

STYLE OF PLAY

I want to get to this first off, because I know some have criticized my Folio works for being ‘on rails’, meaning there isn’t a great deal of choice for players other than to play things as written. Well, my response to that is ‘What is a module for if not to provide a linear adventure?’ Folio #11 is certainly no different than what you might find in Roslof Keep, although I’ve worked this trilogy around an ongoing story instead of a deep delve. What I’ve really tried to get away from is the concept of ‘murder hobos’ (the semi-affectionate name given to most adventuring parties bound on delving and killing monsters for treasure). Instead, I’ve put Folio #11 into a narrative format that I hope you can utilize to tell a story for the characters that they can eventually feel a part of (and one I hope will appear in the third volume of the Taux anthologies). So, keep in mind, this isn’t about the fights as much as it will be about the city, the players, the alliances and enemies, and the effect all will have on Taux as a whole.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

It is my determination that this trilogy won’t be experience point heavy, meaning the ‘reward’ for play is the adventure itself and the feel of being included in something bigger within the anthology world of Taux. Therefore, I’ve listed the adventure

for characters levels 5–7, and I will keep all volumes of the trilogy within those boundaries as purely encounter experience shouldn’t total enough to move levels a great deal beyond 7th. However, if as a role-play award, you as the DM wish to award larger sums for great play, I fully support that, although keep in mind it might require you to adjust some encounters later in the trilogy.

DUELS

Taux is a city built on an ancient tradition of dueling. In fact, one of the three great dueling schools in the Nameless Realms is located in Taux. The practitioners of this school, or guild, are known as Razors because their style employs a single edge rapier and no weapon in their off-hand. Razors attempt to win duels by wounding opponents, having them bleed until death or capitulation. As dueling is so well-practiced among the nobility of Taux, much honor is placed on the practice, and many disputes are still settled in this traditional style.

However, the governing city guard, or Sturgeons as they are called for the fish symbol on the breasts of their blue and silver livery, do not agree with open combat on the streets. Thus, dueling is often settled in private, otherwise those involved might spend nights in jail or face a murder tribunal.

Rules in duels can vary greatly, from first blood to death, but one thing is always clear,

cheating is an act that will bring the bulk of the guilds and even free-blades against you. For the purposes of gameplay, there are two other great dueling schools that sometimes show up on the streets of Taux to test their mettle—the Ebontra School, specializing in dual wielding rapier and dagger offensively, and the Findalynn School whose followers fight with a rapier and defend with an off-hand dagger.

RELIC

This adventure actually revolves around the recovery of an ancient relic created by the lord-priests of the old Tolimic city. In Taux, such relics are highly prized, but are also considered incredibly dangerous as they tend to have latent abilities that manifest over time. For the purposes of this adventure, only the positive parts of the relic will come into play, but as the trilogy presses forward, more power and curses will likely come forward to play for and against the players.

Adventure Synopsis

As many of the stories in the anthologies prove, living in Taux is no easy thing. It doesn't take much for a sturdy soul to run afoul of intrigues and plots that are always in motion around them. To this point, one of the characters will find himself in an unexpected duel with a local, a duel that

will end poorly for the unfortunate sod who tangled with the player. Once the duel is over, only then will the players discover the true identity of the victim. He is Brace Vash, of House Vash, and there is little doubt that repercussions will now be in play.

Seeing that laying low is the best option, a local fixer named Lareo will attempt to get the characters to a safe house until this all blows over. At the safe house, however, they will be attacked and forced to flee across the city rooftops around the Black Gate. Afterward, one of Lareo's agents will find the players and tell them there may be a way out. House Vash has lost a relic in the city and wants it back. Trading said item might make the Vash forget the players' actions.

Going to the jai-ruk bridges, the characters will recover the relic, then bring it to a meeting place in the Ghost Towers. Once there, they will unwittingly summon a shadow creature from the city's stone and be forced to defeat it. It is only after this action that agents from House Vash will arrive looking to clean up loose ends by eliminating the party and acquiring the artifact.

CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

City of Taux

Remember, this is just the first part of a trilogy, so as you are playing here, keep that concept in mind as there is more story that follows in Folio #12 & Folio #13. However, for setting the stage, I'll refer you to a few pieces needed to understand the history of Taux and the situation it currently finds itself in.

Formerly the Tolimic City of Taux, this stand-alone metropolis rests at the tip of the Free Coast and once served as a way station between a dozen large nations all over the northern Halo Ocean. More than half a century before the current date, during the final days of the Five Year War that banished all the old gods from the world, the population of the city was destroyed by a necromantic surge of energy. The tale of that destruction is as follows:

Near a century ago in the Nameless Realms timeline a council of Moon Priests and a coven of Tome-Mages theorized that, like the Afterglow Sea that resides beyond the Elemental Plane of Water, there should be another plane of existence behind each of the known Elemental Planes—Fire, Water, Earth, Air, Positive Radiance, and

City Size: Population:
60,000+ (15% are non-human)

Negative Shadow. Because Taux sat so close to the 'Ebon Swamp' which is known to bubble up with Negative Elemental energy, they decided to dedicate a portion of their resources to discovering this 'other plane' from the secret subterranean conduits in Taux. Years passed, and the two Orders built a series of tunnels beneath the surface of Taux that could be used to amplify elemental transmissions. Then, on a night corresponding with the closest proximity of the Negative Elemental Plane to the planetary sphere, they performed a monumental magical ceremony that would project elemental energy beyond the Negative Elemental Plane, hoping to find another source of raw magical power there. The theory was that some reverb would come back that proved its existence and they could use that for further contact. Nine hours after the elemental burst, just as the city woke in the predawn gloom for work, a nightmare scream struck the city in an apocalyptic wave. Every living thing within a hundred miles was obliterated; all souls flash-burned into the stone of the landscape around them. Since that day the city and surrounding lands have been quiet, but the souls still remember, now trapped forever in the walls of their cursed city...

Today, Taux is once again a thriving port city, although instead of Tolimic humans, it is populated from many cultures all over the Halo and beyond, each trying to make a profit on the mass of cargo that moves through the free city without taxation. Although still haunted by the spirits of the past, the current inhabitants try to quiet the stones, and they live with strange whispers at night or the sounds of cries from vacant rooms.

Districts

Black Gate District

The Ullamalitzli Stadium that once housed 75,000 fans and is now home to perhaps 7,000 squatters who have built tenements in the stadium proper.

Gold Jaguar District

The high class district cut by the prestigious Ruby Lane. Here is where the very wealthy of Taux live and play in the former homes of the greatest nobility the Tolimic ever possessed.

Turquoise Tortoise District

A middle to upper class merchant district of the city and home to the Grand Bazaar of Taux.

Harbor District

The port, docks, and wharfs of Taux. Here is the lifeblood of the city, the place where all cultures meet as ships from the entire Halo Ocean trade cargo for shipment all over the world.

The Haunted Temple District

(Ghost Towers)

This scarcely populated district is the home to the poor of Taux. With no place else to go, the destitute gather among the screaming stones of the former Tolimic Temple District.

Serpent Wall District

Situated against the outer wall of the city, and thus wrapping it in a large crescent, this outer district is home to the mass of the middle to lower working class of Taux.

Ebon Fields District

Located outside the main wall of the city, this tangled group of farmland is the only true source of local food Taux possesses. Farmers and cattle-folk work to stave off incursion from the Ebon Swamp as they cling to a meager existence among the lowland marshes that now serve as livestock fields and in some areas rice patties.

The Smoke Dragon District

This district is the home of the base production elements of Taux with some industry having sprung up to use cheap raw materials taken from incoming trade ships and turning them into more expensive trade goods to be shipped out. It is also the home of Sturgeon Keep, where the mercenary army of the city is housed.

Interacting with the City

Many of those dwelling in Taux insist that the city itself is alive, or if not alive, then perhaps at the very least undead. That way of thinking is correct on many levels, as although the city itself has no true soul, there are nearly two-hundred thousand trapped souls in its stone walls and structures. As each soul is tortured in its captivity, most are mad, and if given the opportunity through magic or other means, will attempt to kill those who now prosper in what they see as their tomb. Still, magic isn't readily available to allow for these spirits to interact with the living population in a dangerous fashion, although one living in Taux is always aware of the presence of spirits around them.

1. How the whispering walls work

Many of the stone walls of Taux will whisper, especially at night, when people walk too near them. Some magically adept people, especially

priests or those favored by their gods, will often report seeing movement in the corners of their vision from the walls. Sometimes, spirits will taunt attuned folk, or give them portents of future happenings (usually dark things), and it is even said that for those who come close to death, the spirits will come to them and attempt to manipulate them to assist in whatever troubles still press on their tortured minds.

2. Ghosts

Ghosts do dwell in Taux, although most are confined to the stones and are not a threat. For those that escape, they can become both a bane and a blessing, depending on the nature of their minds when they become free.

3. The Feel of the Environment

Taux is a rich tapestry of a city, and should feel both foreign and familiar, with many races and cultures mixing in the ruins of this ancient Tolimic city. Although this adventure takes place during the evening, be sure to keep the players aware that Taux never sleeps, and the streets are still alive with 'night folk', those who work a much different trade than the day laborers of the city.

Dungeon Master Notes & Suggestions

1. NPC interactions

There are two NPCs in this adventure who appear in the anthologies, Lareo the Eldaryn fixer, and Dethocrates the jai-ruk rogue. If you have access to the anthologies, you can find ready descriptions of these two there, however, the adventures also give a brief description about each interaction to help maintain the feel of the NPCs.

2. Levels

As this is an adventure for characters levels 5–7, it can be assumed that you have either created a specific set of adventurers for the players (perhaps using The Nameless Realms Races supplement) or that players are bringing experienced characters to Taux for the first time. Whatever the case, it is very important that a bond has been established between members of the party before the introduction duel takes place. Without that, characters might balk at helping the duelist who got himself in a bad situation on his own merit. A well designed backstory for the party, and the reason for being in Taux, should be created by the DM before play has begun.

3. Running the Elemental Sparks

In the world of the Nameless Realms, there are various distinct races (as detailed in the Nameless Realms Races supplement). Each is dedicated to a specific element (fire, air, water, earth) and has a varying level of connection to that element. This connection is measured in something called the elemental spark. Humans, who are low fire, are still hot blooded, quick to anger, love, and are always working at something. Eldaryns, who are high fire, are palpably hot, age quickly, and can become pyromancers. Jai-ruks, who are medium earth, are strong, resilient, and are stalwart in their devotion to a cause. If you are running this adventure using the Nameless Realms setting and races, I highly recommend the Nameless Realms Races supplement, and again, reading the fiction resource material.

4. Running the interests of House Vash

House Vash is the greatest of the mercantile houses of Taux, and it holds a very wide series of interests in the city. For all intents and purpose, think of them as an evil corporation that is constantly working to consume, control, and destroy in an attempt for ultimate power and wealth. They are not well-loved, but are

certainly feared among the citizens of the city, and their family is a large one, which helps insure they aren't dying out anytime soon.

Overall Story Arcs and Threads

1. Building on the chase

The DM has to be responsible for building suspense as the characters run from persecution by House Vash. As this entire adventure is set to take place over a single evening in Taux, it is important to keep the feeling of being 'on the run' alive in the players' imaginations.

2. A higher purpose

As this is only Part 1 of the trilogy, there must be little bits of information that leak out to a greater plot and purpose as the characters get pulled through this larger storyline (see adventure).

3. Dueling

As mentioned above, dueling is an extremely important factor in the political and social structure of Taux (as well as its two sister cities Ebontra and Findalynn). If at any time during the adventure you wish to challenge a player to a duel to settle a dispute (perhaps in the final encounter), you may do so.

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New Monster

Bender Surrogate

Lawful Evil

Frequency: Very Rare

No. Appearing: 1

Armor Class: 0

HD: 15+7

Move: 12"

No. of Attacks: 3

Damage/Attack: 1-10+10

(2 Claws)/2-20+5 (Bite)

Special Attacks: None

Special Defense: +2 or better

weapon to hit

Magic Resistance: 35%

Intelligence: Very

Size: L (20' long)

Psionic Ability: NIL

% in lair: 50%

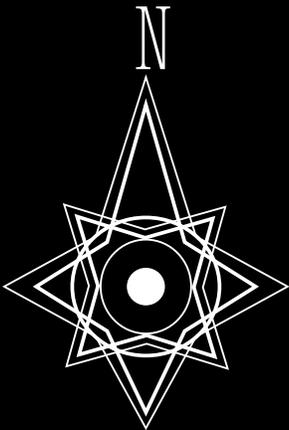
Treasure Type: D, E

Bender Surrogate [AC 20, HD 15d12+45, HP 135, Initiative +4, #AT 3, Hit +9, Dam Claw 16 (3d8+4), Bite 20 (3d10+5), Damage Immunity (non-magical weapons), Magic Resistance]

Beyond the Elemental Plane of Shadow is a dimensional wall that was meant never to be breached. However, the priests of Taux delved too deeply into powerful magic that pierced the veil and destroyed their city. The tiny pin-prick they managed has allowed something to enter their world that must stay tethered to its own dimension as though through an



umbilical cord. This creature is a bender, a creature beyond the laws of the world and bent on devouring all that it sees. However, as it cannot leave the chamber of its 'birth' into this world, it has developed a means of tempting treasure seekers with a glowing light that illuminates treasure it has collected from its other victims.



A Three Part Scenario for Characters Levels 5–7

So, how exactly do you play in a world that was based on a fictional anthology? Well, my suggestion would be to read the fiction first, but if you can't do that, then make an attempt at a very narrative driven adventure. This particular adventure, *The Subtle Revenant*, is based around a moving story arc in three parts. The initial part, *The Duel*, will be the crux that gets the adventurers embroiled in the overall plot. Part Two, *The Old Crypt*, will have the characters working on a way to solve the mess, and Part Three, *The Bender Surrogate*, will culminate in a battle that sets the stage for Folio #12 and the adventures there.

One thing to keep in mind as you play, characters here should have some decent experience, so they should be given some leeway when it comes to sticky situations, although they most likely will have to get used to the particular rules of Taux before becoming too full of themselves.

In the end, I hope that you are able to spin your own tale of Taux, the Black Gate, and the Emerald Serpent, as that is what this trilogy is truly about, which is to say adding to the legends of the great city of cursed stone.

All 'grey blocks' are for 5E conversions in this section.

The Duel

'The patrons of the Emerald Serpent crawl like a living thing, tides of humanity and other elemental-spark races mingling in a great pool around the huge bar. Multi-level decks hold dozens of conversations, games of chance, and illicit dealings far from the prying eyes of the city's Sturgeons. If there is one place more famous in Taux, a citizen would be hard pressed to name it, and yet only the very brave, or perhaps foolish, ever pass beneath the Black Gate and tread the twisting streets around the old Ullamalitzli courts to drink pulque and other spirits in this old house of priests and nobles.'

Setting the Stage

This entry scenario revolves around the characters running afoul of House Vash. To accomplish this, and the story beyond, the DM must be able to run a number of encounters through role-play and limited combat. Each encounter point is listed below, with a series of options and goals for both the players and the DM, but how you get to the end result is up to those involved.

Encounter Point One

Duel

If you read the intro to Part One, I think the players will get an idea of what the Emerald Serpent is, even if they've never read the fiction. Still, there are questions that you will need to either ask or already have an answer for when this Encounter Point begins.

'The bravado and sexual talk has risen to a crescendo at the table behind you after a good half-hour of heavy drinking. The loudest of these young bucks, a thin rake with a gilded rapier and a topknot of blond hair pushes back his chair until it strikes the back of yours, his disgust at your offense apparent in his first curse thrown in your direction.'

1 Razor Duelist (Brace Vash)
[AC 5, HD 7+7, HP 70, #AT 2/1
(+4 to hit), D 1-6+5, Wounding
(Each time Brace strikes, the
victim must make a save versus
petrification or begin bleeding
at 1 hit point per round. This
attack can be cumulative.)]

TREASURE

SABRE +2

1 Razor Duelist (Brace Vash) [AC 15, HD 10d8+20, HP 65, Initiative +5, #AT 2, Hit +7, Dam Sabre 7 (1d6+4), Multiattack, Parry (+2 AC against one attack), Wounding (Each time Brace strikes, the victim must make a DC 14 Constitution save or begin bleeding at 1 point per round. This attack can be cumulative.)]

1.

Who is the party's best duelist? You could also ask, who is the party's biggest hot head? Either way, one player is going to get challenged to a duel, something locals in Taux see a great deal of (See Taux & Dueling in the Gazetteer). The duel is the key, because it sets the stage for the entire adventure. Bait the players as you wish, with lewd comments against party members or other brash talk, perhaps even targeting a priest's god. When the conflict is at hand, the following may set the stage.

