

THE RAID MIRROR

An adventure front by Michael Prescott

THE SITUATION

Halad al Bim didn't take all of his relics to Tannoch with him when he died, and now a pack of blight orcs has found his cache.

At the cost of many lives, they have cracked the secret of al Bim's mirror, a device which not only allows viewing of distant places, but travel as well.

Now, blight orc raiding parties are appearing a hundred leagues from the blight, raiding the unfortified villages beyond the borderlands.

They slaughter everyone, take everything, and leave no tracks. They've eaten their way through three valleys' worth of cattle without a defeat. That sort of thing can make a baron lose sleep.

AN UNFOLDING THREAT

Unlike previous adventures, the Raid Mirror doesn't center on a location. Stryggal's raiding and rise to power may develop over the course of a campaign, probably while the PCs are focused on other objectives. If left unchecked, he becomes a major power in the region, and dealing with him will be much more difficult.

A DIRE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Unless the PCs (or ripples of their actions) interfere, Stryggal's rise to power will play out according to the following sequence.

Once the PCs are involved, modify and adapt as necessary, using the list as inspiration.

A. THE RAIDS BEGIN

Stryggal uncovers the secret of the mirror, and claims the nest for his own by murdering and eating the nestlord. After a few weeks of scrying, Stryggal begins launching raids into human areas far beyond the borderlands.

Rumors spread like wildfire.

B. THE RAZING OF TIRRU-AGGAL

Attracted by meat-smoke, orcs under nestlord Aggal raid Stryggal's territory. Incensed, Stryggal counterattacks through the mirror, killing Aggal and burning his nest.

Stryggal scries, hunting the survivors, who are driven into the borderlands as refugees, where they are forced to steal to survive. Rumors spread of an outright orc invasion.

THE ORCNEST TIRRU-STRYGGAL

Stryggal's orcnest, like all of its kind, stands a hundred feet above the horizon on four massive stilts of pine. By day, it can be seen a dozen miles away and the eyes of its lookouts spy almost as far.

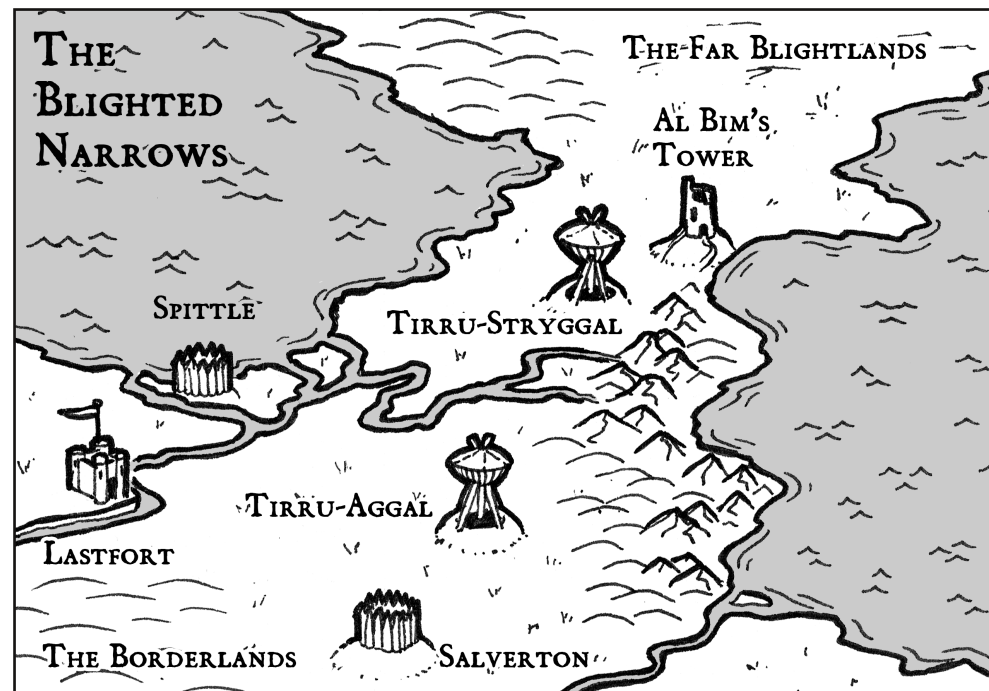
Its upper surface flaps with the hides of hundred kills, and its great wooden belly houses a hundred orcs.

The interior is divided into three levels. Stryggal and his lieutenants dwell in the smallest, upper level.

The middle level, the largest, is a dark, humid warren seething with orcs and their pups.

The small lowest level houses the winches, the butchers and the sand pit that holds the great cookfire. Greasy black smoke pours up the central column and out the top.

Below the nest, effluent pools in a basin of packed earth, giving off an intense smell detectable from many miles downwind. (Any who fall in risk a drowning beyond description, and even those rescued will certainly fall ill.)



C. THE RAZING OF LASTFORT

Fearing a migration, Baron Esselet of Lastfort sends patrols into the narrows to locate the raiders, but only succeeds in provoking Stryggal.

Stryggal sends orcs into Lastfort keep, murdering and burning it from the inside.

The chaplain, a survivor, pronounces it an attack by devils and flees to the capital.

D. LUGH-NICURAN LIT-FROM-BELOW

A demon arrives to bargain with Stryggal, offering his services as advisor and patron in exchange for blood sacrifices.

E. WHIM OF THE MIRROR

Stryggal is briefly very ill, stranding a raiding party deep in human lands. Forced to make a long overland journey unprepared, their trail homewards is easily followed, and several stragglers are caught. Stryggal collects the rest near Salverton, but their exit through a shimmering portal is observed.

E. STRYGGAL MOVES THE NEST

On Lugh's advice, Stryggal relocates his orcs to a new nest, deep in the far blightlands as safeguard against attack by human armies.

Stryggal threatens the other nestlords of the

blight into his service, demanding warriors as tributes. They are fed well but kept in pens beneath the nest.

Raids now occur weekly, but henceforth victims are taken captive by the dozen to be sacrificed to Lugh; Stryggal remains in his nest with his advisor, scrying constantly.

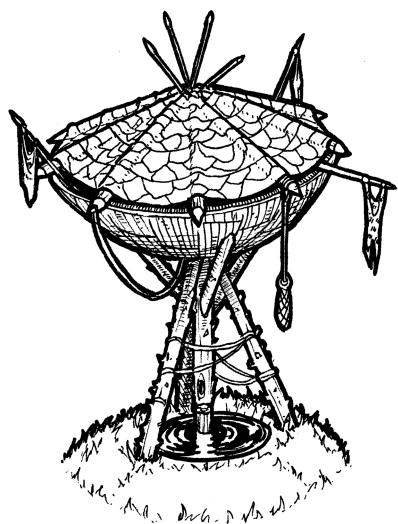
F. RULER OF MEN

Lugh directs Stryggal to extort human rulers. Nearby barons and even dukes are forced to pay heavy tributes in gold and hostages. Some refuse and are dealt with brutally; this garners serious attention from the capital.

The gold buys a force of ogre mercenaries, sufficient to allow Stryggal to treat with a clan of giants in the blighted north as an equal.

G. THE SCRYER BESCRIED

A coven of sorcerers scries Stryggal's location, but Lugh notices. Stryggal dispatches them with a raid, but loses many of his best warriors to fire and sorcery.



THE RAID MIRROR

Stryggal secures the coven's magical trove, which Lugh deciphers. He begins searching out wizards of any stripe, intent on turning their magics to his own benefit.

In doing so, Stryggal learns the limit of the mirror's range is three hundred leagues.

H. THE IRON CASK

Lugh masters Al Bim's **iron cask**, an artifact of great power. Stryggal reinforces his nest with crude chains and severs its moorings; it rises into the sky to a height of half a mile. So long as the cask is filled with the blood of fresh sacrifices, there it remains.

Stryggal directs it to drift southwards, over the borderlands, increasing the reach of his attacks.

I. STRYGGAL BINDS LUCH-NICARAN

The nestlord grows ever more paranoid. He turns on his advisor, binding him and then devouring his ichor. Demonic power flows into him and his insanity deepens.

J. NESTFALL

During a fit of madness, Stryggal allows the cask to run dry. The flying nest crashes to the ground somewhere in the borderlands. All aboard are slain instantly, save for Stryggal, who is saved by his regeneration.

Stryggal lashes mirror and cask to a crude raft, and flies into the deep north, leaving his treasures behind. Taking giant form himself, he installs himself among them by force and magical domination.

K. DEMON LORD OF GIANTS

After biding his time, Stryggal seizes control of the giant clan.

There he will remain until ready to venture forth once more, as demon warlord of the giants. His demonic nature has allowed him to scry beyond the mortal lands, and he has set his sights on an assault into hell. But for that, he'll need gold. And blood.

He commands the giants to hew him an impenetrable barque of stone and ice. Raising it with the cask, he once again plunges southwards, but this time with the intent of filling the barque's sacrificial pits to the very brim.



STRYGGAL THREESTAKES

From the beginning, the master of the mirror is no ordinary orc head-taker, but a summoner of considerable potential.

What he lacks in technical skill, he makes up with improvisation and a reputation: dark powers know his willingness to provide generous sacrifices.

From his old master (whom he ate), Stryggal learned the secret of binding dark spirits to himself with silver stakes driven into the skull.

As the adventure dawns, Stryggal Threestakes has three such stakes (hence his name). The bound spirits grant him free use of **telekinesis** (one object up to half a man's weight), **ventriloquism**, and **speaking in tongues**. He carries an enchanted gnomeskull staff that grants the bearer silent movement.

Once he becomes Stryggal Sixstakes, he acquires the powers of **pyrokinesis**, **ogre strength**, and (when he drinks blood) trollish **regeneration**. Setting aside his staff, he now favors a mattock (wielded one-handed).

Stryggal Ninestakes acquires **telekinetic mastery** (control of up to four 100lbs objects simultaneously when he concentrates, and two under any circumstances), which he will use to devastating effect if attacked.

He acquires **truesight**: he sees clearly in every direction, and clearly sees invisible and ethereal beings. In addition, he can produce a **stinking aura** that produces debilitating nausea in the unprotected.

Once Stryggal devours Lugh-Nicuran, he gains the ability to **detect magic** at will, polymorph and telepathic **domination** twice daily. He ceases aging.

When Stryggal emerges as warlord of the giants, he adopts the form of a **fire titan** of orc legend: 20' tall, brass skin, smoldering coal for eyes.

PLAYING STRYGGAL

Stryggal is an ambitious leader, unafraid of painful sacrifices (of his troops, or his person) to further his aims.

In the early days, Stryggal will be focused on the prosperity of his nest and indulging petty grievances with neighbouring orcnests. In person he will be violent and unpredictable with those he perceives as weaker, but inside him is a born negotiator. He believes anyone he cannot immediately overcome is worthy of dealing with, and he will explore possibilities enthusiastically.

Once the demon arrives, Stryggal's mind is opened to the possibility of establishing himself as a genuine regional power. His deal-making now takes on a merciless angle. Behaving like a generous lord, Stryggal will ask endless questions, professing an insatiable curiosity: he paints visions of grand alliances, all while heaping on generous hospitality (if somewhat crude) and even gifts of captured valuables, if he feels it necessary.

All of this is a ruse, however. What Stryggal now seeks is information - his bargains are struck only to increase his knowledge of targets. He strives to understand the power structures of the human realm, all the better to strike at them.

At the crest of his power, Stryggal becomes compulsively homicidal. Now completely free of any accountability to his lieutenants by virtue of his magical abilities he drops all pretense of providing for others, believing that destiny has chosen him to be as great a master as he dare.

Nevertheless, a great loneliness gnaws at him. Culturally alienated among the giants, many of whom loathe him, a part of him yearns for the days of running in the hunt with his bretheren. What he craves most is peers to join him in his conquests. Bravery

and defiance will arouse his curiosity, which he will indulge until he is - inevitably - disappointed.

STRYGGAL'S TREASURES

If Stryggal is slain and his stakes removed, each is effectively a magic wand, usable by any that can attune to such things.

After each use, however, there is a 1 in 4 chance that the bound spirit escapes, exacting vengeance on the bearer if he or she seems vulnerable.

The spirits are intangible, but can coalesce briefly to taunt or to attack with spectral claws. Each can use the power it granted Stryggal freely.

AL BIM'S MIRROR

The troublesome mirror has grown clouded and dark from constant use. It is sturdy, but it can be damaged. If it is cracked, it may still be used for scrying, but attempting to traverse it will cause lethal harm.

Once the extorting begins, Tirru-Stryggal will also contain a steadily growing quantity of coin, jewellery. By the time of the crash, it is a sizeable hoard and includes 2d6 minor magical items.



THE BLIGHT

Once fertile, the blight has been ruined by the depredations of tree-cutting formians - giant ants. Over the millennia, the blight orcs have become symbiotic, following the formians as they expand into lush territory. The orcs live off the game flushed out as the formians gradually replace forest with bare earth, building new nests every years as they move.

Far from such frontiers, the blight does rejuvenate, especially near good water. Young forests exist all over the deep blight, growing hurriedly before the arrival of a newly hatched formian queen.

AL BIM'S TOWER

Between Stryggal and Al Bim's favored apprentice, Stanus, Al Bim's tower is a ruin of only historical significance, though ruins in the blight are seldom unoccupied for long.

SPITTLE AND SALVERTON

These two fortified villages stand at the edge of the blight. They are dismal places, whose inhabitants are wary of strangers. Nevertheless, they know the value of a debt of gratitude.