

G A M E M A S T E R I N G
G U I D E



of a thousand worlds

EVERWAY

G a m e m a s t e r i n g
G u i d e



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This book shows gamemasters how to invent realms and quests. It also explains how to “run” a quest by guiding and pacing the action. The last portion of this book is the ready-to-run quest, “Journey to Stonedeep.”

Players don’t need to read this book to play. Many gamemasters, in fact, will want to use ideas presented here for their own quests, so they won’t want their players reading this book. Therefore, you should ask your gamemaster if it’s all right to read this book before you do so.

While players only need to know what’s in the *Playing Guide* (and don’t even need to know all of that), the gamemaster needs to read the *Gamemastering Guide*, the *Playing Guide*, and the *Guide to the Fortune Deck*. If you’re going to be a gamemaster, read the *Playing Guide* and *Guide to the Fortune Deck* first, and then read this book.

You can read the sections in this book in any order. The sections are all interrelated, so there’s no need to read from front to back.



THE REALMS AND ACTIONS
SECTIONS OF THE PLAYING
GUIDE HAVE A LOT OF INFOR-
MATION THAT GAMEMASTERS
NEED IN ORDER TO INVENT
AND RUN QUESTS.

New Gamemasters

If you've never gamemastered a roleplaying game before, this section helps you understand what it takes. If you've never gamemastered **EVERWAY** before but you have gamemastered other games, this chapter helps you get familiar with how the **EVERWAY** game works.

What Quests Are

At the heart of the **EVERWAY** game are *quests*, the medium with which you interact with the players.

A quest is the plot, background, or conflict that you prepare for your players. You can say, "I'm working on a quest that takes place in the clouds," or "I've got three quests ready to play."

A quest is also the adventure as the heroes experience it and participate in it. Players can say, "We got split up and captured on that quest," even if the heroes' getting split up and captured wasn't part of your plans. In other words, the notes you prepared before play did not refer to the heroes' getting split up and captured, but that's how it actually happened when the quest was played out.

Ultimately, a quest is a dynamic combination of your imagination and the heroes' actions. Even as you devise a quest, you think about how the heroes are going to act during certain scenes, so the heroes are influencing the nature of the quest even before you start playing. In fact, you may invent some quests specifically to involve certain heroes in certain ways. If one player's hero is a musician, for example, you might invent a quest that includes an opportu-

WHEN YOU,

THE GAMEMASTER,

GUIDE THE PLAYERS

THROUGH A QUEST,

IT'S CALLED

"RUNNING" A QUEST.

nity for the hero to soothe a fearsome monster with music.

Generally, playing a quest goes like this: You and the players (maybe two to seven of them) gather around a table. You have notes that you've prepared about the quest, and every player has a hero that he or she portrays during the quest. All the action is spoken: you guide the players in a dialogue that involves everyone—including yourself—and help the players imagine that their heroes are undertaking an adventure in a fantasy setting. You all talk back and forth, developing the shared story as you go. You occasionally look at your notes and draw cards from the Fortune Deck to help guide your imagination. By the end of the quest, which may take anywhere from two to six hours, the heroes have faced and overcome a challenge and drawn the quest to a close.

Running a Quest

To understand what a quest is, read through "Journey to Stondeep," which begins on p. 31. You can skim it or read the whole thing thoroughly, but at least take a look at it now. When you're done, come back here and continue reading.



THERE ARE OTHER QUESTIONS THAT COULD COME UP IN THE RUINS.

• CAN FIRESON GET A SENSE FOR THE DIVINE ENERGIES OF THE RUINS? HE HAS A 5 WATER SCORE,

AND HIS SPECIALTY IS "SENSING DIVINE ENERGIES," SO IT ACTS AS A

6 WATER IN THIS CASE. THAT'S

PRETTY STRONG, SO FIRESON

PROBABLY CAN SENSE THAT THESE RUINS WERE ONCE THE CENTER OF

DIVINE ENERGIES BUT THAT THE

ENERGIES HAVE FADED. HIS EARTH

SCORE IS WEAK ENOUGH (3: AVERAGE) THAT HE MAY BE UNABLE TO

SENSE THAT THE RUINS ARE TIED

PRIMARILY TO AN EARTH DEITY.

DRAW A FORTUNE CARD AND THINK

ABOUT HOW YOU'D GUIDE THE

OUTCOME OF FIRESON'S ATTEMPT

TO READ THE INSCRIPTIONS

BASED ON THAT CARD.

• WHAT IF THE PLAYER ASKS, "CAN FIRESON MOVE HEAVY STONE

BLOCKS TO SEE MORE INSCRIPTIONS?" FIRESON HAS A FIRE OF 6,

SO HE'S VERY POWERFUL, BUT HIS

EARTH SCORE IS ONLY AVERAGE (3).

THUS, HE CAN PROBABLY MOVE

SOME HEAVY ROCKS AWAY FROM THE

INSCRIPTIONS, BUT HE'LL TIRE HIMSELF OUT IN THE PROCESS. DRAW A

FORTUNE CARD AND SEE IF IT GIVES

YOU ANY IDEAS FOR SOMETHING

THAT COULD HAPPEN WHEN

FIRESON TRIES TO MOVE HEAVY

BLOCKS AROUND.

according to fortune, he should learn little, if anything. And of course it makes sense that Fireson's bias toward fire would lead him to see a fiery sun god as the head deity rather than Osiris, a god of the earth.

Running a Combat

As the gamemaster, you will often have to determine who wins a fight, who loses, and what happens to the winners and losers. This section will give you some practice with these ideas.

Now read the section (beginning on p. 47) in which the heroes first come to Bonekeep and meet Rarity, who is being threatened by ghoulish soldiers of the Ghoulish Queen.

What would Fireson do when he saw that? Look at Fireson's hero sheet and think about that question before reading on.

Fireson is confident and strong, as his strong Fire score suggests, so he's likely to fight the ghouls in order to protect Rarity. (Whoever plays Fireson, of course, would be the one to make this decision, not you.)

So imagine that you're the gamemaster and Fireson decides to attack the ghouls. He uses his Sweat Fire Power so that his arms are burning, thus keeping the ghouls from trying to claw him. Fireson's Fire score (representing, among other things, his combat ability) is 6, and he's armed with a short sword. The player says, "I attack the ghouls and try to drive them off." What's likely to happen? The player is waiting for you to say what happens next. What do you say?

To decide what happens, first decide what the ghouls will do. Do they both fight Fireson at once? Or does one try to hold Fireson off while the other grabs Rarity? This choice is up to you—you're the gamemaster.

Let's say you decide that the ghouls split up, one going after Rarity and the other after Fireson. Who wins the fight between Fireson and the ghoul? To decide, first look at the combatants' Fire scores. The ghoul's Fire score is 5; Fireson's is 6, so he's about twice as

good at combat as the ghouls is. In a fair fight, he'd most likely win. But the fight's not fair: Fireson has a weapon, and he's sweating fire. What do you think the likely outcome of the battle is? Now wait, the ghouls have a 6 Earth score, meaning that they have a great deal of endurance, and they can take a lot of damage. Fireson's Earth is just 3, so he's only average in terms of what he can withstand. If the ghouls can drag the fight out, Fireson may tire.

How likely is it that the ghouls can tire Fireson out? What do you think?

In these circumstances, Fireson has a clear advantage. The ghouls' toughness isn't enough to beat Fireson's three advantages (stronger Fire, better weaponry, and fiery sweat). Only a lucky ghouls would win this fight.

Now imagine drawing a fortune card to rule this battle. You draw The Eagle (*the mind prevails*). Look at the description of The Eagle on p. 7 in *Guide to the Fortune Deck*.

How would you interpret that card in light of the battle? Think about that before reading on.

The most common reading of The Eagle would be that it favors Fireson, representing his good use of tactics. Perhaps sweating fire proves very effective against the ghouls. You might rule that Fireson quickly defeats the ghouls. (If your reading is different, that's all right. Every gamemaster is unique.)

Now draw a random fortune card from your deck.

What would you have it mean in this fight? You decide.



Imagine that instead both ghouls had attacked Fireson. Now his advantages are balanced against the double-toughness of the ghouls.

Would the fight still be in Fireson's favor? Decide for yourself now.

The fight is more balanced when both ghouls attack, but Fireson's 6 Fire score puts him on roughly equal terms with two 5-Fire combatants. That means Fireson's fiery sweat and short sword must be weighed against the ghouls' far superior Earth scores. Since flames and weapons are more relevant to combat than an Earth score, and since the ghouls may already be tired from chasing Rarity, Fireson may still have an edge—but not much of one.

Draw a fortune card to determine how Fireson copes with two ghouls.

How would you interpret that card?

Now you've had some practice deciding how Elements (karma), circumstances (drama), and fortune cards (fortune) can influence combat. If you want more practice, you can play through other battles in your head.

Pacing and Plots

During a quest, heroes will inevitably do things that you don't expect them to do, and you will have to invent details and plot twists to keep the story going. Here's an example:

Imagine that Fireson is fighting the ghouls and you've drawn a really bad fortune card, such as The Phoenix—reversed (*destruction*). Or imagine that the player tries something impractical, such as having Fireson put down his sword and approach the ghouls to talk with them. In either case, it's likely that Fireson will be defeated by the ghouls. But the quest has barely begun, and it would be disappointing if Fireson were killed right off the bat. What are you going to do? Being defeated doesn't have to mean being killed.

What other things could happen if Fireson is defeated by the ghouls? Think about how the fight could turn out.

Lots of things could happen.

Fireson could be clawed up and knocked down. He has an average Earth score, so he could easily be incapacitated by pain, fatigue, and minor

wounds. He could be half-conscious as the ghouls drag Rarity away, so he can hear her screams fade into the night. (Players sometimes dislike losing in this way, but seeing a hero defeated and an innocent background character captured can make a player more emotionally committed to defeating the Ghoul Queen.)

Or Fireson could be captured, too. One ghoul might drag Rarity away while the other grabs Fireson. Fireson may be able to escape. He may have enough strength left to sweat fire, or the ghoul that's dragging him may be too wounded to keep it up. Or Fireson could be brought before the priestess of Isis in Underwood. He could be put in chains, set on a boat, and brought to the Ghoul Queen herself. (Such a big change in the plot might be hard for you to handle, especially if you're a beginner, but it could also turn into an exciting adventure.)

Or "the cavalry" could come to the rescue. Later in the quest (p. 54), daring, rebellious peasants in the countryside appear, who are nearly ready to lead a revolution to try to topple the Ghoul Queen. Some of these rebels could be in the area, and they may hear Rarity's screams, just as Fireson did. They could come out of the shadows and fight off the ghouls just after Fireson has fallen. In this case, you could skip the whole trip to Underwood because the heroes can get the information they need from these rebels. (A change in a plot of this type is relatively easy to handle, but you would still have to invent the rebels, their names, and their personalities on the spur of the moment.)

Or Fireson could fall in the combat, and you could say, "The world goes dark, and the last thing you hear is the woman screaming." Take a pause. Let the suspense build. Maybe it's time to get a drink or some popcorn. When you start again, Fireson wakes up in someone's care. The ghouls left him for dead, and now he's been

nursed back to consciousness by rebels, by a wise hermit, or by a priest of Osiris. (He could even be in Underwood after all.)

One way to help determine what happens is to refer to the Fortune Deck again. The first draw led to Fireson being defeated. Now that he's been defeated, what does it say about his fate? Imagine you draw The Smith (*productivity*).

What could that mean?

The Smith is a positive card, and it's tied to fire. (It's tied to Mars, which is a fiery planet, and smiths also work with fire.) How could Fireson be "productive" while being defeated? Perhaps he has the energy to maintain his fiery sweat even while incapacitated, so the ghouls leave him be instead of killing or capturing him.

Now draw another card and interpret what that card would mean.

Impromptu Details

Sometimes players ask questions to which you don't know the answers, and you have to invent answers on the spot. With luck and practice, you can turn these surprises to your advantage. Players enjoy a gamemaster who can handle surprises, and surprises can often work to further your plot.

For the examples below, read the section in "Journey to Stondeep" that covers the culture and town of Underwood (p. 49–50).

For instance, imagine that Fireson doesn't go to Underwood after the encounter with Rarity.

Rarity has been captured by the ghouls, and Fireson decides to head downhill.

What sort of landscape is he likely to travel through? If you had to make it up, what would you say?

Since Bonekeep is an agricultural land, and the people rely on the river to flood and make their farmlands fertile, Fireson is likely to find farmlands. It's night, so he can probably sneak through. (Fireson also has a strong Water score, meaning that he's subtle, so he can probably sneak rather well.)

Now Fireson goes to the riverside and hides so that he can see the boats pass by.

What sorts of boats is he likely to see?

The only reference to native boats in the quest is to a "small boat" (p. 55) that the heroes might be able to take upriver. With so little precedent to follow, you're free to invent just about anything that you think fits. What did you come up with? There may be fishers. There may be ghouls on patrol. There may be a galley rowed by undead slaves taking a captive upriver to the Ghoul Queen. There may be a strange boat sailed by foreigners who cover their faces with scarves. Anything can happen.

When you choose what sort of boats are on the river, you help determine how the plot will go. If Fireson sees a foreign trading ship being forced aground by a boat full of ghoul soldiers, he may try to contact the traders once the ghouls have gone. If Fireson sees a bunch of peasants armed with farm tools (rebels) sneak into a boat on the far shore and

cross to his side, he may seek them out. If he sees nothing interesting, he may simply move on up or downriver. You can invent what Fireson sees based on how you want the plot to move.

Did you have trouble imagining what sort of boat Fireson might see? You can draw a fortune card to see what's on the river. Imagine you draw The Priestess (*understanding mysteries*).

What ideas come to mind now, in relation to that card?

You can take the card literally or figuratively. Literally, the card may suggest an actual priestess of Isis. (Remember, in Bonekeep, the priestesses of Isis are the eyes, ears, and arms of the Ghoul Queen.) Fireson could see a brilliantly decorated galley moving upstream, with a powerful priestess at the prow and ghoulish warriors along the rails. Taken symbolically, the card refers to “understanding mysteries,” and it's tied to both water and the moon. You could interpret this to mean that Fireson meets a “divine fool,” an apparent “lunatic” who understands the mysteries of what's happening here.

Now draw a random card from the Fortune Deck and let it guide you to determine again what Fireson might see while he waits by the side of the river.

Your First Quest

You'll learn a lot from the first quest you run, and it will give you ideas for new quests you want to invent and how you want to run them. There are several things you can do to help your first quest a success.

BE CAREFUL.

IMPROMPTU DETAILS CAN TAKE ON

LIVES OF THEIR OWN. IF YOU MAKE

A BACKGROUND CHARACTER

INTERESTING ENOUGH,

THE HEROES MAY BECOME

SO INTRIGUED WITH THAT

CHARACTER THAT THE GROUP

SPENDS A LOT OF TIME

ON A DETAIL THAT YOU MEANT TO BE

SECONDARY TO THE PLOT.

IF YOU HAVE LOTS OF TIME

AND RUN A FREE-FLOWING STORY,

THAT'S GREAT. IF YOU ARE

TRYING TO MOVE THE ACTION

TOWARD A CLIMAX, HOWEVER,

IT CAN BE A DISTRACTION.

- Use the ready-to-run quest at the end of this book, “Journey to Stonedeeep.” That way you don't have to worry about inventing a quest or realm until you've had some practice with the game.
- Create heroes right away. The players hardly need to know anything in order to start creating their heroes (just the premise for the quest). You might want to get together with the players as a group for two or three hours just to create heroes. It's a lot of fun, and it gets the players excited about playing.
- You can create your own hero along with your friends. Doing so helps get you involved, and you can use your hero as an example of how the rules work.

- Give yourself plenty of time. An experienced gamemaster can guide players in inventing heroes and run “Journey to Stonedeeep” in four hours, but you might want to reserve more time for yourself.

- Play with three to five players. One or two heroes might not have the abilities they need to handle the quest easily, and one or two players might not have the energy they'd get from interacting with more people. More than five players might be hard for a beginning gamemaster to handle, and they may make the quest take longer than it would with fewer players. Of course, you can play the quest with less than three or with more than five players; don't hold back just because you don't have the ideal number.

Creating the First Heroes

Just as when you're running a quest, you have to control the pacing and speed of hero creation to keep it exciting. When your players first invent their heroes, you may want to speed things along to let the players get to the action quicker. They can always come back to their heroes another time and add the final touches.

No Surprises



Running your first quest can give you stage fright. I've been gamemastering for seventeen years, and I still get stage fright when I'm getting ready to run a quest. There are a couple things that you can do to boost your confidence regarding your first quest.



- Emphasize the premise of the quest: that the heroes are spherewalkers who will be exploring a previously isolated realm. By emphasizing the premise, you can be sure that the heroes will be suited to the quest.



- Create heroes during one session and then run the quest at the next session. By splitting

the process into two steps, you get some time to look over the heroes and think about what it will be like to run the quest for them.



- Read "Journey to Stonedeeep" carefully. Imagine how the heroes will react in different scenes. Do the heroes have any Powers that will strongly affect the plot? Will any of them break the plot? If so, change the plot or be prepared to handle the scene.



- Invent some of your own details about Bonekeep, even things as minor as more names for the inhabitants. By inventing details, you make the quest your own.

You may wish to skip the following steps. While they add detail, they can be dropped to make it faster to invent heroes.

- **Motive:** As long as the players invent heroes that follow the premise (which you should explain right away), motives aren't strictly necessary.
- **Virtue, Fault, and Fate:** If you really want to move quickly, you can skip these aspects, since they're not necessary to play as the Elements are. They can be added later. Only drop these if you're really in a hurry, however, because they do help to develop a hero's identity and to familiarize new players with the Fortune Deck.
- **Magic:** Describing magic powers for a hero can take a long time and a lot of thought, especially for beginners. Sometimes it's best to have all the first heroes be non-mages. You can let players create mages later, once they're familiar with the game.
- **Specialties:** While these help make the heroes more individual, they're not necessary, and players may find it easier to invent Specialties after playing their heroes once or twice.

With these steps left out, the players get a premise, choose vision cards, invent their heroes, choose Powers, assign their Elements, and engage in questions and answers. Your group can have heroes ready to go in thirty minutes to an hour (though the more fun they have in the Q&A session, the longer it will take to create the heroes).

Ready-to-Run Heroes

The twelve ready-to-run heroes can give you and your players a better idea of what heroes look like when they are complete. Don't have the players play ready-to-run heroes, however, except as a last resort. It may seem backwards,

but it takes a lot more experience to have fun playing a ready-to-run hero than it does to have fun playing one you created yourself.

Example Quests and Realms

The following quests are actual quests that other gamemasters and I invented and ran as we developed **EVERWAY**. They can serve you in several ways:

- You can see examples of what sorts of quests you can invent.
- You can read about how we invented these quests.
- You can use these quests as outlines for quests that you design, or just take good ideas from them.

Brightwind

A realm of air and fire, where the forces of water and earth are suppressed.

The culture of Brightwind is basically medieval. The people are closely attuned to air and fire, but they fear and disdain water and earth. On the positive side, they are bright and energetic, and they have mastered the skill of making hot air balloons (a combination of fire and air talents). On the negative side, they rely on wizards and their acolytes to provide well-water and metals. (The thought of getting something from underground terrifies the average person in Brightwind.) The people live in fear of the mute, blind, wet, pale "underlings," who live in caves under the ground. The underlings deal with wizards, trading surface goods for ores and gems.



The princess of Brightwind, who is heir to her father's throne, has been secretly learning about the underworld. As queen, she will be able to unify the forces of air and fire with those of water and earth, bringing prosperity to her people and dispelling their fears. Unfortunately, she wandered through the underlings' caverns into the territory of a rival king, and when she came to the surface, the enemy captured her.

When the heroes arrived, the king's soldiers were searching for the princess. The heroes soon found out about the strange ways of the Brightwinders, discovered the underlings, and eventually found the princess.

I created this realm as a symbolic representation of a split between the conscious and unconscious. The talkative, bright, action-oriented Brightwinders, who live in buildings without basements, represent

the conscious mind separated from its unconscious roots. The "dark," blind, mute underlings represent the unconscious: strange and frightening to those who live on the surface. The realm and the quest, however, were not allegories. The imagery of the conscious and unconscious informed the realm, but the realm took on a life of its own.

The players enjoyed the double mystery of finding out what the Brightwinders were about and locating the princess. Exploring strange cultures and figuring out how to interact peacefully with those who hold strange beliefs is a fun part of EVERWAY.

Heavenmount

Where people living on a floating mountain face their doom.

A thousand years ago, wizards' wars left this sphere polluted and deadly. A small community called on the Wind (which they revered as a deity) to save them, and it lifted them onto a mountain up above the clouds where they would be safe. Now the earth is rejuvenated, but the people don't know it because they cannot see below the clouds. They have grown lax in their worship, and they are out of touch with the gods and goddesses, so they cannot receive word that the earth is healthy again and waiting for their return.

Recently, the priest Hawkwind devoted himself to the Wind and became an agent for that deity. He received a mighty sword that allowed him to fly and to sunder stone, but it put him in such a powerful state of consciousness that he could no longer communicate with others. He immediately began destroying the floating mountain, cutting off chunks and letting them fall to the earth. (They fell gently, as if sinking in water.) Those who tried to stop him were pushed over

the edge so that they fell through the clouds to the earth (and were considered dead). One of the first to be thrown over the edge was the community's mage.

The mage's apprentice summoned aid from across the spheres; his spell called the heroes to him. (This opening helped unite a group of completely new heroes, as they were drawn from their respective worlds.) The people of Heavenmount asked the heroes to face and defeat Hawkwind, but their real task was to determine the truth about the situation and to persuade the people to accept the return to earth. They only found out the truth themselves when Hawkwind defeated them and they themselves fell to earth. They used magic to return to Heavenmount, where they persuaded the people of Heavenmount to leap over the edge.

I based this quest on a set of images representing the wizard lounging on the ground, the wizard's apprentice, Hawkwind, with a sword, and Heavenmount's crumbling edge floating above the clouds. I used a reading from the Fortune Deck to help build the plot, but I wound up changing the plot so much that the reading no longer matched it. The reading got me thinking, but then I came up with good ideas that weren't related to the reading at all.

Sister to Tigers

In which the heroes face tiger-people and sequestered monks.

At the center of a jungle island is a beautiful garden and a monastery created from the mind of the monk Empty. Empty and his followers have lived here in seclusion for over twenty years. Living in the jungle around the monastery are tiger-people, also created by the monk's mental energy. The monks ordered the tiger-people to

keep strangers away from the monastery, a task that (unknown to the monks) they perform by killing all who venture onto the island.

Many years ago, a tiger-woman gave birth to tigers and to a girl, named Naked Cub. These "strange creatures" are shunned by the tiger-people. The girl, now a young woman, wants to face her "father," Empty, and claim her birthright, whatever that may be. The tiger-people, however, would kill her rather than let her disturb the monks.

The heroes came to the island to find the warrior Proud, who had become a monk in Empty's order, and who had a marvelous sword that Chance, one of the heroes, wanted. They had to fight off attacks by tiger-people, decide whether to help Naked Cub, and then figure out how to get to the monastery. They successfully resolved the quest without causing a fight between Naked Cub and the tiger-people, and Chance got his sword.

I based this quest first on three images: a meditating monk in a monastery, some tiger-people in a jungle, and a woman and some tigers. I liked the images, but the plot just wouldn't come together. I laid out a two-tier Fortune Deck reading and got The Creator (*nurture* vs. *abandonment*) as the Fate, with The King—reversed (*tyranny*) aligned against Spring (*new growth*) as Rivals. I assigned the monk to the Creator slot, the tiger-people to The King, and the woman and tigers to Spring, but I still couldn't figure out how to connect it all. I did the third layer and got The Soldier—reversed (*blind obedience*) in the Past, The Fool—reversed (*lack of connection*) in the Present, and Summer—reversed (*exhaustion*) in the Future. "Blind obedience" manifested as the tiger-people following an old order and preventing

CHANCE IS A
READY-TO-RUN
HERO.

Naked Cub from meeting her creator. “Lack of connection” became Brother Empty being “free” from the world and therefore out of contact with his creature, his daughter. “Exhaustion” I took as a portent of the monastery’s eventual decline if Brother Empty maintained his lack of connection to the outside world.

The Clashing Hills

Where barbarians live to fight.

Once, the Clashing Hills were a place blessed by Gaia, goddess of the earth. The earth there has the remarkable ability to heal wounds and illnesses. When my quest there began, however, tribes of barbaric humans and bestial humanoids were fighting there, relying on the earth to heal them when they were wounded. The custom was to defeat enemies but not to kill them so that warriors could battle without end.

Into this land came two people: Faithful, an honorable knight from a distant land carrying his plague-stricken brother to the fabled healing lands, and Goldlover, a beast-woman to whom Gaia had given a vision of Faithful. If these two could meet, Faithful’s brother would be healed, and Goldlover would be the first person of her tribe to learn of the outside world, of honor, of chivalry, and so on.

Here, also, came the heroes. Their first encounter was with an overpowering force of barbaric warriors. The fight looked grim until the heroes saw that the wounds of the fallen healed quickly. They found Goldlover, followed her vision to Faithful, defeated a dragon that menaced him, and brought Faithful’s brother to the healing lands.

I based this quest on a set of cards that emphasized barbaric themes. I wanted to set up two

dichotomies. The first was between the land’s original nature as a place of healing and its current status as a place of strife and violence. The second was between Goldlover’s primitive and simple attitudes and the refined, chivalric, noble conduct of Faithful. The quest offered a good mix of action and humor.

The Celestial Palace

A story of smiles and poisons, by Kathy Ice.

The spherewalkers found themselves in The Midlands, a peaceful agrarian realm ruled by a queen and her cabinet. The heroes soon discovered, though, that there was a crisis in The Midlands—Queen Plum Blossom was deathly ill, and no one seemed able to cure her.

At the palace, the heroes quickly learned that in the labyrinthine tangle of court politics, even something as simple as summoning a physician to help an ailing monarch was a nearly impossible task. They didn’t know whom to trust, and they only narrowly escaped being poisoned at a dinner party. Eventually, the heroes identified the queen’s nurse as the one person who really cared about the queen’s illness. Once they found her, the heroes quickly found a way to summon a healer to cure the queen.

To develop a quest with such a strong political element, I first set up three factions. (More factions would have been more fun but would also have led to a longer quest.) Two factions wanted Plum Blossom to be cured, but each wanted to be the one who brought it about. They therefore prevented anyone else who seemed to be making progress. The third faction actually wanted the queen to die because they believed that they could then seize power; they secretly opposed any attempts to save the queen. Of course, all the factions acted secretly, using delaying tactics and manipulation.

THE MIDLANDS
IS ONE OF
SEVENTY-ONE
REALMS
CONNECTED
ROUNDWANDER.
SEE P.25
IN THE
PLAYING GUIDE.

Working out these motives let me bring in several background characters to befuddle and confuse the players. Some lied, some told the truth—most did a little of each. By keeping track of the factions, I was also able to keep track of the background characters. The players, however, were utterly bewildered—just as I'd planned.

Like most of my quests, this one was very story-oriented; that is, it had very specific starting and ending points, as well as several key plot points in the middle. I used fortune cards to determine the outcome of actions by the heroes and background characters, but I had to interpret them in the context of the overall plot, favoring drama over fortune.

The important thing in a story-oriented, intrigue-heavy quest is that the actual solution to the problem is quite simple. The players should spend most of their time trying to figure out who's telling the truth and who's really on their side. To solve this crisis, the heroes had to stop relying on the factions for assistance and find the one person who was really interested in Plum Blossom's well-being. Once the heroes located her, they easily saved the day.

Creating Quests and Realms

How do you get ideas for a quest or a realm? What goes into developing a quest? How is that different from what goes into developing a realm? What makes a quest succeed? What makes a realm seem "alive?" This section answers these questions.



Which Comes First: Quest or Realm?

Most gamemasters invent realms and quests in conjunction. The realm serves as the backdrop for the action of the quest, and the nature of the realm defines, and is defined by, the conflict at the quest's center. I usually start with the quest, and invent the realm around it. For example, look at "Journey to Stonedeep." The images connected to it (which are based on images that I actually used to invent the quest) defined certain background characters and crisis points. Based on these images, I developed a story tying Rarity, the Ghoul Queen, and the Awakener together. Around this story I invented the realm of Bonekeep. I chose to make the culture somewhat similar to that of ancient Egypt, but I could have done the same sort of story in a different setting. For instance, if the setting were like ancient Greece, the Ghoul Queen would have been the high priestess of Hekate, the Greek goddess of magic, instead of the high priestess of Isis.



The realm of Bonekeep could stand alone from the quest. Heroes could come through the gate or down the river and interact with the ghouls

and living subjects of the Ghoul Queen without the crisis of the Awakener taking place. In this case, however, as with most of my realms, the setting serves a specific quest. If I'd designed Bonekeep to be a realm without a quest, it would have more detail about how the people normally interact with strangers, such as trading habits, shelter for travelers, and so on. In fact, I might have changed details to make the setting more exciting, such as specifying that the priests of Osiris were masterminding underground resistance to the Ghoul Queen.



Some gamemasters prefer to invent realms in which the heroes can travel but where there is no specific quest for them to undertake. When the heroes come to this realm, they may find some sort of threat or conflict to resolve, or the gamemaster might invent one on the spot. On the other hand, the heroes may just have a good time exploring the realm, talking to the people there, and learning about it.



How you invent realms and quests is ultimately up to you.

Generating Ideas

There are several ways you can generate the basic ideas that serve as the foundation and inspiration for a quest. You can use whatever method or combination of methods works best for you.

Vision Cards

You can use vision cards to generate a quest the same way that players use them to generate their heroes. Select a few cards that attract you, and then turn them into a story.

It's important that most vision cards represent scenes that the heroes are likely to see. If a vision card represents a secret wizard acting behind the scenes, you may never get a chance to show the card to the players.

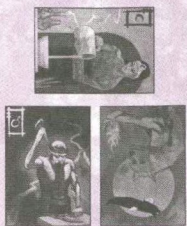
Some gamemasters select vision cards to illustrate ideas that they've already come up with instead of basing their ideas on the cards.

"The Clashing Hills" (p. 13) is an example of a quest developed from vision cards.

Fortune Cards

You can do a two-tier reading for the realm to determine a realm's Virtue, Fault, and Fate.

For example, imagine this reading:



Virtue: The Smith (*productivity*)

Fault: Trickery—reversed (*subterfuge revealed*)

Fate: The Priestess (*understanding mysteries vs. impracticality*)

You could take this reading to mean that the people of this realm have tricked some spirits into working for them and that with these spirits they are able to perform miraculous things, such as forging steel, curing plagues, building arches and large monuments, and so on ("productivity"). Unfortunately, the spirits are beginning to suspect that they've been tricked ("subterfuge revealed"), and they've begun sabotaging the people's projects. Some day the spirits will abandon the people. By then, the people will have either learned how to perform these deeds themselves ("understanding mysteries") or lost even the knowledge they had before the spirits began helping them ("impracticality").

You can also read the Fortune Deck to determine the basic conflicts in a quest. A two-tier reading (Virtue, Fault, and Fate) may be all you need, as it sets out the basic conflicting forces and the potential outcomes of their conflict. If you need more information, add a third tier, or even a fourth.

You can often assign vision cards to the particular fortune cards in the reading to help you connect these two sources of information as I did when I developed the quest "Sister To Tigers" (see p. 12).

Once you get an idea for a plot, there's no need to stick slavishly to the fortune card reading. If an idea comes to you that doesn't quite fit the cards as they came up, that's all right. Creating a good quest is more important than following the reading.

The plot of "Sister to Tigers" developed from a Fortune Deck reading.

Themes

You can also base a quest on some theme or idea that comes to mind. After coming up with

the initial concept, you may find vision cards that illustrate the quest even though they did not actually inspire it. These images may also inspire further ideas and details that eventually become part of the plot. You may even want to draw illustrations to show the players.

Themes can be based on symbols, plot elements, setting features, and so on. Example themes could be:

Symbol: The heroes find a warlord who is questing for a magic bow of great power; it is said to slay the unvirtuous, and indeed it does, but it's also fated to slay its wielder. The bow symbolizes judgmentalness. Even if the players never catch on to what the bow represents, the symbol can help you develop a rich quest. In fact, it may be better for the players *not* to know what the symbol stands for.

Plot Element: The heroes come to a land where political intrigue is rife and deadly, especially for unwary strangers. The heroes have to learn who is on their side (if anyone) and who is just trying to use them. The excitement of the adventure depends directly on how the plot plays out.

Setting Feature: The heroes come to a land where the men and women look, dress, and act alike; where inquiring as to a person's gender is considered rude in the extreme. There may be a political conflict between outlaws who advocate being open about one's gender and the authorities who forbid it. Even if the heroes don't become involved in a plot, it can be fun simply to explore a strange, new realm like this one.

"Brightwind" (p. 10) is an example of a quest based on a theme.

What Makes a Good Quest

Most good quests have the following elements:

Plot: The action of the quest, what's going on, and why the heroes should care.

Setting: Where the plot takes place, the culture, the land, and the history.

Background Characters: Who, besides the heroes, takes part in the plot, and how they are likely to react to the heroes.

Options: Choices the heroes must face.

Boons: The heroes' rewards for a job well done.

Peril: The threat of injury, death, or worse.

Magic: An atmosphere of wonder, mystery, and power.



Plot

The plot is the center of the quest. Just as different writers have different styles of writing stories, so gamemasters have different styles of creating plots. Most advice, therefore, applies only to some gamemasters. Still, you may want to keep a few general ideas in mind.

- **Let the heroes make a difference.** Sometimes gamemasters get so excited about their plots that the plots work all by themselves and the heroes have no real effect on events. For instance, in the original version of “Journey to Stondeep” that I ran, the Awakener was destined to take the Ghoul Queen as his bride, whether the heroes intervened or not. The heroes’ actions had very little effect. That’s why this detail changed for the final version. Now it’s up to the heroes to get the Awakener to take the Ghoul Queen as his bride.
- **Keep the quest simple.** If you and your friends can complete the quest in one sitting, you don’t have to worry about getting the exact same group together the next time you play. If you have to suspend the quest halfway through, then the next time you meet you might not have the same players there to run the same heroes. For some quests, there are ways to get new heroes into the action and reasons for heroes whose players are elsewhere to drop out of the action. Think about how you’d manage this if you design a long quest.
- **Leave room for the heroes to react in different ways.** Think ahead of time about how the heroes are likely to react, and prepare a plot that works even if the heroes don’t take particular actions.
- **Let the heroes “lose battles without losing the war.”** Unless you want to arrange for the heroes to succeed at every task, be sure to set up tasks

at which they can fail yet still carry on with the quest. In “Journey to Stondeep” (p. 31), for example, the heroes can succeed eventually even if they’re defeated by the ghouls they meet in the woods in the first action scene.

Setting

A unique and well-detailed setting can make a quest really come to life. Obviously you can’t detail every part of a realm, but be sure that you’re ready to handle it when the heroes explore their environment. The “Generating Ideas” section on p. 16 and the *Realms* chapter of the *Playing Guide* provide plenty of advice for creating realms in general. From the point of view of the quest, be sure to cover at least these details:

- **What is the weather like? What season is it when the heroes arrive?**
- **What do the people look like in terms of race, clothing, and manner?**
- **How do the people react to strangers (which the heroes will be)? Where will the heroes sleep?**

Background Characters

You will have to define various background characters for the players’ heroes to meet, talk to, fight, and help. Portraying believable background characters makes a quest engaging and memorable.

- You can define background characters with less data than players use to define heroes. Often, just a character’s Elements will suffice. You don’t need to specify every background character’s Specialties, Virtue, Fault, and Fate. These details, however, can be nice touches for major background characters.
- **“Keys” can help you portray background characters.** A key can be a card correspondence, a

zodiac sign, a central personality trait, or a role. A key helps you develop details about a character. For example, a queen's key may be that she's tied to the Smith card. In this case, what symbol would be on her crown? It could be the symbol of Mars, which appears on the Smith card. What would her color be? Red, because that is the color of Mars and of the forge. How would she command her assistants? Efficiently, powerfully, and effectively. As you can see, a key can help you invent details you need them.

- The most realistic and interesting background characters have motives that give them lives apart from the quest. For instance, a royal advisor whose motive is to be remembered as a great advisor may be more interested in plans that involve war, conquest, exploration, and other grandiose acts than in more intelligent and moderate plans.

- After you've invented a few quests, think about how you portray background characters. Do you see any patterns? For instance, are all the rulers in your quests corrupt? Or are they all virtuous and regal? Are peasants always dim and short-sighted? Or are they all pure and strong? Once you see a pattern, you may want to vary it so that the players get a better sense that the different realms they visit are indeed different. Consciously changing your habits also keeps them guessing when they come to new realms.

YOU CAN USE READY-TO-RUN HEROES AS

BACKGROUND CHARACTERS, EITHER AS

NATIVES IN THE REALMS TO WHICH HEROES

TRAVEL OR AS FELLOW SPHEREWALKERS.

Options

It's easy to invent a quest that's fated to turn out a certain way, or one in which the heroes can pretty easily see what the right course of action is. These quests can be rewarding, especially if the action is fast, the background characters colorful, and the plot detailed. But after a few such quests, the players may get the feeling that they're only along for the ride, as they are when they watch a movie. Real options for the heroes, ones that let them affect the outcome, make the quest much more interactive.

Tactical options allow the players to use their wits to solve problems. For instance, the heroes may need to get into a villain's castle, and they will need to invent a plan for doing so. They can try to scale the walls at night, sneak in hidden in a wagon, impersonate foreign dignitaries come to call, or simply storm the gate. Some options may lead to imprisonment and death, while others may lead to easy victory. Players get a real sense of satisfaction out of choosing the right tactics.

Moral options encourage strong roleplaying and sometimes lead to strong emotional involvement among the players. For example, in the "Broken Silence" campaign (see p. 25), the heroes had to decide whether or not to help the sorcerer, who had been an evil person in her youth and middle age and whose plight could have been seen as punishment for her evil ways. The players had real disagreements over the proper course to follow.

Aesthetic options allow for roleplaying and character development without the seriousness that tactical and moral options can entail. For example, the heroes who came to Brightwind had some time free at the king's castle, and they could choose how to spend it. Some talked with the natives to get to know them, while one hero looked for a woman to try to seduce. These options helped the players develop their heroes' personalities.

Boons

Boons are rewards that the heroes earn on their quests. For instance, Fireson helps bring a healer to an ailing queen, and the healer gives him magical spices that purify poisonous or corrupted food. Chance helps a child king return to the kingdom from which he was kidnapped, and the queen-mother rewards him with riches, plus a petal from the rose that symbolizes the boy's kingship. This petal may have magical powers or mystic significance, but no one knows how Chance might put it to use some day. A hero greets the Awakener, who gives her a magical crystal skull that will bring death to any mortal. These rewards are examples of boons.

Boons may be any of the following:

- **Treasures** that the heroes find during the quest. For example, the heroes rout a band of satyrs, and in the satyrs' camp they find magical herbs that the satyrs had gathered.
- **Rewards** from those the heroes have helped. For example, the heroes help a powerful wizard, and she grants them all magical powers to thank them.
- **Direct or indirect effects from the quest.** For example, the hero who strikes the killing blow against an evil shaman may be overwhelmed by the release of magical energy. This energy could give the hero a new power or special ability.

A typical boon has a special effect that only works once.

Peril

In each quest, the heroes should have the opportunity to make mistakes and pay for them.

Without some real peril, a quest can lose its tension. While a good quest tells a story, it's also something of a game. When you and the players know that the heroes can fail, and fail drastically, then their success becomes more meaningful.

Peril usually comes as the result of errors. If the heroes do "the right thing" through the quest, they typically should survive, if not prevail. But when they go astray, they ought to be vulnerable to suffering consequences. For example, in "Sister to Tigers," the heroes reacted slowly when the tiger-people attacked them, and one hero received some nasty wounds as a result.

Peril need not simply apply to the heroes' health. A misstep could result in another sort of tragedy, such as the needless loss of innocent life. In "Heavenmount," the heroes led a band of brave warriors against Hawkwind. The attack, however, was futile: over a dozen warriors died, but Hawkwind was unhurt.

Magic

Magic combines aspects of imagination, wonder, mystery, and meaning. Each quest should have some. In the worlds of **EVERWAY**, most people practice "low magic," including charms, amulets, curses, rituals, and prayers, even if "high magic," such as spells and enchantments, is rare.

Magic works in narrow and broad ways. "Narrow" magic includes spells, magical creatures, and other isolated types of magic. "Broad" magic includes effects that can help or harm whole realms. For example, a king's iniquities can bring misfortune to the kingdom, or a people's devotion to the gods and goddesses can bring their land harmony and wealth.

Leaving Out Elements



You don't have to include every element in every quest. No element is essential.



A quest without a plot could be a visit to a peaceful or magical land. The fun would come from the roleplaying or from the sense of wonder that you and the players create. Don't be surprised, however, if the heroes create or find their own conflicts.



A quest with no specific setting could focus on an open-ended goal. The heroes, for example, may be searching for a marvelous gift to present to Great King Horizon Emerald's newborn niece, but where they go to find the gift is up to them. Naturally, they will go somewhere, and that destination will become the setting, but still the setting is not integral to such a quest.



A quest without background characters could take place in ancient, cursed ruins, where

deadly traps and obscure mysteries present the challenges.



A quest without serious options could be a gauntlet or test of some sort in which the heroes have to face a series of tasks. Obviously the heroes will make some choices, but these choices may be trivial.



A quest without boons could have as its reward simply the satisfaction of doing a job well, or the relief that comes after surviving a deadly threat.



A quest without peril could focus on developing the heroes' personalities, or it could present relatively benign threats to the heroes' esteem or status.



A quest without magic could focus on political or social conflicts.

What Makes a Good Realm

Many of the same things that make a good quest also make a good realm. To invent a good realm, pay attention to the following elements:

Dynamics: Energy and action in the realm.

Background Characters: Characters who bring the realm to life and make it personal.

Possibilities: Different ways the realm may change and develop.

Magic: Mystery, power, and meaning.

Dynamics

In a good realm, things are happening. When you first imagine a realm, you might imagine it as static. If so, add enough detail to get things moving. For instance, the realm of Brightwind (see p. 10) started out as a place with a symbolic division between the land above and the land below, but nothing was happening. Adding the plot about the missing princess made the setting more dynamic.

Keep in mind three factors: energy, balance, and momentum. Energy is the activity of the realm or of the groups and individuals who live there. Balance is the way in which different forces work with or against each other. Momentum is the direction that the realm is headed and the speed at which it is changing. Often, low balance leads to high momentum.

For example, Bonekeep (the realm in "Journey to Stonedeep," see p. 37) has low energy, poor balance, and high momentum. The energy is low because Undeath is the realm's Fate and Usurper, and energy is a "lively" trait. The balance is poor because the Ghoulish Queen has taken power from the people and from the priests of

Osiris and concentrated that power under her direct control. The momentum is high because the realm is heading for disaster.

Background Characters

Gamemasters use background characters for much of their interaction with players. Heroes interrogate, cajole, spy on, wrestle with, debate, bewitch, loathe, distrust, like, flirt with, befuddle, frighten, and help background characters. If the background characters are strong parts of a realm, the realm seems alive.

Background characters are your way of *showing* the players what the realm is like, so that you don't have to tell them outright. For example, if the heroes come to Brightwind (p. 10), you could say, "The people here are oriented toward fire and air," but it would be more dramatic to let the heroes find this out for themselves by interacting with background characters. When the background characters act "flighty" or display "fiery" tempers, when they say they would never dream of eating fish, and when they swear by saying "Sun and sky," the heroes can start figuring out where these people's biases lie.

Major background characters, such as kings and queens, priests and priestesses, mages, villains, and so on also make the realm seem more alive by making it more personal. Details for these characters are very important so that they become more than merely their titles. When the heroes leave a realm after talking to the High Priestess, do they remember her as a person or simply as "the High Priestess"?

Possibilities

This element is tied to dynamics (see above). No matter what a realm is like, different events should be possible there. The future is never certain. Even when a realm's momentum is high and its future

seems predetermined, different possibilities remain. If a realm is being conquered by a more powerful realm, even if being conquered is inevitable, this loss can mean different things. Can the people hide their sacred scrolls and treasures so they are not looted? Can the realm's greatest prophets and visionaries escape the conquerors? Will the conquered people retain an identity of their own or will they merge with the conquering people?

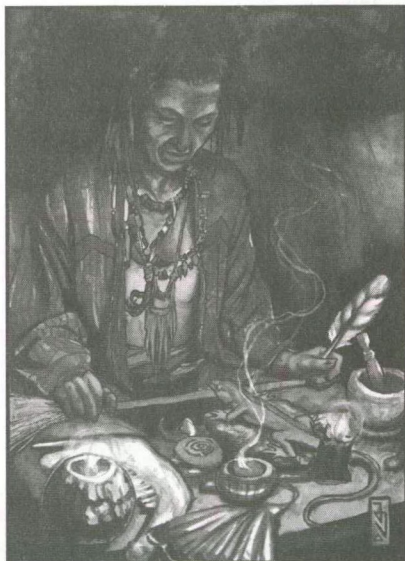
Everything that's alive has more than one possible future. If you want the realm you create to be alive, it needs more than one possible future.

Magic

In **EVERWAY**, magic is a part of everyday life. From the hand-carved protective amulets that a mother puts around her children's necks before sending them out to play, to the yearly ceremonies that insure abundant crops, people who would never call themselves shamans or sorcerers routinely use magic.

SEE THE
"MAGIC AMONG
THE REALMS"
SECTION IN
THE PLAYING
GUIDE, P. 36.

Even when you invent a realm whose emphasis is on politics or on social details, it's good to include magical elements as well. By immersing the heroes in worlds of magic and mystery, you help the players imagine the fantasy setting more vividly.



Running Quests

After imagining the quest, detailing the realm, and planning out the plot, it's *running* the quest that really counts. All the thought and care that goes into developing the quest pays off when your friends are gathered around the table and looking to you to lead them on a memorable quest. This section covers general and specific advice for making the most of the quest while you're running it.

The Plot

You may have a wonderful plot laid out for your quest, with dramatic crests of tension and a heart-pounding conclusion. Whether the quest turns out to be satisfying for you and your players, however, is partly up to them and partly up to you.

Maintaining Tension

The central element of storytelling is tension. If the players know how a quest is going to end, or if they don't care one way or the other, there's no tension. You need to make them care, and you need to keep them in doubt. The more experience you gain as a gamemaster, the larger your repertoire of tricks becomes. For example, here are some ways to maintain tension.

- If the players don't seem to care about how events are turning out, make things more personal: Have a villain steal things the heroes value, hurt background characters that the players like, or even hurt the heroes directly. For instance, if the players don't really care about the strange malady that afflicts the prince, let some of the heroes contract the illness, too. Now their only way to save themselves is to find the cure that will save the prince as well.

- If the players are so confident that they're not concerned for the safety or success of their heroes, build up the threat. Friendly background characters can emphasize the danger that the heroes face, or you can invent details to show how powerful the villains are that the heroes are going to fight. If you need to, you can decide to make the opposition stronger halfway through the quest. For example, if the heroes have easily defeated the evil duchess's demonic servants in their first encounter with them, you can increase the creatures' Fire and Earth scores for later encounters.

- Give the players breathing space every now and then—but not for too long. If they have “rest periods” of relative safety, it makes the tension more dramatic. If they find a safe place where they can stay indefinitely, change the situation so that it's no longer safe. For example, heroes trapped in a hostile realm might find a cavern where they can hide and make plans, but if they stay too long, a terrible creature might come up out of the deeper tunnels and drive them out.

Playing to Players' Tastes

If your quests play to what the players want to experience, they will be a great success. You can often tell a lot about what players want by how they create their heroes. Players whose heroes are mischievous often want the opportunity to cause trouble. Players whose heroes are flashy often want the chance for their heroes to show off. Players whose heroes are strong and violent often want their heroes to face and defeat opponents in combat. If you can provide the players with the sort of action they're looking for, they'll enjoy the quest, and you will, too.

Be sensitive as well to what the players don't want. Some events that could happen in a quest

The Campaign



A "campaign" is a series of quests or game sessions that all connect together somehow. Usually a campaign centers around the actions of a more or less constant group of heroes. In this case, whichever quests these heroes undertake is the campaign.



In addition to developing individual quests, however, you can invent a larger background of which the individual quests are a part. The campaign then has an identity and purpose of its own, one that the players and heroes might not know until they discover it. Such a campaign involves some large plot as a backdrop.



The "Broken Silence" campaign, in which I was a player, involved spherewalking to various spheres where the heroes confronted various "selves" of an old, powerful sorceress. She had attempted a mighty magical feat, had failed, and had been split into several parts, each of which represented the sorceress at a different age. On each quest, the heroes had to find and confront one of these selves until each one had been reincorporated into the whole.

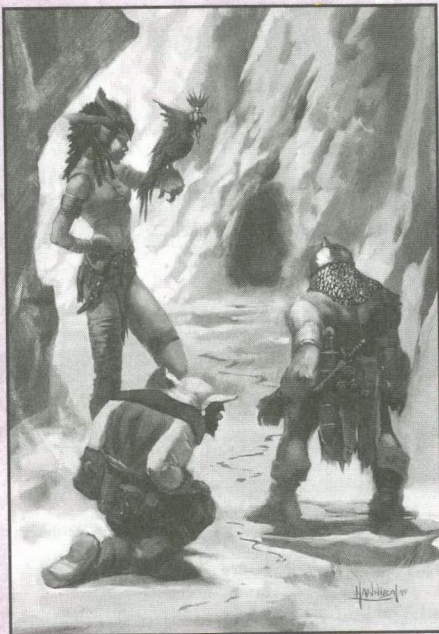
This campaign was much like a long quest divided up into separate episodes.



The campaign I'm currently running (as of the spring of 1995) is called the "What Rough Beast" campaign. The name comes from a line in William Butler Yeats's poem "Second Coming," and it portends something momentous and terrible. The campaign takes place in Everway, where newly arrived spherewalkers find themselves caught up in webs of lies and deceit. I can't tell you what the plot is really about because my editor is one of the players, and I don't want to spoil the surprise for her. [Talk about maintaining tension! Thanks a lot, Jonathan. —ED.] This quest is long and involved, with each session bringing the heroes deeper into the mystery that is at the heart of the action. The sessions are not separate quests with beginnings and ends; instead, each session simply represents more action toward the eventual resolution of the campaign.



Whether you want to develop a campaign and how you want it to play out are things that are all up to you. You may wish to play individual quests at first and then develop ideas for a long campaign when you're familiar with the game.



that might seem dramatic and interesting to some players can be too strong or offensive for others. Different players have different ideas about what's dramatic and what's in bad taste. It's part of your job to make sure that the action doesn't veer into areas that are going to cause players to be very uncomfortable. For instance, some players hate to see their heroes insulted if they can't immediately take vengeance on the insulter. If one of your players is sensitive about this, think twice before putting the hero in such a position.

When the Going Gets Tough

Sometimes in the middle of a quest the heroes' luck fails, or the heroes take the wrong actions, and events turn against them. They may be in a dangerous cavern when their strongest warrior gets paralyzed by a giant spider; without that warrior, they have little chance to complete the quest. Or they may need the help of a certain hermit to get the knowledge they need to defeat a cockatrice, but an obnoxious hero in the group

says some things that make the hermit unwilling even to speak to the heroes. Or they may miss a vital clue and blunder into the haunted woods at night (when the dangerous inhabitants are at their strongest) instead of during the day. Whatever the details, you may find yourself with a group of heroes who are likely to fail to complete the quest as you envisioned it.

Quite simply, you have two options: you can let them fail, or you can change the quest so that they can still succeed. No answer is best, so it's especially important for you to think about how you will handle situations like this ahead of time.

THE BEST WAY TO KEEP YOURSELF FROM FACING THIS DILEMMA IS TO INVENT QUESTS THAT ARE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH THAT THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS FOR THE HEROES TO SUCCEED. EVEN SO, HOWEVER, YOU STILL MAY FACE QUESTS IN WHICH THE HEROES MAKE MISTAKES AND PREVENT THEMSELVES FROM BEING ABLE TO SUCCEED.

If you let them fail, the players may be upset. They may even accuse you of making the quest too hard. If they're used to "winning," then they may take "losing" especially hard. But on the other hand, letting heroes fail sometimes makes their victories more rewarding. If the players get the idea that they'll never fail because you'll never let that happen, quests lose a lot of the tension that makes them enjoyable. In fact, you can turn their disappointment into energy. For example, you can let them fail but also let them escape so that they can return another day. Succeeding at a quest that stumped them the first time may be especially rewarding for them.

A Gamemaster's Observations



by Bob Kruger

The Fortune Deck need not be viewed as a device for divining the heroes' fates; rather, it is a set of symbols that invite you, the gamemaster, to think of the present action in a different way. There is nothing close to "the right way" to interpret the cards in a given situation. However, this does not render the cards mere window-dressing. The cards represent a range of well-established, universal, mythic themes and, if used conscientiously and with imagination, will, like the notes on a musical scale, provide a structure with which to create limitless kinds of compositions.



Though EVERWAY quests take place in an atmosphere reminiscent of other roleplaying games, they are actually radically different. Combat is de-centered as the focus of conflict. There is no system for resolving combat separate from the general action rules, as combat is but one way of moving a story along, and far from the preferred way. Circumstance and a draw from the Fortune Deck may suggest an outcome for a combat, but EVERWAY does not pretend that to be a

combat system. Gamemasters may find that a well-structured story is actually upset by combat if combat is allowed to swing the plot radically. Character decisions should have the most effect on the outcome of a quest. To ensure that is the case, consider these elements of a successful quest:



1. Hero action should affect the outcome of the adventure; hero action should actually have a chance to change the way events turn out.



2. Significant items or events in the adventure should provide some key to the overall outcome of the quest. (It is a well-established axiom among fiction writers that a character given a weapon in the first chapter of a book had better use it and soon.) The use of these "props" can help focus a quest, but props should not be too limited in their applicability to a situation. A sword that sings when someone tells a lie in a quest could be a good prop, depending on the importance of lies to the plot. A good prop should help a party progress deeper into a quest but should not resolve the quest by itself.

The Company of Heroes

While inventing a hero may be the job of the individual player, there is a lot you can do to help the group work together. Paying attention to the heroes can be as important as keeping track of the background characters.

Bringing Heroes Together

You can use the premise to bring the heroes together. Bringing heroes together is most important for the first quest, when most of the heroes probably don't know each other. Some premises presuppose a relation among the heroes, such as "The heroes are all members of Chamber Platinum who know each other and have trained together." Other premises create a relation, or the opportunity for one, such as, "The heroes are all enemies of the godling Rockheart, whose evil has spread from realm to realm; while they don't know each other at the

beginning of the quest, they have all come to the realm of Rushwaters to defend it from Rockheart's advancing army."

You can usually leave it up to the players to decide why their heroes have come to the realm in question, accepted the mission, or whatever else the quest involves.

During play, you can usually rely on believable coincidences to get the heroes together. If several heroes have come to a city individually, they may meet by chance in the streets. If two separate groups of heroes are in the wilderness, one may find the other's tracks or spot the other's campfire. Often all you have to do is arrange for the heroes to meet and the players will find some reason for the heroes to work together.

CHAMBER PLATINUM

IS A GROUP

SPONSORED

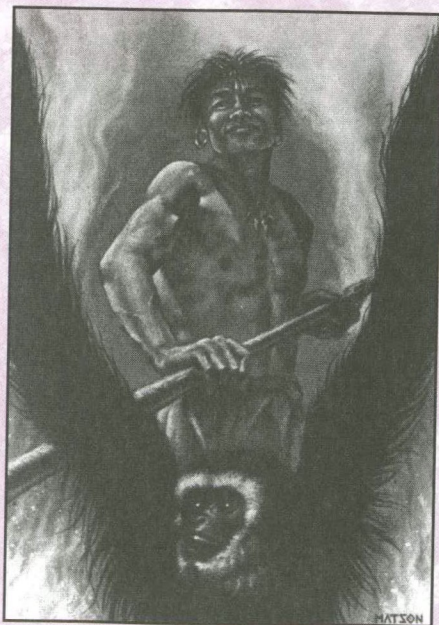
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LIBRARY OF

ALL WORLDS.

SEE P. 21 IN THE

PLAYING GUIDE.



When a Hero Joins a Quest

Sometimes heroes join quests in progress. A player wants to get into the action and start playing, but the game world may make it hard for the hero to join up. Perhaps you ended the last session with the heroes in a strange city in a newly discovered realm. Now the next session is beginning, and a player who wasn't playing last time is here. Or imagine that the heroes are marching through a trackless, arctic wasteland when a player shows up late and wants to play. How do you get the new hero into the action without violating the game world's consistency?

First of all, you don't have to let the new player in, at least not right away. Naturally, it's more fun to have the player involved than sitting and watching, but you don't need to twist



the reality of your quest for this player's sake if you don't want to. If the heroes are in the middle of the wilderness when the new player shows up, that player may have to wait until the heroes arrive in some settlement or new realm, some place where it's conceivable that they would meet the hero of the new player.

Second, you can avoid a lot of these problems by inventing quests that are short enough to finish in a single sitting. Then you don't have to worry about different players showing up at different sessions.

But when you do want to get a new hero into the group, you have several options. If the heroes are anywhere near crossroads, a large city, or any other place where a spherewalker might be, the group can encounter the new spherewalker there. It may also be that fate throws the new spherewalker onto the same

path as the current group; if the current group has been brought to this realm by an astral storm, a magic ritual, or the promise of reward, the new hero may have come for the same reason. How far you're willing to bend probability (karma) in order to help the plot (drama) and get the new hero involved with the current group is a question of taste.

When a Hero Joins a Company

If the company of heroes has an identity as a group, it can be hard for a new hero to join. You and the players need to answer the question of why the new hero would be accepted as part of the group. The more of the following questions you can answer yes to, the more believable it is that the hero will be welcome. It may be up to you to help arrange "yes" answers.

- Does the new hero have a goal in common with the existing group?
- Do the members of the group trust the new hero?
- Does the hero offer some talents or abilities that the group could use?
- Does the hero get along with the members of the group?

You can help a hero fit in by making the meeting dramatic. Perhaps the new hero has information that the group needs. Perhaps the new hero happens along just when the current group is facing a tough challenge that the newcomer can help them overcome.

When Heroes Die

Unlike a character in a story you write, a hero might die even when the player has plans for the hero's further adventures. It can be painful for

players to see their heroes die, especially if they've invested a lot of time and emotion into developing them. It may be that no heroes in your group ever die, but if the death of heroes is rare, a death can be even more painful than when death is common. There are several ways to deal with the death of a hero.

A fallen hero deserves a funeral. A funeral is a chance for the other heroes to erect a memorial of some kind, to speak over the fallen hero, and to recall the hero's virtues and great deeds. It's also an opportunity for the players to remember the events of the hero's life, including the good, the bad, and the humorous. If it means calling the quest to a virtual halt to roleplay the funeral, it's worth it.

The death of a hero is not necessarily the end of the story. It's possible for someone related to the hero (played by that hero's player) to carry on.

The hero's child could "step into the hero's shoes," perhaps inheriting the status, wealth,

and magical devices of the fallen hero. The child, naturally, shares some of the fallen hero's traits, but he or she is also a new person. Can this child both live up to the parent's example and forge an independent identity?

A student or admirer of the hero could take up the hero's cause, trying to act as the hero would have. The fallen hero's goals are now championed by the newcomer, who may have some of the same skills the first hero had.

A friend of the hero may come for the funeral, befriend the other heroes, and join their group. This option works especially nicely if the player has vision cards representing both the original hero and the friend in the original hero's selection of cards. For the new hero, the player can use the same cards as part of the hero's set. The card that used to represent a friend now represents the new hero, and the card that used to represent the hero now represents "a friend who has passed on."



R E A D Y - T O - R U N

Journey to Stonedeep



This section describes a quest that you can use as your first quest. **This section is for the gamemaster only.** It contains information that the players shouldn't know, at least not until after the gamemaster has run the quest described here.

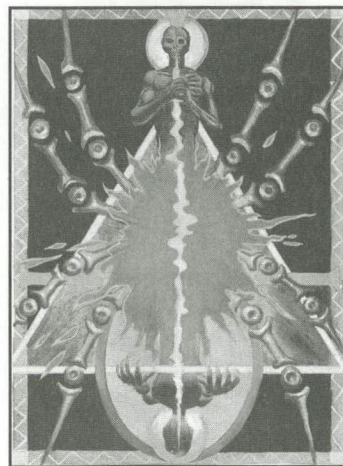
The Quest Cards

Look at the six quest cards. (You can tell them from the vision cards because they say "quest card" on the back.) Each card is explained below, along with the background characters that these images represent.

Undeath

Undeath is The Usurper for the Fortune Deck, representing the usurper force in the realm in which this quest takes place. It represents "deathly life," the vile blending of lifelike activity and deathlike corruption. It can also refer to deathlike properties (stasis, infertility, etc.) among the living. Its reversed meaning is "life and death in balance," each force in its proper, natural, and healthy place. Undeath has no planetary, elementary, or astrological correspondences.

If during the game you draw The Usurper from the Fortune Deck, you can show the players the Undeath image just as you would show them a regular fortune card that you draw.



SEE PP. 1-2 OF GUIDE TO THE
FORTUNE DECK TO READ MORE
ABOUT THE USURPER.

The Awakener

Across the land of Bonekeep, people are having visions of a terrible warrior known as “the Awakener,” seen on this card. Legend has it that he has come to find a bride, the most beautiful woman in the land. During the quest he comes to the realm, and the heroes have to turn this terror into a blessing.

The Awakener

Virtue: Death (*change*)

Fault: The Peasant—reversed (*lack of vision*)

Fate: The Phoenix (*rebirth vs. destruction*)

Air	3	6	Fire
Water	6	3	Earth

Powers:

Unkillable. As an avatar of Death, the Awakener cannot be slain.

The Gift of Death. By snapping his fingers, the Awakener can bring death to mortal and undead beings. Each snap weakens the targets’ Earth scores by 1 and can affect up to a dozen beings at once. It takes a week for a character to recover these lost points.

Other Powers. He may have other powers related to death as well, at your discretion.

Description: The Awakener embodies death, but he is not evil. He regards the deaths of others to be a trivial matter, but he does not kill needlessly. He is firm but respectful in speech, single-minded but patient in pursuit of his bride. To characters who treat him with respect, he is honorable and tolerant. Those who attack him

or try his patience, though, are met with a few snaps of his fingers. He may snap his fingers only once in order to weaken all those around him and to demonstrate his power. Play him as a reasonable but extremely powerful entity, someone the heroes can deal with but not defeat or ignore.



Rarity and the Ghouls

The Ghoule Queen's ghoule soldiers seek a beautiful woman, Rarity, to be the bride of the coming Awakener. In the scene depicted on this card, the ghoules have chased Rarity to the ruins where the heroes appear.

Ghoule Soldiers

Air	2	5	Fire
Water	2	6	Earth

Powers:

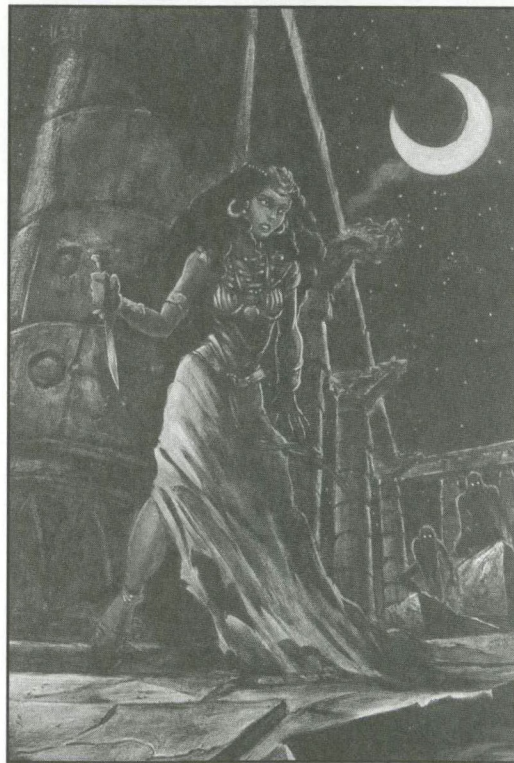
Unnaturally Tough. The ghoules resist pain, disease, poison, and other afflictions of a lively body. They do not need to breathe, but do so when they wish to speak.

Description: These ghoules are foot soldiers of the queen. They are used to people cowering in front of them and are ill-prepared to face stiff resistance from the heroes. Play them as haughty soldiers who, if given a chance, curse the heroes and tell them that they will certainly fall before the might of the Ghoule Queen. (Alternatively, you can play them as snivelling cowards when defeated, as unthinking lackeys, as bestial creatures, or however else you wish.)

Rarity

Air	2	3	Fire
Water	4	3	Earth

Description: Rarity, ironically, is a typical inhabitant of Bonekeep. She fears the Ghoule Queen and her soldiers, considers the Ghoule Queen's rule to be unchallengeable, knows little about realms beyond Bonekeep, and knows nothing about other spheres. Play Rarity as a sensitive person who's just experienced the most terrifying night of her life: shaken, weak, and terribly frightened. (Alternately, she can faint from the exertion, or she can be as frightened of the strange heroes as she was of the ghoules.)



The Envoy

Favor, the envoy of the Ghoul Queen waits at Stoneflat for the Awakener to arrive. A ghoulish honor guard is with him. The heroes can defeat Favor if they wish to be the ones to greet and guide the Awakener.

Protecting the envoy are ghouls. There might be only two of them, or there may be as many as twelve. Choose the number of ghouls to suit the plot. If you want the heroes to be able to attack and defeat the envoy, then let there be a small number. If you'd like to force the heroes to be tricky, let there be so many ghouls that the heroes think twice before attacking.

Favor, the Envoy

Air	4	4	Fire
Water	4	6	Earth

Powers:

Unnaturally Tough. Favor resists pain, disease, poison, and other afflictions of a lively body. He does not need to breathe, but he does so when he wishes to speak.

Description: Favor is a powerful undead creature, much more humanlike than the ghouls that threatened Rarity. Unlike other undead servants, he is also well-spoken and intelligent. Play him as spooky, refined, and devious. (Alternately, you can play him as a quite honorable, pleasant gentleman who just happens to be the undead servant of an evil queen.)

Ghoul Honor Guards

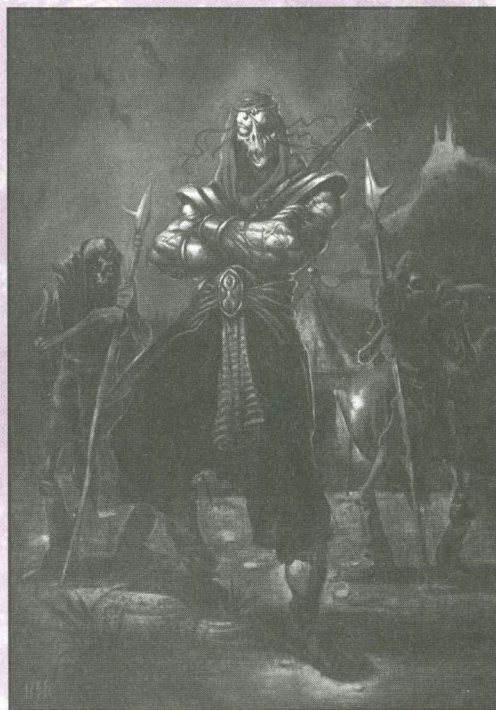
Air	2	5	Fire
Water	2	6	Earth

Powers:

Unnaturally Tough. The ghoulish honor guards resist pain, disease, poison, and other afflictions of a lively body. They do not need to breathe, but they do so when they wish to speak.

Description:

While these particular ghouls are better dressed, they are essentially the same as the ghoulish soldiers that threatened Rarity (see the description of the card "Rarity and the Ghouls"). When they fight as large groups, their tactics are remarkably poor and predictable. They tend to charge when threatened, and they do not have commanders capable of inventing new strategies to deal with exceptional opponents.



The Queen's Court

The Ghoul Queen rules a kingdom of undead creatures. She is determined to find the most beautiful woman in the land and offer her to the Awakener as his bride. She believes she will gain a great boon from him in return.

While the queen is a mage, most of her practical power comes from the undead army she's built over the years, not directly from casting spells. Her ghoule soldiers number in the thousands; about a thousand are in Scepter, and perhaps fifty are armed, ready, and near the Ghoul Queen. In a crisis, the Ghoul Queen can muster two hundred soldiers in half an hour and a thousand in an hour.

The Ghoul Queen

Virtue: Undeath (*deathly life*)

Fault: Death—reversed (*stasis*)

Fate: The Phoenix (*rebirth vs. destruction*)

Air	5	3	Fire
Water	4	6	Earth

Powers:

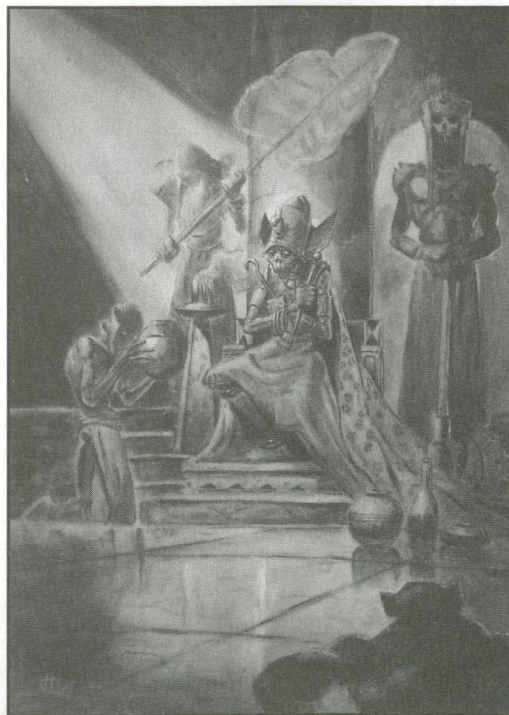
Unnaturally Tough. The Ghoul Queen resists pain, disease, poison, and other afflictions of a lively body. She does breathe, but only a tenth as much as a normal person needs.

Magic: 5

Black Breath (Air). The Ghoul Queen follows a magical path known as "Black Breath," so named because its users can substitute magic for life's breath. Thus the queen can breathe the breath of undeath into a corpse and bring it not to life, but to a parody or shadow of life. Similarly, she

can call and command spirits of the dead, giving them some faculties of life (visibility, speech, awareness, and so on) but not life itself. She works her magic with incantations, magic words, and arcane symbols.

Description: The Ghoul Queen is smart and powerful, but she's trapped. The kingdom she commands has grown in power, and her magic has kept her alive for centuries, but the weight of her rule through magic is wearing on her. She believes she needs more power to support this weight, but what she really needs is rebirth. She is harsh, demanding, cruel, and confident. She's ruled without serious opposition for centuries; in the face of real danger, she becomes furious. (Alternately, you may play her as unable to cope with serious threats.)



Ghoul Soldiers

Air	2	5	Fire
Water	2	6	Earth

Powers:

Unnaturally Tough. The ghouls resist pain, disease, poison, and other afflictions of a lively body. They do not need to breathe, but do so when they wish to speak.

Description: These ghouls are foot soldiers of the queen. They are used to people cowering in front of them and are ill-prepared to face stiff resistance from the heroes. Play them as haughty soldiers who, if given a chance, curse the heroes and tell them that they will certainly fall before the might of the Ghoul Queen. (Alternatively, you can play them as snivelling cowards when defeated, as unthinking lackeys, as bestial creatures, or however else you wish.)

Transformation

If the Awakener chooses the Ghoul Queen as his bride, both of their fates are fulfilled, and they transform into a healthy woman and a dragon, respectively.

Woman

Virtue: Undeath—reversed (*life and death in balance*)

Fault: The Fool—reversed (*lack of connection*)

Fate: War (*great effort vs. effort misspent*)

Air	4	4	Fire
Water	4	5	Earth

Powers:

The Blessed Cut. The transformed woman can separate life and death where they are

unhealthily mixed. For instance, ghosts live in the borderland between life and death, and she can let ghosts pass on to the land of the dead and, ultimately, to their next lives. As this power is new to her, she isn't entirely aware of what it does or even that she has it.

Description: The queen has been reborn. She remembers her past and regrets it, but she feels that it is no longer a part of her. Left to her own devices, she will gladly ride off on the dragon and rediscover the world. She has no name, and she may look to the heroes to name her. (How they name her may bless or curse her in her new life.) Play the woman as bewildered, soft-spoken, and emotionally and mentally open. (Alternately, you can play her as forceful, filled with visions of a new life she can live with the dragon, and eager to put Bonekeep literally behind her.)

Dragon

Virtue: The Fool (*freedom*)

Fault: The Satyr (*indulgence*)

Fate: War (*great effort vs. effort misspent*)

Air	6	9	Fire
Water	6	9	Earth

Powers:

Immunities. The dragon is immune to poison, fire, and psychic intrusion.

Flight. He can fly as fast as a horse can run.

Speech. He speaks both the Tongue and the Dragonspeech, the language of dragons.

Impenetrable Scales. His scales deflect all normal weapons, except for one spot at the top of his skull.

Description: The dragon is cordial but distant. He feels little in common with humans. He feels no regrets for his actions as the Awakener, and he's eager to get on with this new stage in his life. (Alternately, you can portray him playful, like a puppy.)



Story Overview

This quest, "Journey to Stonedeep," plays with the theme of death, as personified by two people. The Ghoulish Queen is a sorceress whose power comes from creating undead soldiers and servants. The Awakener is a supernatural being who brings death to those around him. In the ideal climax to the story, the Awakener brings death to the Ghoulish Queen, but, as is always the case, death is a transformation. The old Ghoulish

Queen dies so that a new, better, "whole" self can be born.

The heroes may hate, fear, and fight the Ghoulish Queen and the Awakener, but the way to enable positive evolution is to recognize death's (and thus the Awakener's) right to destroy, and to guide it, rather than resist it.

Read through the whole quest and write notes in the margins or on a separate piece of paper about how you'd like to run the quest. You may want to change the plot, the characters, or other features. And you should be familiar with how the events will progress so that you can pace the quest accordingly.

THE AWAKENER GETS HIS NAME FROM A TEACHING OF ANUBIS, THE GOD OF DEATH. ANUBIS TEACHES THAT DYING IS "AWAKENING": THE VIRTUOUS AWAKEN TO THE LIGHT OF A GLORIOUS AFTERLIFE, WHILE THE UNWORTHY AWAKEN IN DARKNESS.

Outline: Realm of Bonekeep

Virtue: The Peasant (*simple strength*). The people have the strength to endure the queen's reign.

Fault: Overlooking the Diamond (*failing to see opportunity*). The people have nearly given up any hope of ever resisting the Ghoulish Queen's reign. For example, they fail to see that the Awakener could bring a blessing instead of a curse.

Fate: Undeath (*deathly life vs. life and death in balance*). Will the dead continue to rule the living, or will they be helped to pass on and let the living "come to life" again?

Usurper: Undeath. See p. 31.

People: The people have golden-brown skin, black hair, and dark-brown eyes. They dress

in simple robes, sheath dresses, or wrap-around skirts. They wear religious and magical ornaments, but purely decorative jewelry is rare. They are quiet, strong, resigned to their fates.

Craft: The people of Bonekeep mine and work iron, but not steel. Copper is more common than iron for day-to-day tools. Large monuments are made of stone, but most homes and such are made of sun-dried mud-bricks.

Tamed Animals: The people keep cats (which are regarded highly), dogs, and lizards as pets. For food and labor, they have chickens, pigs, goats, and cattle. There are no horses, as horses are easily spooked by the Ghoul Queen's undead warriors.

Deities: The chief deities are Isis (She Who Revives the Dead), Osiris (He Who Died), and Anubis (Keeper of the Dead). The Ghoul Queen is the high priestess of Isis, who is a goddess of magic. In Bonekeep, obeying the Ghoul Queen is more important than worshiping the deities. Osiris is a god of fertility; he was killed by an enemy god, and Isis brought him back to life. Anubis is the jackal-headed god of the dead.

Rule: The Ghoul Queen rules the land, as she has for over 250 years. She expects little out of her subjects while they live, but takes them as servants and soldiers when they die. The high priests of Osiris and Anubis have some power, but strictly with the consent of the Ghoul Queen, who is the high priestess of Isis.

The Land: Bonekeep covers both banks of a long, wide river called Springrise. The banks are mostly flat floodplain, but there are hilly, woody areas as well. Because it runs along the Springrise, Bonekeep is long (about two hundred miles) and narrow (about fifty miles).

ANUBIS IS PICTURED ON

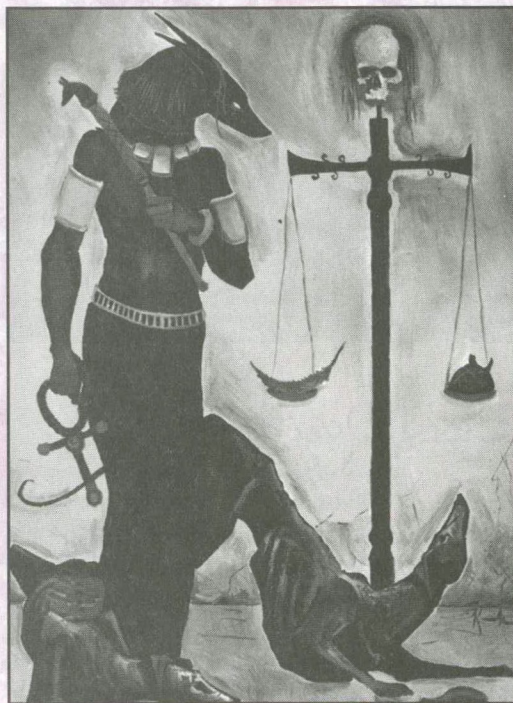
THE FORTUNE CARD

DEATH. SEE P. 6 OF

GUIDE TO THE

FORTUNE DECK.

Connections: The people of Bonekeep know of no active connection to other spheres, but there is a gate linking it to the realm of Sweetwaters. This is the gate through which the heroes walk.



Names in Bonekeep

Girls' names in Bonekeep often express hope or happiness, a sign that the parents hope the baby girl will bring cheer to their lives. Boys' names often express the ability to survive or prevail in the face of hardship, a sign that the parents hope their son will endure the hard life the people here know too well.

COMMON GIRLS' NAMES

Miracle

Cheer

Joy

Blessing

Godsgift

Delight

Star

COMMON BOYS' NAMES

Patience

Strength

Enduring

Stone

Greatheart

Able

Victor

If you use these names for background characters, you can write notes next to the names to remind you who these names belong to. For example, if you decide that a woman named Delight is a traitor to the peasants' rebellion, you can write "traitor" next to the name "Delight" on the list.

If you wish, you can invent a few more names along these lines and write them here, so that you have an even longer list from which to choose.

The History of Bonekeep

Three hundred years ago, Stonedeeep was a prosperous land. Spherewalkers regularly traveled through a gate that connected Stonedeeep to another realm, Sweetwaters. Then people stopped coming through the gate, and the spherewalkers who went through the gate returned with stories of terrible devastation—when they returned at all.

Robbed of its valuable connection with Sweetwaters, Stonedeeep declined. Fifty years later, as the kingdom was being threatened by an invasion, a young mage declared that she and her magic would save the kingdom. She did. Then she took the throne and changed the name of the kingdom to "Bonekeep." That was 250 years ago, and she's still on that throne. The people have forgotten her name; they call her simply "the Ghoul Queen."

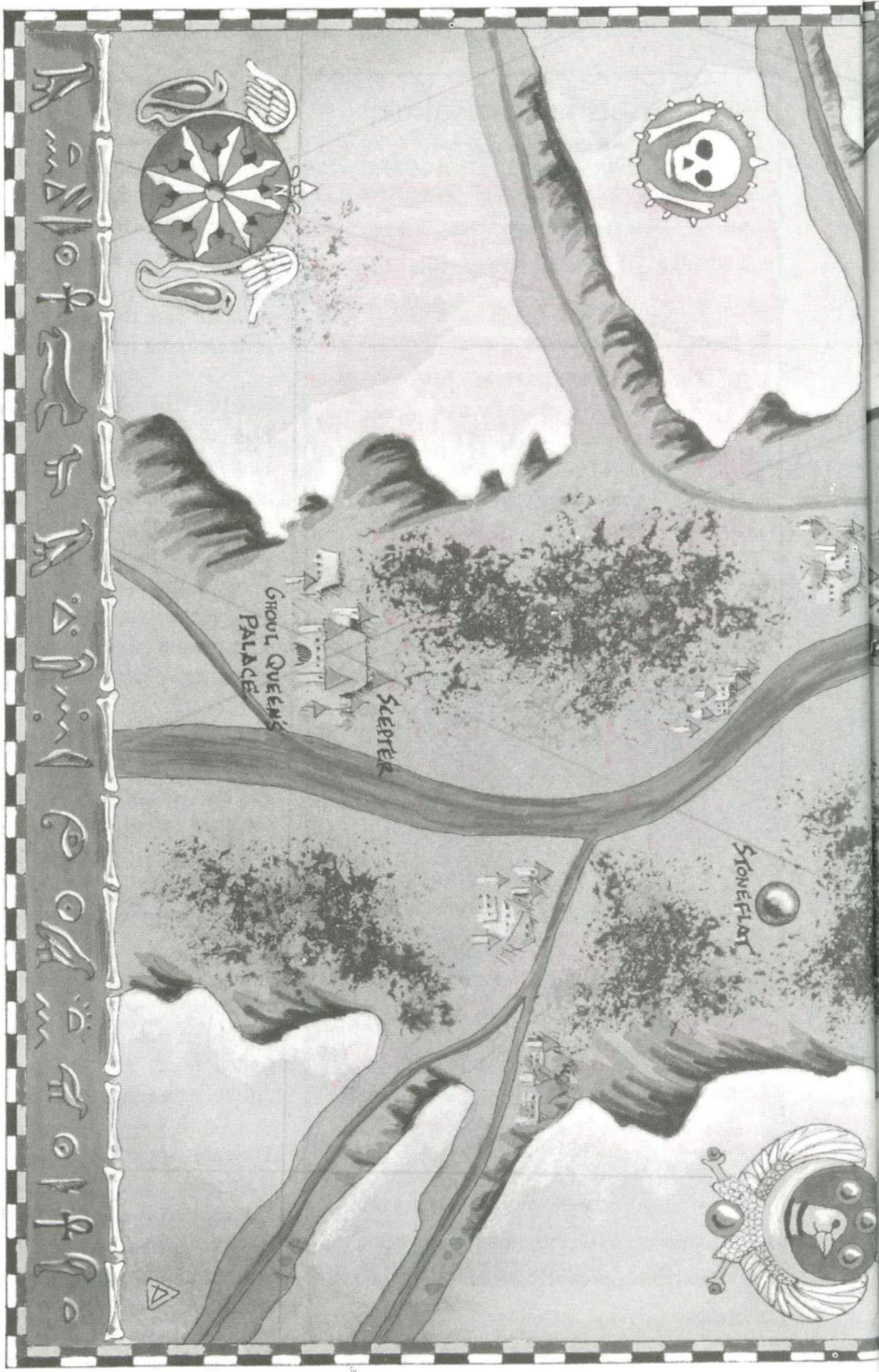
The queen rules the land by turning the dead into vile, half-alive servants that do her bidding without question. The people have grown resigned to her rule.

The Map of Bonekeep

Look at the map of Bonekeep. This map only covers the most likely places the heroes will travel through during the quest. Bonekeep continues north and south of the map, but it's unlikely that the heroes will travel there.

The ruins at the top of the map are where the gate is through which the heroes arrive. The town of Underwood is the first (and perhaps only) town that the heroes are likely to visit. The city of Scepter near the bottom of the map is the capital, where the Ghoul Queen's palace is. The heroes are likely to come here for one reason or another.

Map of Bone Valley





Plot Summary

The Awakener is coming to the realm of Bonekeep. Legend says that he takes beauty and brings death. It is said he wants the most beautiful woman in the land to be his bride.

Below is an outline of how the plot is likely to progress, though it's ultimately up to you and your players how the plot actually turns out.

Prologue: The heroes pass through a newly reopened gate to explore a realm that has been cut off for centuries.

Opening: One or more heroes has a vision of the Awakener while traveling through the gate.

Action: The heroes arrive and rescue a woman named Rarity, whom ghouls are trying to capture. The heroes learn of the Awakener's imminent arrival and of the legend about his bride.

Progress: The heroes escort Rarity to the town of Underwood. They learn more about the Ghoul Queen, who rules the land of Bonekeep. They learn, among other things, that she has already captured two women as possible brides for the Awakener.

Decisions: The Awakener's arrival is nearing. How do the heroes react? Do they try to oppose him? Do they gather a makeshift army of regular folk to fight him? Do they try to talk him out of choosing a bride? Do they try to rescue the Ghoul Queen's captives?

Actions: The events of this section depend on the decisions of the heroes. The heroes might trick or defeat the Ghoul Queen's envoy, prepare peasant rebels for revolution, or travel to the capital city of Scepter to try to rescue the Ghoul Queen's captives.

Rising Tension: The Awakener arrives and searches for a bride. He kills those who oppose him and speaks politely to those who do not.

Climax and Resolution: Depending on what the heroes have done, the quest may climax in any of a number of ways:

- The Awakener chooses the Ghoul Queen as his bride, transforming both of them. (This is the best ending.) The people of Bonekeep are freed from the queen's tyranny.
- The Awakener is driven off or persuaded to leave (highly unlikely). The Ghoul Queen is denied her boon, and her reign collapses, but at a price to the inhabitants of Bonekeep.
- The Awakener finds a bride, but she is not one of the women captured by the Ghoul Queen. The Awakener provides a boon to whoever helped him find his bride. The Ghoul Queen is denied her boon, and her reign collapses, but at a price to the inhabitants of Bonekeep.
- The Awakener chooses a bride from among the women the Ghoul Queen has captured and gives her more power over life and death. This power bolsters her reign so that she maintains her control over Bonekeep and its people. (This is how things will turn out if the heroes don't intervene or fail to intervene effectively.)
- Some other conclusion that you and the players bring about.

Later Quests: The heroes may return to Bonekeep later to find more adventures and challenges awaiting them. What happens in this section depends on how the heroes deal with the Awakener and the Ghoul Queen.

Prologue: Getting to Bonekeep

In the first part of the quest, the heroes travel to the gate in Sweetwaters, walk the gate, and arrive in Bonekeep. During this section, you set the stage to prepare for the action that will follow. The Prologue starts with the heroes (and players) learning about the quest, and it ends when the heroes are in Bonekeep and hear a cry for help.

Starting the Quest

The first thing you have to do is explain to the players what the heroes know about the quest and find out why they are on it.

Read this to your players so that they get a sense of the quest without learning anything that their heroes wouldn't know:

"Three hundred years ago spherewalkers frequently used a gate that connected the realms of Sweetwaters and Stonedeeep. Then a venomous, evil dragon came to Sweetwaters, drove everyone away, and made a wasteland of the realm. No one could use the gate anymore. For three centuries, the dragon prevented contact with Stonedeeep.

Now, however, a hero has vanquished the dragon, and the people of the realms around Sweetwaters are eager to make contact again with the people of Stonedeeep. First, though, they need daring, intelligent spherewalkers to use the gate, find out how Stonedeeep may have changed in three hundred years, and

determine the best way to approach these lost neighbors.

You are these people."

If the Heroes Haven't Been Created Yet

During hero-creation, give the players the premise that their heroes are all willing to go to Stonedeeep to explore it. Each hero may have a different reason to explore Stonedeeep, but as long as they have this goal in common, they can work together.

SEE THE HEROES
CHAPTER OF THE
PLAYING GUIDE FOR
MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT CREATING
HEROES.



If any players want their heroes to be working for a patron who is sponsoring them, you can use the background character Lady Silverbell, a noble from a nearby realm. Lady Silverbell is the direct descendent of a noble from Stonedeeep who was cut off from her people when the dragon came to Sweetwaters. She is using her family's influence to sponsor an expedition to Stonedeeep.

Regardless of whether or not Lady Silverbell makes an appearance in the quest, she will provide a guide and a train of mules loaded with supplies to make the journey to the gate possible.

If the Heroes Have Already Been Created

Ask each player to invent a reason for his or her hero to undertake this quest. Again, the players can use Lady Silverbell as a device to give their heroes a reason to go to Stonedeeep.

Bonekeep, Sweetwaters, and Everway



The heroes will travel to two realms, Sweetwaters and Bonekeep, on two different spheres. If the heroes are already in Everway, you may want to know just how they get from Everway to Sweetwaters. You can decide for yourself the path that the heroes take, but it may be best to make it an easy path so that the heroes don't take a lot of game time getting there. I'd recommend placing Sweetwaters on the same sphere as The Midlands or Tales (see p. 25 and 27 in the Playing Guide) so that travel to Sweetwaters is relatively easy, but you can place it anywhere you want.

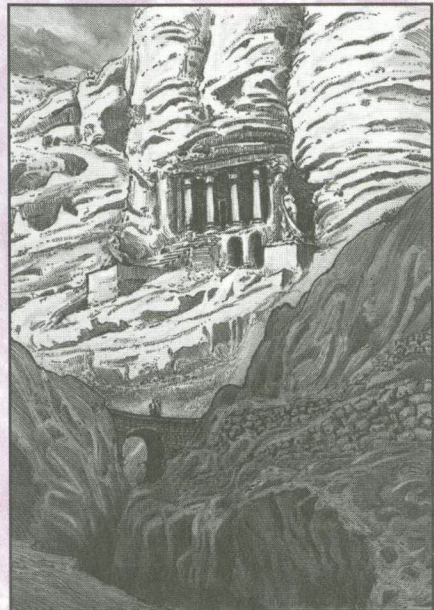


If your heroes aren't in Everway, there's no real reason to decide that Sweetwaters is anywhere near there.

What the Heroes Know About Stonedeeep

The heroes' sponsors, or at least some people who want to help them, provide them the following information, gleaned from centuries'-old records. Read this to the players:

"Stonedeeep is over two hundred miles long from north to south. It lies along a large river called the Springrise, which floods every year. A narrow realm, Stonedeeep is bounded by cliffs on either side of the Springrise. The capital city of Stonedeeep is Scepter, which is upriver from the gate. The people of the realm worship Osiris and related gods. They are a peaceful people, who prosper from trade and fertile soil. Stonedeeep is warm, and its seasons move in step with Sweetwater's. It will be early spring there, before the flood. No one remembers how long it takes to travel through the gate from Sweetwaters to Stonedeeep, so you may arrive during any time of day."



YOU CAN PLAY OUT THE WEEKLONG TRIP TO THE GATE IN MORE DETAIL THAN IT HAS BEEN HERE. THE HEROES CAN PASS RUINED CITIES, FORD A BEFOULED RIVER, AND SO ON. WHETHER YOU SUMMARIZE THE TRIP OR PLAY IT OUT IN DETAIL IS A QUESTION OF STYLE AND PACE.

Heading to the Gate

First, ask the players if their heroes bring any special equipment or make any other special preparations. Sponsors and friends can provide most reasonable help that the heroes request. Then ask them if they have any questions about Stonedeeep. The sponsors don't know much more than the bare facts provided above, but the players may need some things clarified. Remember that no one on this side of the gate knows anything about what's happened in

Stonedeeep in the last three hundred years.

When the players feel ready to start the quest, read the following to them:

"Your guide is a wiry young woman who looks at home in the wilds. She guides you out of the city and into the blasted land of Sweetwaters. Following her, you travel for seven days through land that becomes more and more devastated as you go. The ground is rocky and dark, the trees and other plants stubby and misshapen. You have brought plenty of water because the streams here are foul and smelly. On the seventh day, you come to a ring of partially toppled standing stones. This, the guide says, is the gate to Stonedeeep.

The guide will camp here for two weeks, waiting for you to return. If you do not return within that time, the guide will leave, and eventually someone will sponsor another expedition to Stonedeeep."

Ask the players if they have any last questions before they head through the gate. When they are ready to go through the gate, read:

"You stand in a circle with the large, gray stones all around you. You join hands so that none of you will "drift away" while you're between spheres. You close your eyes, concentrate, and feel the ground beneath your feet fade away."

Opening: Vision of the Awakener

One or more heroes has a vision of the Awakener while traveling between spheres. This vision foreshadows what will come later in the quest and makes the Awakener seem more powerful and threatening.

All heroes whose Water scores are 6 or stronger have the vision. If no hero has a score this high, then the one with the highest Water score has the vision. (If more than one hero ties for the highest score, they all have it.)

SHOW THE AWAKENER QUEST CARD TO ANY PLAYERS WHOSE HEROES HAVE THE VISION. DO NOT LET OTHER PLAYERS SEE IT. THEY'LL SEE IT LATER IN THE QUEST.

Read the following to any players whose heroes have the vision:

"You are standing in a field, but you feel ungrounded, and you realize you're having a vision. A dragon hurtles down out of the sky, crashes into the ground, and bursts into flame. Out of the flame walks a man in armor. He strides forth, stands still, and stares at you. His eyes glow red. Suddenly you see that he is standing on a pile of skulls. "I seek a bride," he says. The vision vanishes, and you're standing on solid ground."

Continue immediately with the arrival in Stonedeeep. The players whose heroes had the

vision do not have time to ask questions at this point.

Arriving in Stonedeep

Immediately after the vision, the heroes arrive in Stonedeep. Read this to them:

“Suddenly, you’re standing on hard and solid ground. You smell dust. You open your eyes, and it’s dark. In a moment, your eyes adjust, and you see ruins and deep shadows all around you. Beneath you is a cracked, circular stone slab, partially buried in the rubble. Above you are the stars. You’re now in Stonedeep.”

Looking Around

The heroes are free to explore their new surroundings, at least for a little while. Once the pace slows too much, have them hear Rarity’s scream and move onto the Action segment (see the next section, “Action: Rarity and the Ghouls”).

It is up to the players to ask questions about the heroes’ surroundings and up to you to describe the sights and sounds that their heroes see and hear. The players may say that their heroes simply walk out of the ruins, but it’s more likely that the heroes will try to learn something about the ruins by looking at them.

A player whose hero had the vision may ask what “sense” his or her hero was able to get of the man, especially if the hero is psychically sensitive (that is, has a strong Water score). Don’t provide any extra information. The vision is itself the special perception that the hero has because of his or her sensitivity, so it would be redundant to provide more information. Let the

player draw his or her own conclusions based on the imagery of the vision.

The ruins consist mostly of large blocks of stone, mammoth pillars, and occasional deep reliefs. The stone slab that the heroes are standing on is the gate. It is carved with “pictures of birds and hands and things.” These are heiroglyphics, the writing that the ibis-headed god of knowledge, Thoth, teaches to his worshippers. Only well-educated heroes, or those from the right background, recognize them as such. If a player asks whether his or her hero can identify the markings, think about that hero’s background. Is the hero learned? Does the hero come from a land that worships Thoth and his associated deities (that is, the ones worshiped here in Bonekeep)? If so, you can say that the hero recognizes the marks as writing and that the writing identifies the slab and a gate that sends one to “the land of sweet waters.”

Heroes who know the stars can orient themselves by them, though it takes a lot of moving about to spot the stars through the leaves of the trees. If a hero who knows the stars looks to see what sign is at the zenith of the zodiac, say it’s Scorpio, the sign of death and regeneration.

There is a slight slope to the ground. (It leads to Springrise River, but there’s no way for the heroes to know that for sure, so don’t tell them that.) The slope goes down to the west, but only someone who can orient themselves by the stars (or by some other method) would know which direction east is.

Once the heroes have had some chance to look around, but before the players get bored (or even completely comfortable), Rarity screams (see below). It’s up to you to decide the right time for Rarity to scream and the action to start.

Action: Rarity and the Ghouls

This section describes how the heroes rescue Rarity, whom ghouls are trying to capture. They learn of the Awakener's imminent arrival and of the legend about his bride. This encounter starts the quest off with deadly action and sets the tone of peril. It should let the players get a sense of the evil that their heroes are to face and establish the heroes as saviors. If this is the players' first quest, then it also shows them how combat is played and gives them a sense of how good their heroes are in a fight.

IF YOU WANT TO REVIEW HOW TO HANDLE COMBAT, SEE P. 142 IN THE PLAYING GUIDE. Look at the quest card called Rarity and the Ghouls. This is the scene that you're trying to set.

The Action segment begins when the heroes hear Rarity's cry for help.

It ends when they have dealt with the ghouls that are threatening her and are ready to move on.

Rescuing Rarity

SHOW THE PLAYERS THE QUEST CARD RARITY AND THE GHOULS. The heroes hear Rarity's screams, and most likely they chase after them. First, tell the players that the heroes see figures running in the night, catching only glimpses of them in the dark and among the ruins. Eventually, they come across Rarity, just as the ghouls are closing in.

At this point, the most likely outcome is that the heroes engage in combat with the ghouls and defeat them, either by driving them off or by destroying them. The quest card shows two ghouls, but there may be more. Have at least

one ghoul for every hero in the group whose Fire score is 6 or stronger. If there are too few ghouls, the heroes will gang up on them and beat them easily, depriving the players of a good fight.

If any heroes are badly wounded by ghouls, especially if bad cards get drawn (such as the Cockatrice or Undeath), then the wounds may be unclean and therefore serious. If the heroes don't have any healing powers, they'll have to get healed by a priest of Osiris in Underwood, or some similar place (see below).



The heroes may use other ways to rescue Rarity besides combat, which is just fine.

Rarity is deliriously happy to be rescued and may be in shock. (She's just been chased through the woods at midnight by undead creatures who wanted to hand her over to an avatar of death. It's got to be rough.)

KARMA: DO THE HEROES TREAT RARITY WELL ENOUGH THAT SHE CALMS DOWN AND CAN TELL THEM USEFUL INFORMATION?

DRAMA: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS BEST FOR THE STORY? SHOULD RARITY TELL THE HEROES LOTS OF THINGS OR JUST A FEW?

FORTUNE: DRAW A FORTUNE CARD TO SEE HOW WELL RARITY CAN GET ACROSS WHAT THE HEROES WANT TO LEARN. WHAT DOES THE FORTUNE CARD SUGGEST?

Rarity may be able to tell the heroes plenty, or she may be too distraught to be coherent. (Incoherent hints of danger may be more frightening to the players than a coherent explanation of events.) She may (or may not) be able to get across the points below. Use karma, drama, and fortune, as you feel is best, to determine what Rarity says and what she doesn't say.

- Rarity was trying to find a magical spot in the woods where, it is said, one can escape Bonekeep. No one has ever come back from wherever that spot takes one, so only the desperate try it. (Note: This legend probably means that people of Bonekeep have occasionally used the gate, only to be eaten by the dragon on the other side.)

THE GHOUL QUEEN ASSUMES THAT BEAUTY IS THE TRAIT THE AWAKENER WILL MOST VALUE IN A PROSPECTIVE WIFE, BUT THAT ISN'T TRUE AT ALL. SHE'LL FIND OUT HOW WRONG SHE IS IF THE AWAKENER CHOOSES HER AS HIS BRIDE.

Have Rarity either guide the heroes back to Underwood (her hometown) or give the heroes directions to Underwood and set off on her own into the wilds to escape the Ghoul Queen.

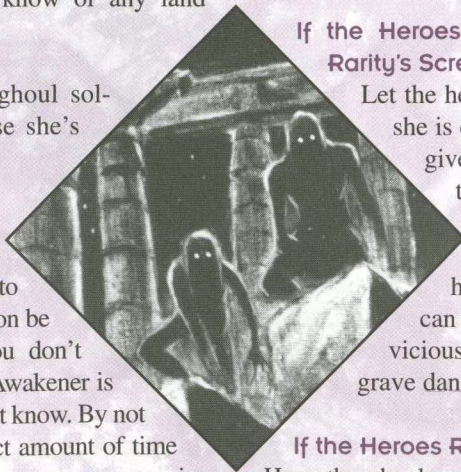
- The woman's name is Rarity, and she's from the town of Underwood. This is the land of Bonekeep. (She doesn't know of any land called "Stonedeeper.")

In any event, guide the heroes to Underwood, where they can learn more.

- The Ghoul Queen sent ghoulish soldiers after Rarity because she's beautiful.

- The Ghoul Queen intends to hand the most beautiful woman in Bonekeep over to the Awakener, who will soon be coming to this land. (You don't have to specify when the Awakener is due to arrive; Rarity doesn't know. By not telling the players the exact amount of time they have before the Awakener comes, you give yourself the freedom to pace the plot as you wish. Eventually, however, the heroes will find out, and then you'll have to commit to a day.)

- The Ghoul Queen rules the land with an army of undead servants and soldiers.



If the Heroes Were Slow to React to Rarity's Screams

Let the heroes still find Rarity before she is captured; but their delay has given the ghouls the opportunity to wound her. When she steps away from the tree she's backed up against, have her faint. The heroes can then see that the ghouls have viciously raked her back. She is in grave danger of bleeding to death.

If the Heroes Refuse to Intervene

Have the ghouls capture Rarity (and the heroes hear her screams silenced). Help the heroes reconnect to the quest by guiding them to the town of Underwood. The townsfolk there can tell them that a young woman named Rarity fled when ghouls came to claim her. The townspeople rightly believe her to have been captured in the woods.

If the Heroes Are Defeated by the Ghouls

Have the ghouls capture Rarity but leave the heroes. The ghouls have little reason to hurt helpless, wounded heroes or to pursue any who flee; their goal is to capture Rarity.

Alternately, if a female hero is very beautiful, you could let the ghouls capture her and bring her back to the Ghoul Queen. (They will be careful neither to kill nor mar her.) This option is tricky because it may mean splitting the company of heroes, altering the plot, and so on, but take this option if it works for you.

If the Heroes Won't Go to Underwood

You need to find a way to give the heroes the information they need to continue the quest. They can talk to traveling merchants, farmers in the countryside, to animals (if any heroes have that ability), and so on. Somehow they should get most of the information that they could get in Underwood (see below).

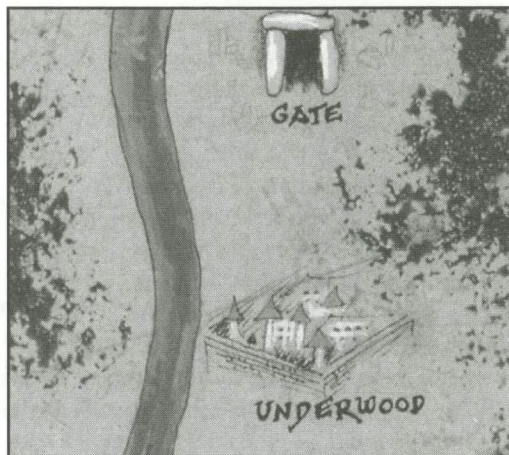
Progress: The Town of Underwood

The heroes go to the town of Underwood, possibly escorting (or carrying) Rarity. They learn more about the Ghoul Queen, who rules the land of Bonekeep, and they learn of the coming Awakener. They learn, among other things, that the Ghoul Queen has captured two women already.

This section sets the stage and gives the heroes the information they need to start thinking about how to deal with the coming of the Awakener. It also gives them a rest time between action points.

The Progress section begins with the heroes coming to Underwood (if that's what they

decide to do) and ends when they have the information they need to start inventing a strategy to deal with the Awakener.



Outline of Underwood

The following information will help you understand the town of Underwood. The heroes will learn this information as they approach Underwood, move about the town, and talk with the inhabitants. They might not learn *all* of these details.

People: The people of Underwood are simple people living under an oppressive rule. Everyone who lives here is a native Bonekeeper; there are no immigrants here. These townspeople are mostly specialized craftspeople: smiths, leatherworkers, merchants, wheelwrights, boatbuilders, and a single physician. There are about seven hundred people in the town.

Craft: The people of Underwood include crafters who can make most of the area's basic goods, but no one who can engineer the large stone buildings, do fine work in precious metals, or perform other exceptional tasks.

Tamed Animals: Cats and dogs abound in the city, and pigs and cattle are often led through the streets.

Deities: These people chiefly worship Osiris. Greatheart, the priest of Osiris, is well-liked by the people, but he has little official power.

Rule: Wonder, priestess of Isis, rules Underwood. She is the town's only mage (Words of Power—3). She commands a dozen ghoulish soldiers, who serve as her guards and enforcers. (Two of these soldiers were the ones who chased after Rarity.) These soldiers are the only people in Underwood who have weapons.

The Land: Underwood is on a hill near the Springrise. When the river floods, the only way to get to and from the town is along the raised roads that crisscross the flat floodplain. There are palm trees along the bank but very few trees around the town itself. (The name "Underwood" comes from an earlier time, when there were trees about.) Underwood has low walls and is about a quarter mile (over four hundred yards) across.

Connections: The people of Underwood tell stories about other worlds, but they are pure fantasy; they don't really know anything about gates or spheres.

Coming to Underwood

Once the heroes are out of the hills around the ruins, finding Underwood is easy. Raised roads (high enough that they don't flood in spring) lead to it, as it is the closest town to the ruins. Even in the dark (if the heroes are traveling at night), the

heroes can see the town from a distance, as the land around it is flat. Tell the players that the heroes see a small town (about four hundred yards across) with short walls on top of a hill near the river.

THIS OUTLINE
DESCRIBES THE
PEOPLE OF THE
TOWN OF UNDERWOOD
IN PARTICULAR.
SEE P. 37–38 FOR
BASIC INFORMATION
ABOUT THE PEOPLE
OF THE REALM OF
BONEKEEP IN GENERAL.

Entering Underwood at Night

At night, the gates into the city are closed. The gates are simple wooden doors that are barred on the inside. If the heroes approach at night, they can probably find a way over the ten-foot-high walls, or they can wait until dawn and enter through a gate.

If the heroes climb over the wall, you can have any of these things happen as they wander about in the dark:

- You can have them meet a human inhabitant who may try to call out for help if the heroes seem dangerous.
- You can have them meet a ghoulish soldier on patrol. It questions them, and they have to react fast to keep it from sounding the alarm.
- You can have them meet human rebels sneaking about. The rebels are as afraid of getting caught as the heroes probably are.
- You can have them find a group of inhabitants gathered for a party, to which they invite the heroes.
- You can have them meet no one; they could just find a place to take shelter until morning, when they can move about without frightening people.

What do you think would be a fun scene to play out?

Entering Underwood During the Day

The gates are open during the day, but each is guarded by a ghoul soldier. (Use the description, Elements scores, and Powers described for the “Ghoul Soldiers,” found on p. 33, though this soldier has a spear.) The guard, while not bright, is smart enough to question any who approach the gate.

If the heroes seem threatening, the guard sounds a horn to draw other soldiers. The soldiers arrive in a minute or so, and they try to take the heroes to Priestess Wonder. This encounter may result in a battle, or the heroes may slip away.

If the heroes are not threatening, the soldier will simply note that they are strangers and tell them to report their business with Priestess Wonder. Naturally, they may decide not to do so (which could get them into trouble if they hang around long enough for this ghoul to check to see whether they complied).

The heroes may want to sneak into the town. Plenty of people hate the ghouls enough to help strangers avoid them. Folks driving wagons of wine, beer, or oil into Underwood may be willing to help the heroes. The heroes may also be able to get over the wall, though this move is risky during the day.

Once inside Underwood, lots of things can happen.

Events in Underwood

In Underwood, the heroes may do any of the following things. Some encounters or events may result from the players’ initiative. Others you can arrange. For instance, the heroes may confront Priestess Wonder because they decide to go visit her in the temple of Isis, or they may con-

front her because she learns of their presence and sends soldiers to invite them to see her.

Meet with Priest Greatheart

Greatheart is a gentle, patient, concerned sixty-year-old man. He lives at the temple of Osiris, a small, stone structure near the center of town. He can explain everything about the Awakener to the heroes (see “Learn About the Awakener” on p. 52). He also explains his fear that the heroes’ presence may bring down the wrath of the Ghoul Queen on the town. Play Greatheart as thoughtful, quiet, and positive.

Greatheart can channel the power of Osiris to heal people. (If the heroes are wounded, you can use karma, drama, and fortune to determine how well he heals them.)

Greatheart may be able to shelter or even hide the heroes in the temple or among townspeople who are willing to take risks for him.

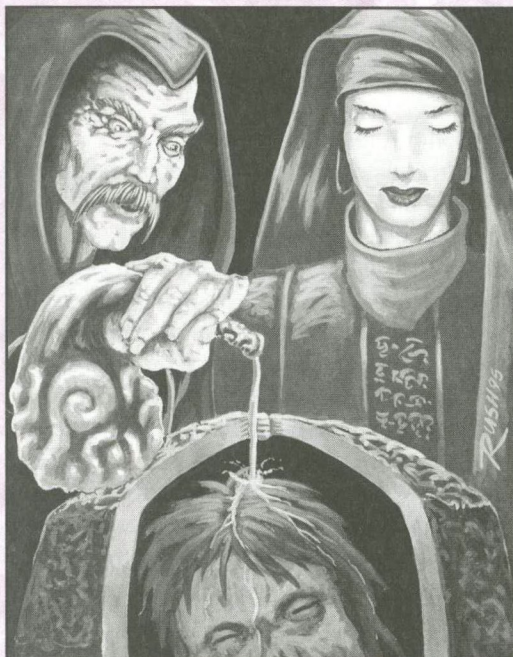
Hide from Priestess Wonder

If you want to keep the pressure on the heroes and the tension high, Priestess Wonder could send soldiers and spies to find out about the heroes. This action could result in a fight or a chase scene, or both. The heroes might choose to let themselves be found, if they are confident enough to face Priestess Wonder.

Confront Priestess Wonder

The heroes may confront Priestess Wonder, most likely in the main chamber of the temple of Isis.

Priestess Wonder has little physical or magical power, relying chiefly on her status to command others, so this is likely to be a safe confrontation (though the people of Underwood may suffer for it later). You can have Wonder vaguely threaten the heroes or warn them not to inter-



fere, or you can have her simply try to learn more about them so that she can report to the Ghoul Queen.

Play Wonder as a petty, corrupt ruler, someone who has little desire to challenge anyone who seems like a threat, but who will stab enemies in the back if given a chance. Alternately, you can play her as a misguided ruler who really believes that the Ghoul Queen's rule is for the best. After all, Wonder may remind the heroes, as long as the Ghoul Queen rules, no living soldiers have to shed their blood in battle.

Wonder's magic (Words of Power—3) allows her to inscribe minor charms, so you can decide that she has charms against poisons, bad luck, harmful magic, or perhaps all three.

If the confrontation goes badly, Priestess Wonder orders her ghouls to attack while she

tries to escape. She has ten ghouls left (since two were either defeated by the heroes in the ruins or are now escorting Rarity upriver to Scepter). Some are stationed at gates and such, so up to six can be at the confrontation.

Rest and Recover

If the heroes are wounded, they may wish to rest and recover. You could have them find friendly townspeople who offer to take them in, or they could rest at the temple of Osiris (see "Meet With Priest Greatheart," p. 51). Priest Greatheart may also be able to help the heroes' wounds heal faster.

Learn About the Awakener

Perhaps the most important thing that the heroes can do in Underwood (or elsewhere, if they avoid Underwood) is to learn about the Awakener. From Priest Greatheart or from many other people, the heroes can learn the following:

- The Awakener is coming to Bonekeep to find a bride.
- He will arrive at Stoneflat, a mystical place to the south.
- The Ghoul Queen intends to present the Awakener with several beautiful women, from whom he can choose his bride. She expects to receive an important boon from him when she does so.
- He will arrive at a certain time. (This time is up to you to choose. If you want to pressure the heroes into traveling to Stoneflat quickly, say that the Awakener is coming in three days, just enough time for them to get to Stoneflat. If you want to give the heroes time to pursue other plans, set the time later than that.)

- Some peasants have been talking seriously about rising up against the queen or against the Awakener. If you want to guide the heroes to joining or leading the insurgency, then you can portray this idea positively: as a daring move by brave, intelligent people. If you want to guide the heroes away from this tactic, then you can portray the rebellion as the futile gesture of a hopeless people.

Decisions: Inventing Strategy

In this period, the heroes decide what to do next. The central conflict is that the Awakener is going to come and choose a native woman to be his bride and probably give the evil Ghoul Queen even more power. There are several ways the heroes may deal with this problem. This period may be short or long depending on how the players go about making their decisions. Your role as the gamemaster may be very limited during this part of the quest, though you may have to play out some background characters, natives of whom the heroes ask questions. This segment allows the heroes to make their own decisions about how to carry on.

If the players spend too much time in this segment, you may want to force them into action. (While the heroes might reasonably spend three hours debating their strategy, it would probably be a boring game if the players actually did so.) For example, a contingent of ghouls large enough to threaten the heroes may come to Underwood looking for them, forcing them to move on.

The Decisions section begins when the heroes have the information they need to start drawing

up a strategy and ends when they are ready to implement that strategy. There are several strategies the heroes are likely to choose.

Talk With the Awakener

The heroes may want to talk to the Awakener to find out more about him. They'll have to go to Stoneflat to do so. If you want to encourage this idea, the natives can say that no one knows for sure who the Awakener is or what he wants. That way, the heroes will need to go and meet the Awakener himself if they are to learn anything about him. This option is a good one, provided the heroes are polite to the Awakener. This option is the one most likely to lead to the ideal ending.

Rescue the Ghoul Queen's Captives

If the heroes head for Scepter and the queen's palace to rescue the captives, they won't head to Stoneflat. They won't encounter the Awakener until he arrives at the palace himself. If you want to encourage this option, have the natives refer repeatedly to the poor women that the Ghoul Queen has captured. The heroes will have to go to the Ghoul Queen's palace if they want to rescue the women. If you want to discourage this option, have the natives say that mages and warriors from other realms have often come to attack the Ghoul Queen to end her evil reign or to steal her knowledge, and that all have died for their efforts.

Going to the queen's palace is probably a bad option because if the heroes choose it, you, as gamemaster, will have to manage a battle between the heroes and a legion of ghouls. (Alternately, you could draw a single fortune card to determine how successful the heroes are in their mission.) The material here does not support this option well (for example, there is no map of the palace where the captives are

kept) because this option doesn't lead to the ideal ending. If you're confident enough to ad-lib the mission, though, you're welcome to let the heroes undertake it.

Lead Insurgents Against the Ghoule Queen

The heroes may decide to raise an insurrection against the Ghoule Queen in order to dethrone

SEE P. 33 TO READ
MORE ABOUT THE
GHOUL SOLDIERS.

her before the Awakener arrives. If you want to encourage this option, have insurgent peasants come to the heroes and ask for help. If

you want to discourage this option, portray the insurgents as incompetent, poorly armed, and ill-prepared for a real fight.

This option takes the heroes away from the ideal ending and would be a challenge for you to run. If, however, you like the idea of the heroes being military leaders, then the heroes may be able to win by inventing tactics that thwart the ghoule soldiers.

Fight the Awakener

The heroes may decide to fight the Awakener directly. In this case they will have to go to Stoneflat, where he is expected to arrive. If you want to encourage this decision, then the people the heroes encounter can emphasize how important it is that someone defeat the Awakener, since no one can defeat the Ghoule Queen. If you want to discourage this decision, have the natives say that the legend of the Awakener says that he cannot be defeated and that he can kill with a glance. (The legend is wrong on this count.)

This option is a bad one because fighting the Awakener would be very dangerous. Remember, the Awakener can kill someone just by snapping his fingers.

Lead a Mob Against Him

The heroes may try to raise a mob of citizens to fight the Awakener. They will have to go to Stoneflat, possibly gathering recruits along the way. If you want to encourage this idea, you can have there be a mob of willing people who say they will gladly follow the heroes. If you want to discourage the idea, have the natives say that no one would be foolish enough to face the Awakener in combat.

This option is a bad one because it endangers not only the heroes but also a bunch of other people.

Actions: Preparing for the Awakener

The events of this section depend on the decisions of the heroes. This section lets them get prepared so they can (perhaps) deal effectively with Awakener's arrival.

This Actions section begins when the heroes start to implement their strategy, and it ends when they have finished implementing it.



Traveling



Whatever the heroes do, they're likely to travel across Bonekeep. The heroes can

- Walk through the countryside, which consists of flat, empty fields crossed by raised roads that connect farmsteads and towns.
- Walk through the hills at the feet of the cliffs (to avoid attracting attention). These rocky lands are rough going, and the heroes are likely to meet only goatherds and outcasts.
- Take a small boat (possibly with a native to guide them) along the river. Along the banks are towns and palm trees. On the river are merchants and fishers in small boats.

Encounters While Traveling

At your discretion, the heroes may encounter the following things on the way:

- Ghoul patrols, who are hostile to strangers. The heroes should be able to get past this encounter or it will slow the game and possibly derail the plot.

• Merchants from other lands whose boats have been grounded by the ghouls' patrols. The ghouls will not let them travel because the Ghoul Queen doesn't want outsiders interfering with the Awakener. This encounter is an opportunity to introduce a small dose of a new race or culture. (If you plan to have the heroes continue to quest on Bonekeep's sphere, this encounter can foreshadow future quests. See "Later Quests," p. 61.)

• Peasant rebels who are considering rising up against the Ghoul Queen at last. Depending on how you want to guide the plot, you can portray them as a ragtag band of poorly armed people or as a brave, committed group that could pose a threat to the queen's undead army. The rebels may intend to attack the Awakener when he arrives, a move that would get them killed. This option gives the heroes a chance to save these rebels' lives by warning them away.

- No one of note.

Waiting at Stoneflat

An envoy of the Ghoul Queen is waiting at Stoneflat to greet the Awakener. Unless the heroes intervene, the envoy will direct the Awakener to Scepter and the Ghoul Queen's palace.

Surroundings

Stoneflat is a large, circular stone slab, much like the gate to Sweetwaters, only fifteen yards across. It might connect to some realm of death, but it is not a regular gate, and the heroes are unable to activate or use it. Around Stoneflat are low hills, raised roads, and occasional stands of short trees. It sits on a broad hill, so the heroes will be able to see it from a mile off.

SHOW
THE
PLAYERS
THE
QUEST
CARD
THE
ENVOY.

Near Stoneflat are a tent and several ghouls. The heroes can use hills and scrub for cover and sneak close enough to the ghouls to spy on them.

Favor, the Envoy

Favor, the envoy of the Ghoul Queen, is a powerful undead creature, much more humanlike than the ghouls that threatened Rarity. He is dressed in fine clothes that are a stark contrast to his disgusting face. Unlike other undead servants, Favor is well-spoken.

Protecting the envoy are ghoul honor guards. There might be only two of them, or there may be as many as twelve. Choose the number of ghouls to suit the plot. If you want the heroes to be able to attack and defeat the envoy by force, then let there be a small number. If you'd like to force the heroes to be tricky, let there be so many ghouls that the heroes think twice before

attacking. (There must be at least two, as the quest card shows.)

Since the ghouls don't need to eat, they can sit here next to Stoneflat until the Awakener arrives, and that's just what they're doing.

In order to talk to the Awakener, the heroes will have to deal with Favor in some way. Unlike the battle with the ghouls that threatened Rarity, this encounter is an opportunity for the heroes to plan and defeat an enemy through a ruse or clever tactics, rather than through brute force (though of course they may decide that using brute force is their best tactic). In order to get past or defeat the envoy, the heroes might

- Attack the ghouls. If the heroes let any of them escape, those ghouls will head to the nearest town to alert the ghouls there and then send a message about the attack to Scepter. It will take one day for a contingent of twelve ghoul soldiers from the nearest town to return and attack anyone they find at Stoneflat.
- Lure the ghouls into an ambush. The heroes may invent a ruse that lets them lure the envoy or his guards into a trap in a thicket of scrub trees.
- Trick them into leaving. Through magic, illusions, or some other means, the heroes may be able to trick Favor and the guards into believing that they have to leave Stoneflat.
- Confront the Awakener after he has arrived, while the envoy is leading him back to Scepter. This is dangerous because it gives the envoy an opportunity to win the Awakener over.

Playtest Notes



IN PLAYTESTING, THE HEROES DEFEATED THE ENVOY AT STONEFLAT AND ACTUALLY SET THEMSELVES UP AS HIS REPLACEMENT, TAKING CHARGE OF THE TWELVE GHOUL HONOR GUARDS. (THEY ALMOST GAVE THEMSELVES AWAY BY EATING, SOMETHING THE UNDEAD DON'T DO, BUT THEY REALIZED THEIR MISTAKE AT THE LAST SECOND.) ONCE THE AWAKENER ARRIVED, THE HEROES THEN ENCOURAGED HIM TO GIVE HIS "GIFT" TO THE GHOULS.

The Awakener Arrives

SHOW THE PLAYERS THE QUEST CARD THAT DEPICTS THE AWAKENER. THIS TIME, ALLOW ALL THE PLAYERS TO SEE IT.

At the appointed time, the Awakener appears on Stoneflat. He looks exactly like the image from the vision, though there is neither a dragon nor a pile of bones with him. He simply appears.

If Favor, the envoy, is there, he greets the Awakener, who accepts the greeting and allows himself to be led to the Ghoul Queen's palace in Scepter.

If the heroes have defeated the envoy and greet the Awakener, he is polite. As a token of his good will, he gives each hero a crystal skull the size of a walnut. He says:

"This crystal will bestow my gift on any mortal you wish."

Each crystal skull will kill any mortal that the owner wishes. It's up to the user to determine how to make the skull work (and up to you to decide whether the chosen method works). Methods that might work include:

THESE
CRYSTAL
SKULLS
ARE
BOONS.

- touching someone with the skull and saying, "Die";
- grinding the skull up and putting it in a drink to poison someone;
- casting an improvised spell that uses the skull and a lock of the victim's hair;
- using the skull as a sling stone.

It's up to the user's imagination and your consent to determine what works and what doesn't. The Awakener will not detail how the skulls work.

The Awakener is willing to listen to any reasonable suggestions that the heroes may have, though his 6 Water score may prevent him from falling for ruses. His only goal is to find a bride, and if the heroes seem to have one for him, he may well accept.

If the heroes attack the Awakener, he's likely to slay at least one of them by snapping his finger. If they persist in the attack, he will probably kill them all. Alternately, he may injure the toughest heroes, reducing their Earth scores to 1 so that they are no longer a threat.

If the heroes attack the envoy while the Awakener is present, he remains neutral. He

will, however, offer his “gift” (death) to any who are wounded, in order to end their suffering.

The Awakener, if he must make a choice, favors mortals over undead because the undead represent a misuse of death.

Peasant Attack

As an optional event, a group of peasants might attack the Awakener in an act of ill-advised bravery (or recklessness). They are armed with scythes, sickles, picks, and other makeshift weapons. The Awakener will slay them all, effortlessly, unless the heroes find out about the impending attack and prevent it.

This event gives the heroes the opportunity to save a band of good-hearted peasants from certain death.

Strategies

The cleverest outcome would be for the heroes to get Favor out of the way and then to convince the Awakener to choose the Ghoul Queen as his bride. With the Awakener to destroy all the ghouls that oppose them, the heroes can march straight to the queen’s palace in Scepter. There they confront the queen, and the Awakener touches her, setting off a dramatic transformation (see “Climax,” on p. 60).

Alternately, the heroes may decide to pay a harsh price and negotiate with the Awakener, offering one of their own or a peasant to the Awakener in order to prevent the queen from gaining more power. In this case, the Awakener does indeed grant great power to those who helped him find his bride. His gift could simply be a quantity of his death-crystals, or it could be something grander, such as level-3 Death

Magic. For a real show-stopper, give one hero the ability to kill at a touch, but each time the power is used, draw a fortune card: Death kills the hero and Death—reversed turns the hero into an undead monster.

The heroes may simply defeat the envoy and then leave the Awakener alone. In this case, the Awakener wanders around Bonekeep looking for a suitable bride and slaying those who do not help him. The heroes will have to track him down and deal with him somehow to keep Bonekeep from being destroyed.

Gathering an Army

There are plenty of townspeople who are angry enough at the Ghoul Queen to risk rebelling, and a strong leader could give them the hope and courage they need. As word of the heroes spreads, more peasants join the band.

Most likely, however, the army is doomed. Make it clear to the players that these peasants are well-meaning but untrained and ill-equipped. All warriors in Bonekeep are undead, so living people have never used weapons or trained in the military. They have no armor and have only farm implements for weapons. If the heroes persist in encouraging this army, they will most likely see the peasants slaughtered, either at the hands of the ghouls (if they attack Scepter) or of the Awakener (if they attack him).

It’s possible (especially if you like this option), for the heroes to provide the leadership, tactics, and muscle that it would take for the peasants to launch a successful attack, but even so, they’re likely to see a lot of peasants die in the process.

If you want to pursue this option, the quest can turn into a strategic military contest. If, however, you don't want to take the time and make the effort to run a rebellion, a few cards from the Fortune Deck can let you summarize the outcome of the rebellion.

The Queen's Palace

The heroes can try to penetrate the queen's palace in Scepter. The place is well-guarded by ghouls and by magical wards, so the heroes will need to do something exceptional to get in there.

If they are truly exceptional, have the right abilities, and use them intelligently, the heroes can free the captured women. This will cause the Awakener to be disappointed when he arrives in Scepter, and he'll demand the Ghoule Queen as his bride. This option leads to the ideal climax.

The heroes can try to defeat the Ghoule Queen, but this is a more difficult prospect. Worse, it leaves the Awakener without his ideal bride, and someone else is going to have to fulfill that role.

If the heroes try to get into the palace, most likely they'll be captured (or killed, if they do anything really stupid). You may want to let them, say, free the captives before being captured so that they at least feel like they've accomplished something. If

the heroes are captured, have the Ghoule Queen hold back from killing them. She says:

"I'll slit your throats and turn you into ghouls, but first I must learn some secrets from the Awakener. You'll be the first of a new breed of

undead slaves created by my new magic. You'll be faster and smarter but just as obedient. With you to champion my armies and to show me the way back to your land, I will conquer more people than I have yet dreamed of."



Captured heroes will be made to watch the arrival of the Awakener. They still have a chance to succeed if they can yell to the Awakener and put it in his mind to choose the queen as his bride. If the heroes have freed the captives, then the queen has only a few women to offer the

Awakener, and he rejects them. This would be an opportune time for the heroes to call out to him.

If the heroes can't prevent the Ghoule Queen's plans, you may want to give the heroes one chance to free themselves and escape so that they can return later to face the Ghoule Queen again. Even just getting back home with the information about the Ghoule Queen is a victory of a sort. (It would probably be a bad idea to let the players' first quest end in total defeat, though a partial defeat might inspire them to come back at the Ghoule Queen for a second try.)

Climax: The Awakener's Bride

This section begins with some kind of final confrontation and ends when the confrontation has been resolved.

The climax depends on the actions and success of the heroes. The following climaxes are possible:

The Awakener Takes the Queen

This is the ideal climax, the one that leads to the transformation of the Awakener and Ghoul Queen. The Awakener says, "Be my bride," and takes the Ghoul Queen's hand. There is an explosion of magical power, and where the Awakener and Ghoul Queen stood there are now a dragon (the one seen in the vision) and a healthy, beautiful woman.

Throughout Bonekeep, the undead minions of the queen fall into decay.

The woman may speak with the heroes briefly. She is eager to leave, but the heroes may be able to ask her for information before she goes. If the heroes ask who she is, she says she has no name. "Would you give me a name?" she asks.

If you want to present a moral dilemma, have some people urge the heroes to kill the woman to pay for the crimes she committed as the Ghoul Queen. Does this transformed woman deserve to die for what her former self did? It will be up to the heroes to decide that.

Ultimately, the woman either leaves or dies.

Regardless, the townspeople rejoice in their newfound freedom and hail the heroes as their

saviors. The heroes are feted with a huge celebration. People plunder the Ghoul Queen's palace, perhaps handing over special treasures to the heroes. Finally, Greatheart (replacing the Ghoul Queen as the spiritual leader of the realm) asks the heroes to lead them, now that they have no queen and none among them has governed for hundreds of years. If the heroes will not lead them, the high priest asks them for advice on how to rule themselves.

Ask each player to invent some item that his or her hero takes from the Ghoul Queen's palace. They may find precious jewels, items with magical abilities, scrolls bearing magical secrets, and so on. (You can change or disallow any item that you think would make the game less fun, such as one that would make a hero too powerful.)

SHOW THE PLAYERS

THE TRANSFORMATION

QUEST CARD.

Alternately, you can invent an item for each hero, either on the spot or ahead of time. Invent items that the heroes are likely to enjoy.

The Awakener Is Driven Off

This is an unlikely outcome, as the Awakener is very powerful and very difficult to drive off.

If the Awakener leaves Bonekeep, the Ghoul Queen is furious. She sends her ghoul soldiers out after whomever has interfered with her plans.

Over time, the queen's reign collapses from its own weight. The decline may be gradual, with the ghouls wearing out faster and faster, the commoners taking arms against them, and armies from neighboring realms coming in to liberate the people here. (These "liberators," of course, set themselves up as the new rulers of Bonekeep.) Alternately, the decline may take only days. The frantic queen sends her soldiers



in search of the meddling heroes, and they kill scores of commoners in their searches. The commoners respond with an uprising, perhaps aided by forces from nearby realms. The queen uses her most powerful magics and devastates the land but weakens herself to the point at which she can be defeated.

In either case, the Awakener has indeed brought his gift to Bonekeep: the realm dies. In its place, perhaps a better one will be born.

The Awakener Takes a Different Bride

This option is not difficult, but it means sacrificing an innocent woman to the Awakener.

The Awakener leaves with his bride, disappearing in a flash. But before he goes, he gives one hero a special boon: The Blessed Cut (see p. 36). This power allows the hero to set life and death in balance, enabling him or her to turn the Ghoul Queen's undead soldiers into lifeless corpses and to send the queen herself to the grave that she has so long avoided.

If the heroes trick or force an unwilling victim into being the Awakener's bride, this deed generates bad karma and should come back to haunt them. Perhaps the bride will return, transformed, and seek vengeance. If the bride is a willing victim sacrificing herself to stop the Ghoul Queen, then the heroes won't suffer bad karma.

The Awakener Accepts a Bride from the Queen

This is the result that happens if the heroes fail to do anything effective. The Awakener chooses a bride and gives the Ghoul Queen greater power over death. With this improved power, she may be able to conquer nearby realms and even threaten the realms around Sweetwaters. The heroes can only hope to escape Bonekeep and, perhaps, return later for another chance to bring the queen down.

Other Possibilities

If the heroes take another approach, ad-lib the climax as you see fit. As long as you understand the setting, you should be able to invent an appropriate ending no matter what the heroes come up with.

- If the Ghoul Queen has not been defeated, the heroes may be able to escape and return another day. They may be able to find boons on other quests that will let them return and defeat the Ghoul Queen.
- If the Ghoul Queen gains new secrets of death from the Awakener, again the heroes might escape to return another day, though the Ghoul Queen will be difficult to stop.

Later Quests

This quest may lead to others in the future. It's up to you to decide whether you want to develop more quests based in and around Bonekeep, or whether you want to send the heroes to completely new places.

Finishing the Job

If the heroes do not defeat the Ghoul Queen, they may want to return to Stonedeeep to finish the job. If the queen has grown more powerful, the heroes may need to adopt new tactics. They could, for example, go to neighboring lands and lead armies against the queen. Alternately, they may be able to quest in another realm to get a magic weapon or secret that they can use to give them the edge they need to defeat the queen.



Explore Neighboring Realms

Once the queen has been defeated, the heroes can explore neighboring lands. The realms around Bonekeep used to be in contact with the people of Sweetwaters, but, like Bonekeep, their contact been cut off. While these other realms may not have been transformed as dramatically as Bonekeep has, they have certainly changed enough to warrant exploration.

You can invent realms one at a time and let the heroes visit each one in turn. Alternately, you can devise several connected realms and let the heroes explore them at their own pace. Draw a map of the land and invent realms in the different areas. Then give the heroes a blank map that just shows the geographical features (which haven't changed). Now the heroes can travel from place to place filling out the map as they go.

Explore Other Spheres

Other realms around Bonekeep may have gates that lead on to other spheres. Imagine the spheres as points on a long path. The dragon in Sweetwaters blocked that path, and it's now open again. The heroes could spend the rest of their lives following that path from Bonekeep on to one sphere after another. If you want to run a series of quests set in new realms and spheres, this theme is a great basis for your plans.

Help Bonekeep

The people of Bonekeep will need lots of help as they establish themselves. The heroes could spend a lot of time working with them instead of off adventuring in other lands. Challenges to face could include:

- Naming the realm. "Bonekeep" just won't do.
- Determining who the new ruler should be and how the government will work. Sometimes people of good intent will disagree violently over the proper form of government; more often, those who want to shape things for their own ends will compete with each other.
- Deciding what to do with the priestesses of Isis, who supported the Ghoul Queen. Many of them are probably killed by mobs now that they don't have the protection of the ghoul soldiers. Are the priestesses welcomed into the new society or are they exiled? Do they become a part of the new realm, or do they become a band of outlaw mages devoted to undermining the new government?
- Protecting the weakened land from invasion by neighboring realms. Neighbors may promise to send in troops to protect the realm, but is this just a ruse to establish control over the land? Perhaps the heroes can arrange marriages between Bonekeepers and people from noble families in other lands and thereby establish peace.
- Protecting the realm when the Ghoul Queen's brother returns from spherewalking to find his sister "destroyed."

Bonekeep as a Base

The heroes are always welcome in the realm that's created in Bonekeep's place. As saviors of the people, they can always count on shelter, aid, respect, and so on. This puts them in a better position to explore this sphere than any other spherewalkers. They have a base here, a haven to which they can return after every quest. The people here see them as a group, and even if they didn't know each other before the quest, they have a great opportunity to keep working together.

Advice to Gamemasters: Pacing

One important job that a gamemaster does is to pace a quest. I wrote "Journey to Stondeep" so that it could be played out in one sitting in a few hours, but you can stretch the story out much longer if you wish. There are several things to keep in mind as you work to make the quest move at the right speed and take the right amount of time.

One-Sitting Advantage

If you can get the quest done in one sitting, then you don't have to worry about getting the same people together at a later time to finish the quest. If you break in the middle of the quest and return a week later, some players may not be able to make it, and new players may want to join. While you can often manage to keep the quest going, this can be a hassle.

Multi-Session Advantage

The advantage to letting the quest take two or more sessions is that you don't have to worry about getting the story to a conclusion under a time deadline. If the quest takes longer because the heroes want to spend a lot of time on certain events, that's fine. By spreading the quest out over several sessions, you take off the pressure to reach a finale in a certain amount of time.

Impromptu Events

There are plenty of places in the quest where impromptu events present themselves. For example, if the heroes join a party in progress in Underwood (see p. 49), the players may enjoy spending an hour just socializing "in character." Some players and gamemasters relish this sort of impromptu roleplaying, and it certainly helps bring heroes and settings to life. On the other hand, if you want to get the quest to a conclusion in four hours, you may have to curtail these encounters. It's up to you to decide how much detail you want to allow and how many tangential events you want to provide to the players. There

is easily enough material here to form the basis of twelve hours of play or more, if that's the sort of quest you're looking for and if you're willing to invent tangential encounters and dialogue.

Players' Strategies

Players sometimes get bogged down in planning.

The dilemma is letting the players develop their own strategy freely versus keeping the action moving so that the game remains fun. If you force a decision on the players, some of them will feel cheated. Some players are proud of their ability to invent intelligent strategies, and they are disappointed when the quest denies them that opportunity. Sometimes, though, if you don't force a decision, the players talk endlessly, and everyone but a few players (usually the ones doing most of the talking) get bored.

There is no perfect solution to the dilemma. One trick, however, is to limit options. For instance, in the town of Underwood, the heroes learn about the Awakener. The townspeople telling them the story could say that fighting the Ghoul Queen directly is a sure way to die but that meeting the Awakener or aiding the insurgency are both feasible options. In this way, the players essentially have a simple choice: do one or the other. The players do get to influence how the plot evolves, but they don't have so many options that they debate endlessly.

Another solution is to force the issue. If the heroes are torn between helping the insurgency and meeting the Awakener at Stoneflat, for instance, you can have a member of the insurgency show up. If the insurgent is bright, strong, and brave, the heroes are likely to be swayed to help the insurgents. If the insurgent is poorly armed, weak, indecisive, impetuous, and incompetent, the heroes are likely to realize that the insurgency doesn't stand a chance. This solution lets you guide the plot without overriding the players' freedom to make a choice.

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EVERWAY



*encounter the fates
of a thousand worlds*