, Maja A Carter, Cameron Champney, CiB, Matt Clay, Vincent L. Cleaver, Jesse Coleman, michael collett, Margaret Colville, Gordon Cooper, Myles Corcoran, Grandpa Chet Cox, Chris Creel, Ben Cressey, Marco Crosa, CTH, Kirt Dankmyer, Michael David Jr, Davis, DD Ra, deleff, Vincent Diakuh, DivNull Productions, Rob Donoghue, Scott Dorward, Noah Doyle, Timothy Driscoll, Herman Duyker, Mitchell F., Michael Feldhusen, John Fiala, david allan finch, Fnumber, Michael Friedman, fugggi, Jeffrey Fuller, Amanda "Snobahr" Geyer, Sion Gibson, Melanie Gladney, SGLadney, Judd M. Goswick, Griffin, Matthew Gushta, Kairam Ahmed Hamdan, Rebecca Harbison, Hank Harwell, Joshua Herbolt, Benjamin Hinnun, Jeffrey Horn, Thad Horrell, Guy Hoyle, Simon* jf. Hunt (I.O.R. 599), Wade Hursman, Steve Hyatt, Matt Jackson, Jarrah, Tim Jensen, Martin Johnston, Joey Jones, Spike Y Jones, ChrisK, kbob42, Kev, Christopher King, koihin, Andrew Kolb, Lee Kolb, Ed Kowalczewski, Morgan Lake, David Larkins, Dave LeCompte, Christopher Lee, Christopher Lewis, mikeliety, Shawn Lockard, Steven S. Long, Zed Lopez, Louis Luangkesorn, Jennifer A Marden, Anthony Martins, Paul May, Kevin Mayz, Evil Wayne McCaul, Andreas Melhorn, Mesmin, Jon Michaels, Momosnyx, Tim Morgan, Marcia Morrison, Chester Moses, jmuchciello, Marc Mundet, Francis Nguyen, Ryan Northcott, Brandon Oakley, Michael O'Brien, Christopher 'Staples' O'Dell, Ryan Olson, Erik Ottosen, Owlglass, Maurizio Paoluzi, Stelio Passaris, James Patterson, Paul, Shane Paul, Pharsti, Shayne Power, Jason Puckett, Scott Puro, Jeff Queen, Ragamuphin, Lloyd Rasmussen, christopher rattray, AndreasRauer, Eris Reddoch, Cody Reichenau, Sean Riedinger, Kelly Roberge, Wade Rockett, runester, José Sánchez, Mark A. Schmidt, David Schmitt, Jay Shaffstall, Michael Shillott, Nikodemus Siivola, Sparkerama, Paul Stefko, John Alder Stephens, David Sullivan, Dan Suptic, Suzi, Chris Tavares, Doyce Testerman, ThatTwoGuy, Thorn, Adam Thornton, Robert Towell, Bruce Turner, Alan Twigg, Andrew Tyson, Oliver Ullmann, value_crit, Jack Waitkus, John H. Walker, Matthew Ward, Peter L Ward, Stan Ward, Simon Ward, Steven Watkins, Darren Watts, Weimann, Cory Williams, Matthew C H Winder, Brent Wolke, Chris Woods, WuseMajor, Yragael, and zanian0.

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