

LIKE MOTHS TO A FLAME

There was fear and suspicion before the Scourge, during the Scourge, and after the Scourge. Is it not time we stopped blaming the Horrors for all our problems?

• KERN REDBEARD, VILLAGE INNKEEPER •

A mysterious bright light has appeared in the Delaris Mountains, roughly ten days from Jerris. While the light cannot be seen from Jerris, it has been spotted by several passing airships and it can be clearly seen from a small group of villages situated in the foothills of the mountains. The light shines throughout the night and vanishes at dawn, just like all those who have tried to discover its source. Investigating the strange light, the characters discover a recently abandoned kaer—as well as a cabal of deranged magicians who have been holding the former kaer's residents hostage since the beginning of the Scourge.

SETUP

Before the Scourge had fully seized Barsaive in its corrupt grip, fear and suspicion resulted in refugees being turned away from kaers that often had spare capacity to accommodate them. Those unable to find shelter often took their own lives rather than face the Horrors. For those who chose to make a stand, the Horrors took considerable delight in showing them the error of their ways. However, not all kaers turned away refugees, some showing kindness and compassion to their fellow Namegivers. Many that did accept strangers into their sanctuary regretted their decision, for it was often the cause of their downfall, and blame did not always lie with the Horrors.

One such kaer that fell to the depravations of their fellow Namegivers was Kaer Skyhorn. Its residents granted last-minute entry to a small group of Thera refugees claiming they got waylaid on their journey back to Thera. While the refugees were indeed from Thera, their tale was false and they had instead been exiled from Thera for terrible crimes they committed. Soon after the kaer closed its doors, the refugees revealed themselves as a cabal of magicians. They took control and enslaved the population, bar a few that escaped into the mining tunnels used to construct the kaer. Those that escaped formed a resistance and swore to take back what was theirs.

Recently, a bright light has appeared in the mountains, and every night it can clearly be seen from the towns and villages in the surrounding foothills. Several curious villagers have made the journey to investigate and have never returned. The council of elders representing all the villages have decreed the area off limits and believe that a Horror is using the light to lure its victims.

The mystery light is emitted from the giant light quartz that once hung in the center of Kaer Skyhorn. Over the centuries, those that escaped to the tunnels waged a war of resistance against the cabal of magicians. They spent many years digging further tunnels to hide in. Over the centuries, the people of the enslaved kaer became brutalized and used in all manner of terrible experiments. The resistance, realizing they could not defeat the cabal directly, dug a series of tunnels to weaken the outside wall of the kaer. Over the course of generations they eventually succeeded, and the thick rock on the face of the mountain protecting the kaer collapsed, taking part of the kaer with it. Many of the resistance died in their efforts, preferring death rather than facing the Horrors. Of course, the resistance had no way of knowing the Scourge was long over. With the kaer no longer protecting them, and many of the kaer's residents dead, the cabal simply relocated to a small nearby village where they had an ample supply of fresh slaves to continue their experiments.

The player characters are hired by a distraught villager whose sons have traveled to the nearby mountains, disobeying the elders' decree, to find the source of the mysterious light and have not returned.

EVENT ONE: IN SEARCH OF THE LIGHT

After the player characters have agreed to find the villager's sons, he takes them to his village so they can see the light for themselves. When they arrive, they are warned off from going any further by a village elder unhappy about outsiders having been brought to the village. Angry, he tells the player characters they are not welcome in the village and must leave immediately. From here the player characters go home or travel toward the source of the light that is two days as the crow flies, but takes longer on foot as much of the journey is uphill. The characters are ambushed by a group of hunters from the village sent by the elder as they continue their journey. The elder is terrified that the player characters may be captured and reveal the location of his village to a Horror. The hunters engage in missile combat from long range and scatter if they take a single wound or if the player characters attempt to engage them in melee combat. They use their expert knowledge of the terrain and the mystical silence of the Delaris Mountains to their best advantage. Later that night, the player characters see the bright light just as the villager described.

EVENT TWO: RUINS

After a few days of hard travel, the player characters reach the base of the mountains and find the abandoned kaer just after dawn. From what the player characters can tell, part of the mountain face has collapsed revealing the kaer's entrance. The characters must climb the rubble pile to get in, carefully avoiding further rockslides. As they climb, they can see that a good part of the kaer has collapsed. Entering the kaer, they realize that they are actually in its very center and they begin to explore the ruins. However, the group cannot initially find the source of the light. They discover many strange contraptions that have dead Namegivers embedded in them, a result of the cabal's experiments in blood magic as a source of power. The player characters notice that most of the kaer appears like a prison, with iron shackles hanging from all the available wall space. As the player characters continue, the daylight begins to fade to dusk. As it does, a bright light begins to shine from halfway down the rubble pile illuminating the area. The player characters cannot miss it and recognize it as the kaer's main light quartz. The light, however, attracts all manner of creatures including will o' the wisps, death moths, and the cadaver men left behind by the cabal. The characters suddenly find themselves facing an unprecedented assault, fighting running battles for their lives through the hours of darkness until the break of dawn. The only way the assault can prematurely be stopped, is if the light crystal can be smashed or its enchantment broken, but the player characters have to make the connection.

EVENT THREE: THE VILLAGE

Leaving the ruins behind, the player characters discover a previously obscured trail. The trail leads them to a small village protected by a simple wooden palisade of sharpened stakes and a deep moat fed by a mountain stream. A drawbridge leads to a small causeway that in turn leads to the village gate. As the group approaches the village, they are hailed by a guard on the palisade asking who they are and what they want. The guard truthfully tells the characters the name of the village and confirms they are the survivors from the collapsed kaer; however, he then lies if asked about the shackles in the walls of the kaer, stating the kaer was once a penal colony. After some debate, the guard agrees to let the characters enter the village.

It's a trap! As the player characters cross the causeway, the gates open, seemingly under their own power, as does the drawbridge, which rises behind them. Shackled to the back of the village gates is a Namegiver, his life force powering the cabal's magic. The player characters cannot see this until they enter the village, however. As they get halfway along the causeway, a large pit almost the full length of the causeway opens underneath them; full of writhing metallic tentacles that try to grapple the player characters. Ensnared in the walls of the pit are Namegivers of various races whose life force powers the tentacles. Killing these Namegivers stops the tentacles and should be easier than defeating the tentacles directly; killing defenseless Namegivers, however, may be a step too far for some. As a guideline for the tentacle stats, the gamemaster can use the stats for creeping vines (see *Gamemaster's Guide*, p. 164). If the player characters are subdued, they are taken prisoner by the cabal.

CLIMAX

The group must escape, otherwise they will be sacrificed one by one in a powerful blood magic ritual. The cabal consists of magicians of various Disciplines and Circles. The battle involves lots of magic, summoned spirits, cadaver men, and a few downright odd contraptions (allowing the gamemaster to have some extra fun). The magicians have little or no hand-to-hand combat ability, but have an arsenal of minions and spell magic. If the battle looks to turn against the cabal, they offer the heroes eternal life in return for their own. If the player characters accept this deal, they become part of the cabal, using the life force of others to sustain their own, and are unable to travel without the cabal and their slaves as constant companions. If the player characters decline the deal, the cabal plays their final card telling them that if they die, so will the villagers. This is a partial truth—only those slaves that are currently feeding the cabal with their life energy would die, and most of the recently captured villagers and the two sons will survive. One member of the cabal proves his point by stepping forward, wounding himself. As he does, an old lady cowering by the village well slumps to the ground, dead.

SEQUELS

The group eventually returns triumphant, the missing sons and several dozen other rescued Namegivers in tow. However, after they left, rumor of the strange light spread beyond the immediate area and a chapter of the Grim Legion arrived to investigate in the meanwhile. The Legionnaires wish to prove that the player characters and the rescued villagers are not Horror-marked—which undoubtedly takes various forms of unpleasantness...

Another sequel may be that not all of the cabal were present in the village when the player characters arrived. And as soon as they gather their strength, they become a constant thorn in their side. Not all the resistance died when Kaer Skyhorn collapsed, however, and they fled into the hills and will make likely allies for the player characters against the cabal. If the player characters take on the Grim Legion, they may also find themselves with more than one nemesis before the day is done.

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