



BEASTS & BARBARIANS

STEEL EDITION

The Shapeless Horror

"Thou Who Crawlst in Darkness, Come to Me!"
- Ancient Keronian Invocation

A *Beasts & Barbarians* One Sheet by John Goff

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WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

A local sage, Elarian Palanious, specializing in Keronian history, was generally well-liked by those living in his part of a rather large city. He was respected for his knowledge of ancient techniques, particularly in the field of healing and medicine. However, he kept his most treasured item of ancient lore imprisoned in the cellar of his home, a piece of Dread Star Matter, which he believed might eventually provide him insights into the destruction of the Keronian Empire.

Unfortunately for both him and the rest of his city, a massive earthquake recently struck the region. During the disaster, the prison he'd constructed for the Dread Star Matter was compromised, freeing the strange creature. The monster overwhelmed him and oozed into a crack the quake had opened in the cellar wall—one which led into the aquifer for the city.

Now, the slime oozes from a local well to prey on the inhabitants in the night. Worse, its presence in the water is poisoning the city's water supply, spelling doom even for those who don't encounter it.

PLAGUE!

This adventure can be set in any relatively large city, but is particularly well-suited to those nations bordering the Dread Sea.

The heroes can enter before or after the quake itself, but within a day of their arrival, they begin to notice much of the populace seems to be afflicted by an illness. It begins with fatigue and general malaise, then progresses to bloody vomiting as the Dread Star Matter's essence begins poisoning the body, and eventually leads to a messy and gruesome death as the victim's internal organs basically liquify.

It's likely at least *some* of the adventurers will drink some of the local water—or at least eat something prepared with it. Any character who is exposed to the contaminated water must make a Vigor roll at the end of the day or obtain a level of Fatigue. This Fatigue can Incapacitate, and is removed at the rate of one level per day, but only after the sufferer is no longer exposed to the poisoned water.

Rumors almost immediately begin to circulate of victims' bodies discovered almost completely dissolved by the disease. Predictably, the city quickly descends into panic.

NONE SHALL PASS

After a couple of days — or when the heroes decide they need to get out of the area — the local

ruler clamps down on the section of the city they're in, hoping to stop the spread of the "plague." Contingents of the town guard set up roadblocks at every street entering the area. The guardsmen have orders to use any force necessary to prevent *anyone* from leaving the area. They don't even allow anyone within 20' of them, out of fear of contracting the disease they believe is rampant in that part of the city.

If the group decides to fight its way out, the guards raise the alarm, drawing an additional patrol to reinforce them after three rounds. Even if the characters manage to win the battle, they're marked as outlaws in the city – and possibly further afield, depending on the extent of the local ruler's reach.

The characters may try to sneak out. It's impossible to lock down a large urban area short of building actual walls, after all. However, the town watch is patrolling the perimeter of the area. Treat them as active guards for purposes of detecting any escapees trying to use Stealth to escape (see Stealth in *Savage Worlds* for details).

(E) Guard Patrol (2 + 1 per hero): Use the Soldier profile from *SEGM*.

(E) Patrol Leader (1): Use the Experienced Soldier profile from *SEGM*.

FIGHTING A PLAGUE

Unless the heroes manage to fight their way out, or otherwise escape that part of the city, they are faced with finding a "cure." Streetwise rolls can help them narrow down the part of the city first affected by the plague. They may even figure out the water is the source of the sickness, but they still have to find a solution as there is no other source of water for the residents.

THE SAGE IS OUT

Asking around about an alchemist, healer, or sage quickly points them to Palanious' residence – but no one can recall seeing him lately. If they've done any research into the onset of the plague, they quickly realize it is near the center of both the worst of the outbreak and the sudden deaths.

A visit to the sage's house finds a small, two-story row house, but no one answers the locked door. However, even if the characters can't overcome a simple lock, there are numerous windows, including several on the back of the house not easily observed by passers-by.

Inside, they find the house is filled with shelves and stacks of ancient texts. Interspersed with the tomes are a variety of Keronian objects and the like. This is a perfect place to insert either an item or two of treasure or perhaps even a mystical artifact to reward the heroes for their efforts.

THE CELLAR

An ominously open cellar door quickly draws the heroes' attention. In the underground chamber, they discover a large carved circle in the floor that has been cracked by the recent upheaval. The crack continues to the wall, where it opens into a narrow crevice leading into darkness. Although it's too small for a person to enter, they feel cool, moist air wafting up from it and hear the sound of water dripping somewhere in the depths.

Palanious' almost completely dissolved body lies near the edge of the circle. His remains suffered much greater damage than other prey of the creature, but otherwise resemble them in general appearance. In one hand, there's an unlit torch. (The sage did not get the torch lit before the Dread Star Matter overwhelmed him.)

Any adventurer examining the circle itself finds it is simple and carved into the rock of the floor. Soot is obvious on its edges. A Notice roll finds traces of oil along its rim, as well.

It's important the characters realize that oil and fire are possible weaknesses of the creature. If the

physical evidence doesn't point them in the right direction, Palanious' journal on his study of the creature, which rests on a desk in the cellar, does.

DEADLY OOZE

A simple Smarts roll tells the heroes the crevice in Palanious' cellar leads in the general direction of the well in the nearby square. They can either descend into the well to search for the abomination or wait for it to emerge.

INTO THE DEPTHS

The well is 50' deep, but it's easy enough to secure a rope at the top to aid climbing attempts. It ends in a large chamber almost 30' in diameter that is mostly water-filled. The water at northern end, where the well enters the cavern, is over 10' deep, and a passage at the bottom of the pool connects to other parts of the aquifer. However, to the south and east, the water becomes shallower, eventually leading to a small strip of dry ground about 10' wide.

Fighting the Dread Star Matter here should prove challenging. Unless they can draw the creature onto the area of dry ground and keep it there, the water protects the monster from its two weaknesses, oil and fire.

In the likely case the adventurers find themselves overwhelmed, allow them to escape back to the surface – followed closely by the enraged slime, of course.

HUNTING THE HUNTER

An easier solution is to wait near the square for the Dread Star Matter to emerge from the well. The creature waits until well after nightfall to crawl out of its lair. Only after the local residents have retired for the night and the square has been quiet for a few hours does it ooze up from the depths.

The monster has taken advantage of its freedom to feed well over the past few days, but it languished in captivity for years, so it is currently only Size +3. If they've discovered its weaknesses, the heroes should be able to block its retreat and defeat the protoplasmic horror. Either oil or fire causes damage as noted for **Weakness** in the creature's description.

(WC) Dread Star Matter (1): Use Dread Star Matter profile from *SECM*. This particular specimen is Size +3 (Toughness 10); Weakness (Oil and Fire).

CONCLUSION

If the characters defeat the Dread Star Matter, the "plague" resolves itself in a few more days as the creature's foul essence no longer pollutes the city's water supply. Regardless of where they slay it, the monster's amorphous body quickly dissolves, leaving only an oily stain. Not long after the local citizens begin to recover, the local ruler recalls his soldiers and allows people to once again leave the area.

Should they fail or simply choose to sneak out of the area, the Dread Star Matter eventually taints the entire city's water supply. After countless deaths, the ruler's advisors figure out their wells are poisoned and seal them off. However, the creature continues to haunt the city, growing in size and power.