

THE MYSTERIOUS SHRINE

A bonus adventure for Frandor's Keep

This adventure opportunity is a free addition to [Frandor's Keep](#), a setting for use with Kenzer and Company's [HackMaster Basic](#) fantasy roleplaying game. If you enjoy the material presented here, there are 144 pages of comparable fun waiting for you in the full product.



GM's Background

The winding switchback trail leading to Falcon's Eye Tower is broken up by two relatively flat clearings – one about 1¼ miles up the trail (at 6200' elevation) and the second nearly another mile further up the trail (at 6500'). The lower clearing encompasses approximately 1¼ acres while the upper one occupies about three and a half acres.

The two clearings are substantively different in appearance. The lower and smaller one is bisected by the trail and relatively free of bushes and dense undergrowth. Such is not the case with the upper clearing. The trail skirts its northern edge while the balance is choked with briars.

A couple of months ago, a group of soldiers hacked through the thicket in a vain search for 'lost dwarven silver' (this being the rumor *du jour* propagated by some scurrilous wag at the Broken Hilt Tavern). While they understandably came up empty-handed, they did make a remarkable discovery. At the far southeastern edge of the rocky shelf there was a 10-foot-tall unhewn stone erected in a naturally formed notch. More eerily, a collection of antlers, hooves, teeth and other presumed animal parts were scattered around its base.

This shrine became a local curiosity attracting many to the site. Strange markings, purportedly Orkin religious script, were observed on the stone's surface. Word of the site soon reached Keep Prefect Ganitak and the incensed commander ordered his personal retinue to level the spot. This they did by toppling the stone over the cliff edge and hurling the gruesome artifacts after it. Guards assigned to Falcon's Eye Tower were flogged and pilloried for dereliction of duty in permitting this abomination to escape unnoticed for so long.

Chastened by their punishment, the Falcon's Eye Tower crew has been more vigilant of late. To their great consternation, they discovered that a replacement obelisk was erected at the shrine site – now secured in place by large wooden stakes around its base. Subsequent reconnoitering of the site revealed that the pagan offerings – for certainly this is what the bones must be – were also present and in greater abundance every time they visited.

Only the guards of Falcon's Eye tower know the current state of the site. Fearing more severe punishment, they took it upon themselves to apprehend whoever was utilizing the site for these unholy rituals. Alas, several all-night vigils failed to discover the idolaters.

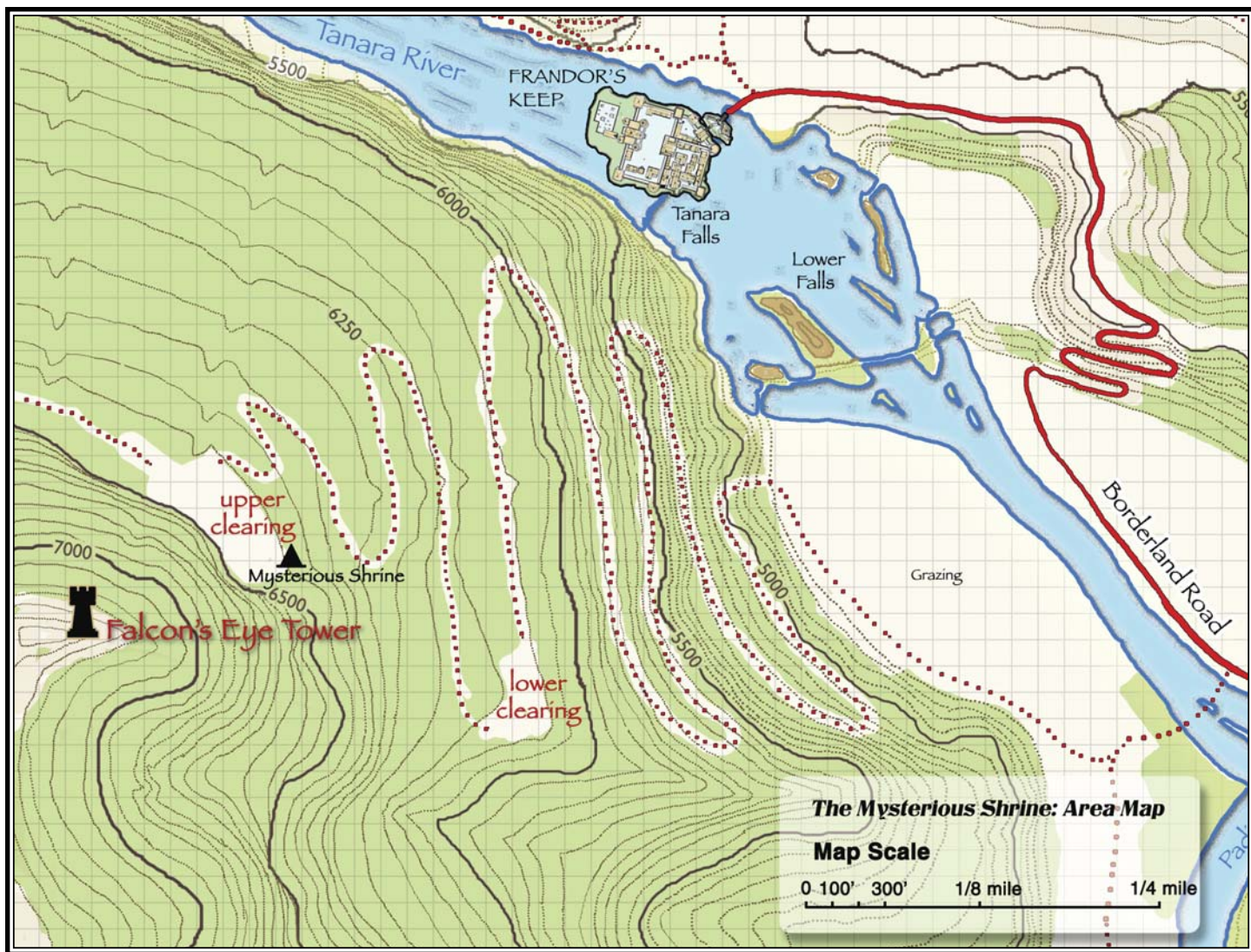
Getting the Players Involved

The following rumors may be added to the Area Information table found on page 24 of *Frandor's Keep*.

21. *There's an old silver mine in the cliffs on the south side of the Tanara River not too far off the path that leads up to Falcon's Eye Tower. Dwarves used to mine it but they abandoned it when it began to get played out. Too much work getting what little remained they said. An enterprising young feller with a strong back might find himself a bit a loot though if 'n he was willin' to scratch around a bit.* (False; Dasas Zhenshi [the proprietor of Dasas' Goods detailed in area M10 on page 65 of *Frandor's Keep*] periodically scatters around a few trade coins to the local drunks to keep this rumor (and other variants) alive in hopes of selling mining tools to rubes foolish enough to believe it.)

22. *A demon totem in our own back yard! Don't that just beat all. The Prefect had a hissy fit when he heard about that. Had the entire crew of Falcon's Eye Tower flogged for lettin' it sit there right under their noses. Good thing he had it torn down – who knows what kind of evil something like that might attract... we got enough problems with these goblin scum.* (True)

These rumors may goad the players into exploring the trail to Falcon's Eye Tower and the clearings along said path. Alternatively, they may wish to travel to Falcon's Eye Tower itself to interview the soldiers there.



If they choose the latter course, they will be greeted with stone-faced grimaces from the guards on duty. These troopers do their best to dissuade the explorers from rummaging around the site, even threatening to arrest them for trespassing. However, use of Diplomacy or Art of Seduction skills (an Average check in either case) will compel the sergeant [Relemir Tesipo] to pursue a different tactic – especially if the PCs relate the rumors they’ve heard and seem intent on investigating the site.

Under these circumstances, he takes the players into his confidence and reveals the true nature of the site (that is, what the soldiers believe to be true). He also states that guardsmen have camped at the site on three separate occasions encountering neither hide nor hair of evil cultists. If the players were to discover who is responsible for the shrine and its apparent upkeep, he would appreciate the effort.

Of primary importance though is for the PCs to keep quiet about anything they discover and report back to him personally. He lets slip that the guardsmen have already been punished by the Keep Prefect and that Ganitek is unaware that the obelisk has been restored. Were he to find out the true situation, heads would roll. While he won’t offer a cash reward, he hints at some alternative remuneration implying that having

soldiers as trusted confederates might prove to be a valuable asset.

If this offer is insufficient, he will agree to any terms that can be reached. However, he will scheme to undermine the players. See *Aftermath* for further details.

Additional details that may be learned through this discussion include the following:

- a) On each occasion, four troopers kept watch on the site and they maintained a campfire.
- b) No unusual tracks have ever been found on the path up to Falcon’s Eye Tower.
- c) There is writing on the obelisk but in an unknown script.

If the players decide to go it on their own, a shift change occurs at Falcon’s Eye Tower a day after they set out. The outgoing patrol searches the upper clearing on their way back to Frandor’s Keep. If they encounter foreigners (e.g. the players) near the site, they will presume that they are the ‘evil cultists’ and attempt to apprehend or kill them. The Fast Talking skill may prove very useful in preventing an escalation of violence and permit the PCs time to provide a plausible excuse for

being there. If they are quick-witted enough, they may be able to take the soldiers into their confidence (with similar results as detailed above).

Sergeant Relemir Tesipo: N Baparan human fighter 1; HP 28; Init +4; Spd 9 (8); Rch 3½'; Atk +1; Dmg 2d8p+1 (longsword); Def +4; DR 3; ToP 9/ 6; Hon 9; *Quirk:* Paranoid; *Notable Skills:* language (Baparan 71), observation (12), resist persuasion (12); *Gear:* longsword, medium shield, studded leather armor, 2d3 sp, 3d4 cp

4 Men-at-Arms: N Baparan human; HP 26; Init +5; Spd 8 (7); Rch 2'; Atk 0; Dmg 2d6p (short sword); Def +3 (medium shield); DR 3; ToP 8/ 6; *Notable Skills:* language (Baparan 71), observation (10); *Gear:* short sword, med. shield, studded leather armor, 1d3 sp, 2d4 cp

The Enemy

In truth, the shrine was erected by an Orkin shaman and his apprentices as part of a ritual calling upon the Creator of Strife for a day of reckoning and eventual defeat of the humans encroaching on Hell's Throat. These are high aspirations for the diminutive band of orcs but they are true believers and fanatical in their devotion to the Discordant One.

Their unholy days, which they dutifully observe, are periods of foul weather. Ironically, this has served better than any stealth on their part to aid them in remaining undiscovered for they visit the shine only on miserable stormy nights – precisely the type of weather that discourages the castle's soldiery from camping out and ambushing them.

Orc Shaman (67 EP): CE orc cleric 1; HP 30; Init 3; Spd 13; Reach 4'; Atk +3; Dmg 2d8p+1; Def +2 (medium shield); DR 3; ToP 12/6; Size M; Move 10 ft./s; Spell: (1) *Moderate Emotion: Cause Fear*; *Notable Skills:* survival (40), literacy [Orkin] (31), observation (12); *Gear:* orkin body armor, medium human-made shield, flail, 5



pounds of rock salt (8½ sp value), 12 sp, **Potion of Orcish Steadfastness**, traveler's outfitting bundle, ink (1 oz), quill, notebook*

3 Orc Minions (34 EP each): HP 29, 27, 25; Init 5; Spd 9; Rch 3'; Atk +3; Dmg 2d8p+2; Def -4; DR 3; ToP 12, 11, 10/6; Size M; Move 10 ft./s; *Notable Skills/Proficiencies*: laborer, observation (7); *Gear*: orkin body armor, orkin scimitar, pilgrim's outfitting bundle

**This notebook is filled with rambling orkin script detailing the sacrilege wrought by the accursed humans building a fortress on an orkin burial ground. Feel free to reveal as much of the history of Frandor's Keep from Chapter Two as you wish should an enterprising character translate the book. (For those not literate in Orkin, translation services are offered by the Adept Scribes located in Frandor's Keep and detailed in entry M2).*

Exploring the Upper Clearing

This three and one-half acre flat area was cleared some years ago in an attempt to create an additional food plot for the Keep's residents. It proved highly susceptible to flash flooding and was abandoned after a couple of seasons. Since then it has lain fallow and become overgrown with thorny bushes.

If players enter the thicket, they will be able to make out several paths through the brush as indicated on the map. Several of these paths end in dead ends necessitating either backtracking or a slow and laborious effort of hacking through the dense undergrowth with swords (the latter weapon the only suitable stand-in for a machete).

At the far end of the clearing overlooking the valley below stands a rough unhewn stone.

After trekking through the thicket, you discover a ten-foot high rough block of stone wedged into a natural depression and secured with large wooden stakes. All about it lie scattered antlers, hooves and bones.

Closer examination reveals script carved into the stone. Should any of the players be literate in orkin, it reads, "Sometimes misfortune has nothing to do with chance." An Easy Divine Lore check will reveal that this is a shrine to the Creator of Strife while a Difficult Observation check of the offerings will identify some of the bones as human (the remains of a lost traveler captured by the orcs and sacrificed a month ago). Tracking checks easily reveal that a number of booted man-sized creatures have tromped around the site but they are too old to follow away from the site.

Confronting the Minions

If the players lay an ambush in order to waylay anyone coming to visit the site, they will spend a fruitless day and night encamped in the clearing. The following day soldiers from Falcon's Eye Tower will reconnoiter the clearing possibly confronting the PCs as 'evil cultists'. Note that the men-at-arms will not make any attempt at stealth and can be detected some ways off by an observant group (though it will necessitate an Average listening check to overhear their conversation in the Baparan dialect – a sure clue that they are not humanoid

raiders). Should the players attempt to hide, make a contested check versus the soldiers' observation skills.

Later that afternoon, dark storm clouds blow over the Krond Heights portending a storm. That evening, a severe thunderstorm hits the region. If players are camping out, describe in detail just how dreadful it is to be out in the wilderness completely soaked and chilled to the bone. To heighten tensions, a lightning bolt strikes a tall tree a mere 100 yards away, causing it to collapse.

In the midst of this storm, the orkin minions emerge to worship at their shrine. They approach cautiously knowing that the abominable human scum have taken to violating their unholy shrine. Should they encounter interlopers, they attack with maddening fury seeking to cleanse the site of this desecration and perhaps to take a living captive to sacrifice.

If the players abandon their stakeout due to the inclement weather, they will not encounter the orkin worshippers. However, later investigation of the site will (with a Trivial observation check) reveals additional bones arrayed as sacrifices and a myriad of fresh tracks covering the site. These tracks exit the clearing to the south and a novice tracker can ascertain that this group comprised four individuals. Unfortunately, following the tracks requires a Very Difficult skill check due to the hours of hard rain obscuring the orcs' trail. If the orcs' tracks are found and the creatures pursued, what will follow is an aimless chase down the Padiras river valley. These orcs are nomads with no lair.

Players may alternatively choose to lie in wait and not reveal themselves to the orcs when they appear opting rather to track them to their lair. Tracking the orcs in the rainstorm requires a Difficult tracking check with success resulting in an identically fruitless chase through the valley.

The orcs will return to the site during the next storm (a new storm front will appear in d8+2 days). This is the next opportunity the PCs have to confront the orc cultists. If they are not dealt with at this point, the shaman will begin to attract followers at the rate of d4-2 per month (with statistics identical to the current orc minions). The emboldened band will also inaugurate the practice of capturing individuals from the immediate region for their monthly sacrifice. Roll a d6 to determine this individual's identity: 1-2 is a random traveler, 3-5 is a named resident of Quarrytown (see Chapter Five of Frandor's Keep) and 6 indicates a named resident of the Keep itself. Obviously the orcs aren't going to boldly march into the fortress and kidnap this individual, rather he (or she) is waylaid sometime during the month and kept prisoner until sacrificed to the Creator of Strife. The Keep's military garrison won't take notice until such time as its residents begin disappearing.

Aftermath

Should the players kill the Orkin shaman and his minions, they put an end to this little coven and have solved the mystery of the shrine. There are a number of alternative conclusions to the story based upon player actions.

Scenario One: If the characters made a gentleman's arrangement with the soldiers of Falcon's Eye Tower, the troops will completely cleanse the site. They insist that the PCs take no bounty heads (though anything else is theirs by right of combat). They proceed to pull down the obelisk, bury the orc corpses and scatter the grisly offerings. None will ever speak of the incident.

These soldiers will be indebted to the PCs and subsequently use their influence within Frandor's Keep to make life a little bit easier for the characters. This will essentially give them the benefit of the doubt when dealing with the Keep's common soldiery and preclude the suspicion normally given to freelance mercenaries. Party fighters may even be invited to join the Secret Society of the Black Fists (see description on page 68 of *Frandor's Keep*).

Scenario Two: If the players drive a hard bargain with Relemir taking advantage of his precarious position or if they insist on taking heads or ears to cash in with Kip the Bounty Master (see area M9a in Chapter Seven of *Frandor's Keep*), he will honor the terms of their arrangement and offer to buy any trophies directly. However, he insists that any cash reward will have to be issued from a slush fund he has squirreled away back at Falcon's Eye Tower. While escorting the players to the tower, he sends his troopers back to the Keep to falsely report that the guardsmen of Falcon's Eye Tower killed the orcs responsible for erecting the evil shrine.

When the players return to Frandor's Keep, a huge public gathering is held in which Prefect Ganitek lauds praise on the brave soldiers of Falcon's Eye Tower. These soldiers are treated as heroes and treated to free drinks and hearty congratulations from everyone they encounter. Players who feel slighted and try to contradict the tale will not be believed whatever evidence they present.

Scenario Three: Should the players bypass the Falcon's Eye Tower crew and wish to exercise their bragging rights first hand, word soon reaches Prefect Ganitek. He summons the PCs for a full debriefing and expresses his appreciation for their initiative in ridding the valley of this menace. He then invites them to a ceremony to be held two days hence to publicly herald their accomplishment.

The ceremony is only a pretense. Its true purpose is to punish the guards of Falcon's Eye Tower for continued sloth and incompetence and to serve as a warning to the rest of the garrison.

When the characters arrive at the ceremony held on Frandor's Field in the middle of the upper bailey, nearly all of the keep's soldiers are arrayed in rank and file before the Lynx rotunda. The PCs are ushered up to the rotunda where the Prefect will give some them some perfunctory praise and then presents them with 30 silver coins. Following that, the guardsmen of Falcon's Eye Tower are marched in bound in chains. Ganitek then lets loose a tirade about the virtues of honor and duty and how these men have failed to honor their oath. One

man, Sergeant Relemir Tesipo, is then led forward and stripped of his rank before being before being beheaded. The remaining Falcon's Eye troops are then marched off to the pillory.

The player characters responsible for bringing this shame upon the soldiery will subsequently marked for every kind of harassment possible short of open attack. Complaining to the Prefect will elicit nothing more than a brusque "I'll look into it" as he has no interest whatsoever in the matter.

Adventure Synopsis

Treasure Yield:

- ☐ Potion of Orcish Steadfastness
- ☐ human-made medium shield (15 sp resale value)
- ☐ flail (7½ sp resale value)
- ☐ 5 pounds of salt (8½ sp value)
- ☐ ink and quill (5¼ cp)
- ☐ 12 sp
- ☐ bounty on orc heads (4 sp)
- ☐ Reward from Prefect Ganitek (30 sp)

Experience Yield:

- ☐ Discovering which deity the Orcs are worshipping (15 EP)
- ☐ Figuring out that the Orcs only appear on stormy nights (10 EP)
- ☐ Learning the identity of the worshippers at the mysterious shrine (20 EP)
- ☐ Killing Orc cultists (169 EP)
- ☐ Destroying the coven before it can grow in size and influence (15 EP)
- ☐ Discovering details of Frandor's Keep's history by translating the shaman's notebook (60 EP)
- ☐ Forming trusted alliance with Falcon's Eye Tower crew (50 EP)

CREDITS

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