

# Official **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons**®

Adventure Module for 5-8 Characters of Levels 7-9

## **DARK CLOUDS GATHER**

by Jim Bambra and Phil Gallagher

### CONTENTS

<b>DARK CLOUDS GATHER</b>	2
From the Dark Past	2
The Adventure	3
Abbreviations	3
<b>THE DARK SKY</b>	4
(Map M: areas 1-6/Maps 2 & 6: areas F1-F9)	
Recent Events	4
The Scarrabere	7
<b>THUNDER ON THE MOUNTAIN</b>	10
(Map M - areas 7-9/Map 8)	
Tikka-ti-jarra	11
The Eagles	13
<b>THE PEAKS OF LIGHT</b>	14
(Map M: areas 10-12 Map 10 & 11: areas E1-E8 & T1-T6)	
The Journey	14
Mount Ederglow	15
Deval's Island	17
The Crystal Citadel	17
Leaving Mount Ederglow	21
<b>DEATH IN THE SKIES</b>	23
(Map C - areas C1-C23)	
The Cloud Castle	23
The Approach	23
Inside the Castle	24
Aftermath	28
<b>PULL-OUT SHEETS</b>	(between pages 14 & 15)
<b>NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS</b>	I
<b>NEW MONSTERS</b>	II
Ba'atun	II
Yesorkh Pahyeh	III
Soul Beckoner	III
<b>WANDERING MONSTERS</b>	IV
<b>THE SKYFISH</b>	IV



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### MAPS

#### MODULE FOLDER

#### OUTSIDE

Map M: CLOUDSCAPE MOUNTAINS

#### INSIDE

Map 2: LURNESLYE  
6: FANJYR WAY-STATION  
8: TIKKA-TI-JARRA  
10: SILVER MINE  
11: MOUNT EDERGLOW & THE  
CRYSTAL CITADEL  
Map C: THE CLOUD CASTLE

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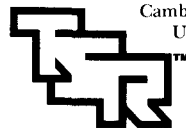
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This is an **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®** module for 5-8 characters of levels 7-9. The adventure takes place in and around the Cloudscape Mountains: a large snow-covered mountain range, cut by a single pass — the Scarrabere.

## FROM THE DARK PAST

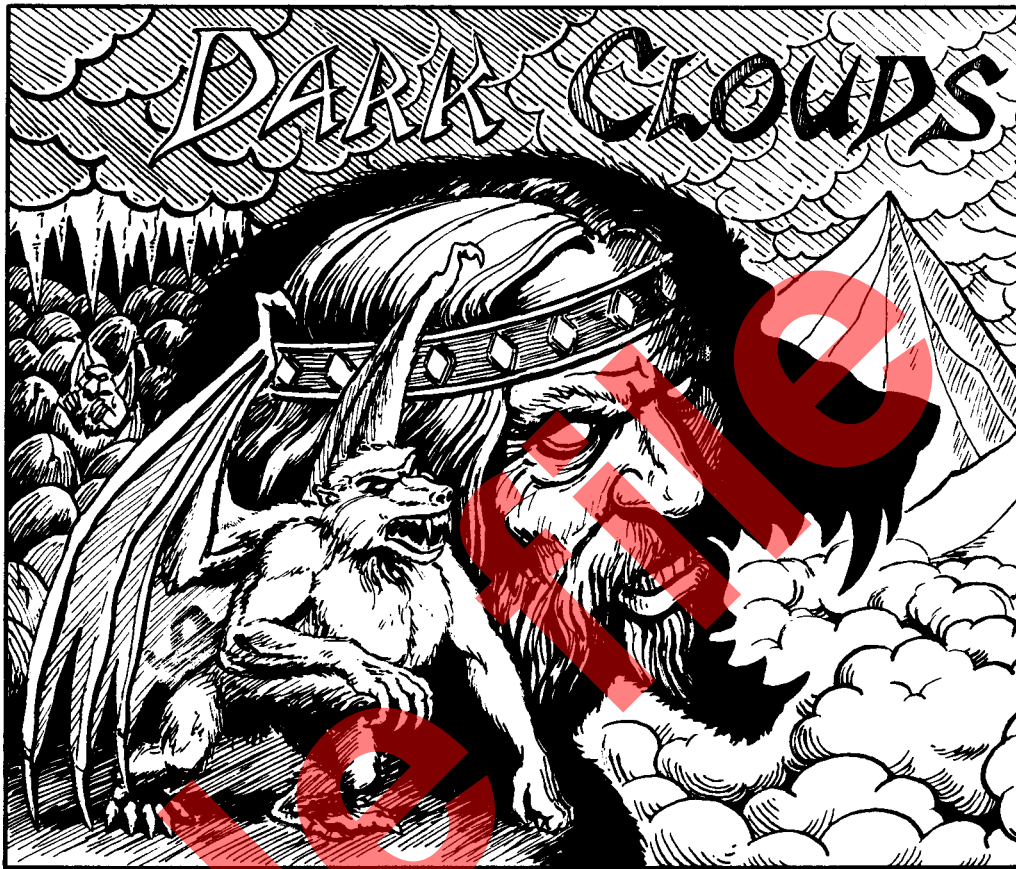
In ages past, when the land was young and the dwarves had not yet emerged from beneath the mountains, the Arch-mage Devral created a wondrous citadel for herself, high in the Cloudscape Mountains. With her mighty magics, Devral transformed the ice on Mount Ederglow into a crystal citadel with walls as hard as steel. Isolated from the rest of the world, Devral and her assistants researched deep into magical flight. They made many amazing discoveries which culminated in the construction of the skyfish — an incredible flying device in the form of a giant manta ray (see **Pull-out Sheet IV**).

One day Devral's researches were interrupted by three desperate aarakocra envoys. In anguished tones, they begged her aid against "the snow demons" — fearsome white, winged creatures who had been attacking their nests and slaying aarakocra without mercy. Devral listened closely to their tale and resolved to help the birdfolk. Over the next few days she cast many powerful spells and discovered that the snow demons were called ba'atun (pronounced "bah-TOON") and were led by an evil, black female named Yesorkh Pahyeh, who had the power to **possess** other creatures (see **Pull-out Sheet III**).

Devral quickly devised a plan to defeat the ba'atun and called upon a family of neutral good cloud giants to help her. The cloud giants were more than willing to rid the mountains of the ba'atun menace. Moving their flying cloud castle under cover of night, the giants led the aarakocra assault on the ba'atun. As Yesorkh attempted to **possess** one of the giants, Devral swept in on her magical griffon (see area T3) and cast a **trap the soul** spell, imprisoning the black ba'atun within the confines of a magical gem. Without their leader, the ba'atun were soon destroyed. The aarakocra returned to their peaceful existence and, over the centuries, the terror of the ba'atun was forgotten.

Already venerable, Devral guarded the gem imprisoning Yesorkh, but as her time grew near, she gave it to the cloud giants for safe keeping. For over twenty five centuries the gem lay hidden in the depths of the giants' stronghold, but with the passing of time, the giants' memories of the ba'atun dimmed. Finally, the gem's function as a prison faded from their minds altogether, and it came to be considered as just another valuable stone.

### 2 DARK CLOUDS GATHER (From the Dark Past)



### The Freeing of Yesorkh

One fateful day thirty years ago, a young cloud giant called Lachlan "borrowed" the gem (without his parents' knowledge) and, while using it in a game, accidentally rolled it off the side of the cloud. Upon hitting the ground, the gem shattered, and Yesorkh Pahyeh was free! At once she sped to her ancient lair, where a clutch of ba'atun eggs had been carefully stored centuries before.

Having no idea of the length of her imprisonment, Yesorkh's greatest fear was that Devral still lived. So she hatched the eggs and hid from the world while the ba'atun grew to maturity. In the darkness of her ancient lair she nurtured her anger, reliving the humiliation of her defeat. Long she brooded on how to exact her vengeance and punish the hated aarakocra, but at last the ba'atun were ready, and Yesorkh's plot could be put into action....

### The Darkness Spreads

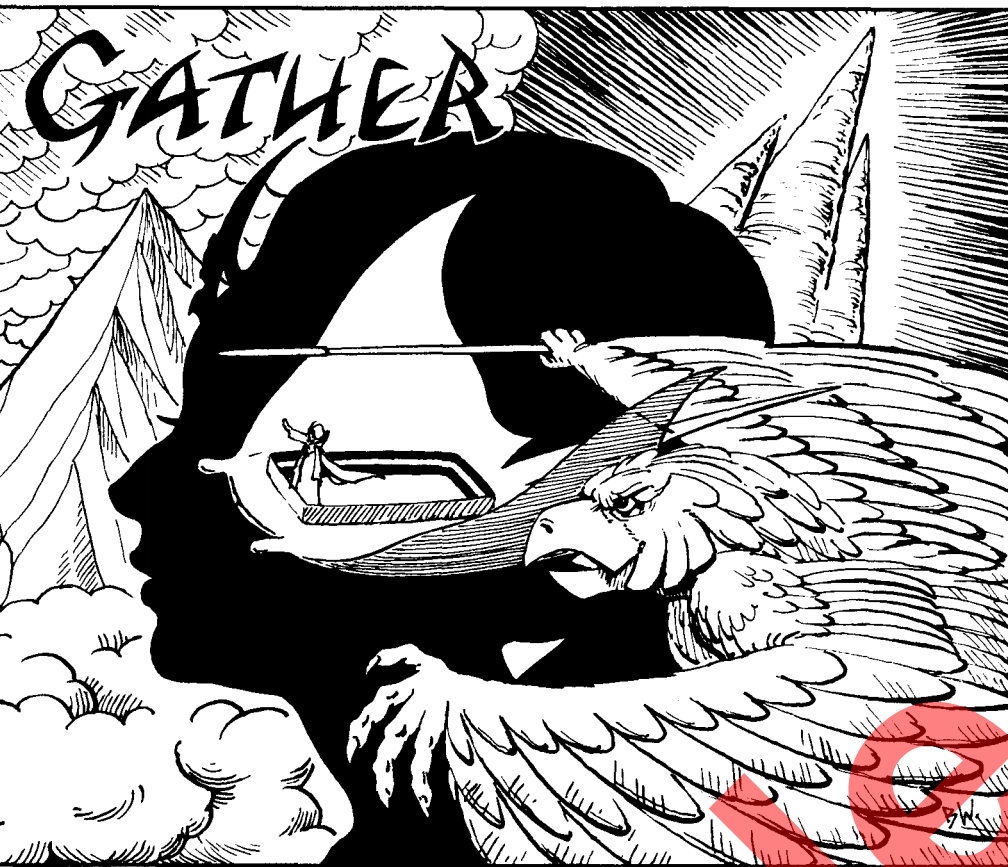
It was a simple matter for Yesorkh to **possess** an unsuspecting merchant, and in this guise she was able to **possess** Lachlan, now an adult cloud giant. Lachlan had inherited the castle from his parents and in his form, Yesorkh discovered that she could control the cloud castle and through it, certain aspects of the weather. Gradually the castle lost its white glow while the clouds surrounding it became dark and oppressive.

With the giants' castle in her power, Yesorkh/Lachlan's attention has turned to the aarakocra. Recently, three aarakocra nests have been destroyed and the remaining aarakocra now live in fear of the "evil" giant and his dark, sinister castle.

Fear also grips the human villagers of Lurneslye (area 2). For the dark clouds call to mind an ancient prophecy of "dark demons from the sky", related by a parchment in the possession of Bernhardt, the head cleric of the village (see **Pull-out Sheet I**).

In order to turn the frightened human populace against the aarakocra, Yesorkh's minions have attacked caravans travelling through the Scarrabere Pass, and have left aarakocra corpses amid the carnage, as though the birdfolk were the aggressors. The discovery of these corpses led Bernhardt to believe that the aarakocra are the demons of which his parchment foretold.

Meanwhile Kirraka, the head shaman of the aarakocra, after consuming some magical, trance-inducing Charrak seeds (see page 11) has experienced a vision in which a mysterious group of adventurers appeared to him. Convinced that these adventurers are the key to the aarakocra's survival he has sent an aarakocra envoy, Tcho'eh (pronounced "cho-AY"), to search for them in the lowlands. But the lowlands are no longer safe for the birdfolk. Yesorkh's policy to incriminate and isolate the aarakocra has worked well, fear now



grips the villagers of Lurneslye and the best an aarakocra can hope for is a quick and painless death.

## THE ADVENTURE

The adventure begins near the village of Lurneslye on the road leading to the Scarrabere Pass. In the village, the adventurers have the opportunity to rescue Tcho'eh, the innocent aarakocra envoy from the clutches of the over-zealous Bernhardt.

Tcho'eh will attempt to recruit the adventurers' aid against the "evil" cloud giant and his castle, and will lead them to Tikka-ti-jarra, the home of the aarakocra. Working on information from the aarakocra shaman and a group of giant eagles, the party will be able to locate Devral's ancient crystal citadel at Mount Ederglow. The citadel contains Devral's magical, flying skyfish. By recovering this fantastic artifact the adventurers will be able to take on Yesorkh Pahyeh in her usurped cloud castle, and banish the dark clouds forever.

## Running the Adventure

There are several ways of starting the adventure. For example, the party could be simply travelling along the road to Lurneslye on the way to somewhere else. Alternatively, they might be following rumours that there are bandits in the Scarrabere, or

perhaps tradesmen in a nearby town have asked them to discover why a number of merchant caravans have not arrived.

As in any role-playing adventure, players' actions can lead to unpredictable results, and it may be necessary to adapt the adventure to suit your players. The characters have plenty of opportunities to deviate from the proposed course of the adventure or even to abandon the aarakocra to their fate. It is up to you as DM, as to how much influence you bring to bear in order to avert this, taking particular account of the alignments of the characters. In various places the flow of the adventure is dependent on the actions of certain NPCs. You should use these NPCs to guide the adventurers. If, as might happen, this does not work out, you must find an alternative means of continuing the adventure. For example, if Tcho'eh is killed in Lurneslye, another aarakocra envoy should meet the characters to guide them to Tikka-ti-jarra.

## Weather and Visibility

During the adventure the sky will grow increasingly dark as the black clouds spread over the mountains. By the time the party meets the dwarves near Mount Ederglow (area 10 - page 15) the sky should be a mass of billowing black clouds, broken occasionally by a flash of lightning. The encroaching darkness should be used to add to the module's atmosphere and to spur the party on.

## Aerial Combat

Monsters likely to be involved in aerial combat have three hit point totals listed for them, e.g. hp 12/6/3. The first figure is the creature's normal hit points; the figure after the slash shows at which point it becomes unable to continue stable flight and is forced to land; and the third figure shows at what point the creature simply plummets from the sky (see DMG p53). The figures allow for the fact that feathered wings (cf. aarakocra) are harder to damage than membranous ones (cf. ba'atun).

## ABBREVIATIONS

In this module, the statistics of monsters and non-player characters have been standardised. The information is given after the monster's/NPC's name, as follows:

**AC** = Armour Class; **MV** = Movement Rate; **MC** = Manoeuvrability Class (see DMG p50); **HD** = Hit Dice (monsters) or Class/Level (NPCs only); **hp** = current hit points (figures in brackets indicate maximum hit points of wounded creatures); **#AT** = Number of attacks; **D** = Damage caused by attacks; **SA/SD** = Special Attacks and/or Special Defences; **MR** = Magic Resistance; **Int** = Intelligence (monsters and minor NPCs only); **AL** = Alignment; **xp** = Experience Points awarded for overcoming.

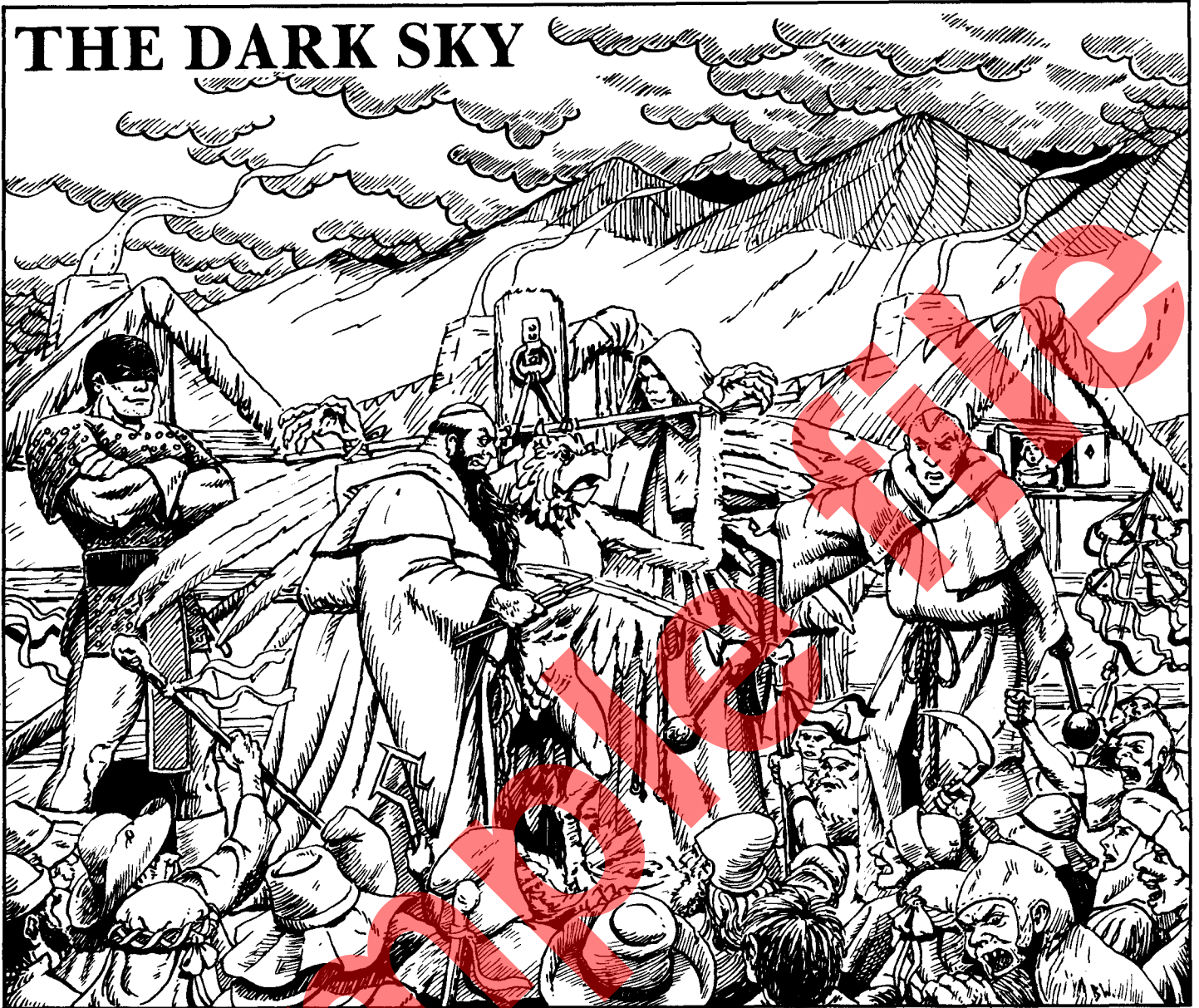
The following additional abbreviations are used:

**C** = Cleric; **F** = Fighter; **MU** = Magic User; **S** = Strength; **I** = Intelligence; **W** = Wisdom; **D** = Dexterity; **C** = Constitution; **Ch** = Charisma; **MM** = AD&D® Monster Manual; **MMII** = Monster Manual II; **FF** = FIEND FOLIO® tome; **PHB** = AD&D Players Handbook; **DMG** = AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide.

**THACO** = To Hit Armour Class Zero. This is the roll on a d20 needed by a creature to hit an opponent with AC 0 (see DMG p196-215). In most cases, the roll needed to hit other armour classes = THACO minus AC. Some creatures, whose hit probability is very low, have been given a THACO of 20\*, and you should consult the relevant tables (see DMG p74-5) to find the rolls needed to hit other armour classes.

**BOXED SECTIONS** include that information which the characters would get from the first sight of an area or room. You may either paraphrase or read them out as written. In cases where player characters would instantly recognise the monsters seen, you should of course substitute the monsters' name(s) for the description given.

# THE DARK SKY



## RECENT EVENTS

Lurneslye (see **Map M** and **Map 2**), is a small farming village governed by a group of clerics of lawful neutral alignment. Clearly visible from Lurneslye are the Cloudscape Mountains. Normally picturesque, with silvery-white clouds blowing along their peaks, the mountains now have a dark and sinister appearance. Large black clouds cast an ominous shadow over the land; a shadow which is growing visibly day by day. The clerics and villagers fear the arrival of winged demons (as foretold in an ancient prophecy), and the discovery of aarakocra corpses in the Scarrabere has intensified this fear (see **The Darkness Spreads** - page 2).

Two days before the party arrives in Lurneslye, Tcho'eh, an aarakocra envoy, was captured and brought before Bernhardt. After briefly interrogating Tcho'eh, Bernhardt became convinced that he was a

demon in disguise. Bernhardt has organised a public trial of the 'demon', to take place on the day of the party's arrival. This trial will see him demanding the maximum penalty under the law — death by burning. People are flocking to the village square to hear the 'demon' confess to its sins, and to watch Bernhardt banish the dark clouds.

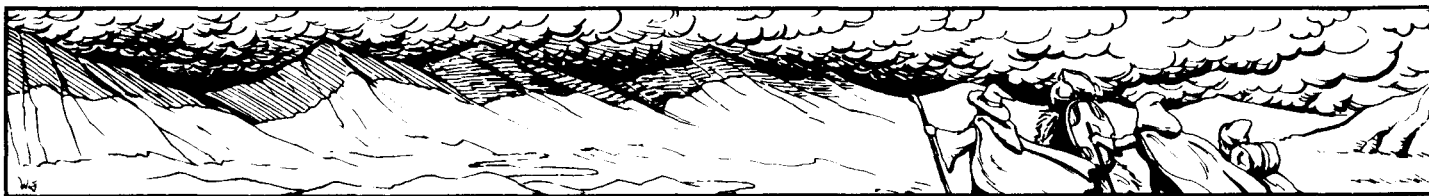
## Important NPCs

This section is designed to introduce the players to the adventure. Some of the background information which is vital to the successful running of this section, is only to be found in the details of the three major NPCs described on the **Pull-out Sheet** (between pages 14 and 15). These characters are Bernhardt, the head cleric of Lurneslye; Tcho'eh, the aarakocra envoy; and Asdos, a visiting neutral good cleric. You should refer to **Pull-out Sheet I** whenever these characters are mentioned in

the text. The actions and personalities of these NPCs should be used to encourage the characters to become involved in the adventure and, it is hoped, rescue Tcho'eh. If all else fails, Asdos can be relied upon to beg the party to intervene. Ham up this section as much as you like and above all, enjoy yourself!

## The Trial

The villagers, normally a simple, peace-loving folk, are afraid and very excitable. Bernhardt, convinced that Tcho'eh is a demon, intends to carry out the law to the letter and burn him — preferably after he has obtained a full confession. In this he has the full support of the villagers. During the proceedings there will be numerous shouts of "Burn it, it's a demon", "Pluck its feathers, make it squawk", and so on, as the crowd is swept along by Bernhardt's rhetoric.



Unless the adventurers intervene, Tcho'eh will be burned by Bernhardt. Intervention can vary from attempting to argue with Bernhardt, to outright violence. Arguing with Bernhardt is difficult, for he will not be persuaded that Tcho'eh is anything but a demon. Violent solutions to the problem will result in a bloodbath, as the crowd surges forwards to ensure that the law is enforced.

### Trial by Combat

According to the law of Lurneslye, it is the right of any creature on trial to prove its innocence by combat — a fight to the death (or unconsciousness) between two opponents; either the accused and the accuser or appointed champions. This law is strictly adhered to and, once demanded, cannot be avoided. If an adventurer demands this right, the crowd will be reluctant initially, but a few will take up the call and it will gradually spread until all are in favour.

## 1. A Farmer Comes to Town

Start the adventure at the point marked 1 on **Map M**, where a rough trail meets the main road to Lurneslye:

While you have been travelling towards the village of Lurneslye, the sky has grown darker. The thin white clouds which previously streaked the bright blue sky have given way to a large grey smudge which masks the light. Judging by the clouds hanging over the mountains, a fierce storm is on its way.

From the woods emerges an aged team of horses pulling a creaking and decrepit wagon. A man and woman stare in surprise, while three children in the back of the wagon giggle at you. By the wagon is a tree with a notice nailed to it.

The family in the wagon are from one of the outlying farms and are on their way to Lurneslye for the trial. They will hail the adventurers and ask if they are going to the trial, indicating the notice by the tree if the adventurers look puzzled. If the approaching storm is mentioned, they will tell the adventurers that it has been gathering over the mountains for 3 weeks and is "the work of demons." These demons have also been "raiding caravans and attacking travellers."

Now, one of them has been caught and "Bernhardt will soon sort it out and remove the dark clouds." The farmer "knows" that the demons have wings, although he has never seen one. If questioned further, his imagination will get the better of him. He will describe them as "black with evil eyes, sharp teeth and fangs, and a thirst for human blood." His children will grow very scared during his description and the youngest will start to cry.

If the characters do not read the notice, you should draw their attention to an identical notice further along the road.

### The Notice

A hand-written notice has been nailed to a tree proclaiming today's interrogation:

#### **PUBLIC EXAMINATION OF THE DEMON BY THE TEMPLE OF LURNESLYE**

*Be it known to all righteous citizens of Lurneslye and surrounding lands, that on the morrow, a public examination of a feathered demon will be held. This foul creature was found not only lurking, but also skulking on the edge of our village, where it plotted to bring pestilence upon us and steal our babes.*

*This abomination cannot be tolerated. When the great temple bell is rung, the trial to demonstrate its guilt will commence. Afterwards, the beast will be cleansed in fire and its ashes sealed into a properly consecrated receptacle.*

*Unless ye are in league with this disgusting, evil creature your attendance is mandatory. Thus all can witness that the monster receives a fair examination.*

*By order of Bernhardt, Chosen of the Temple of Lurneslye*

## 2. Arrival at Lurneslye

The characters will arrive in Lurneslye shortly after Bernhardt begins his public questioning of the aarakocra. The villagers, despite their fear, are in a festive mood, believing that a solution is at hand:

The road rounds the hill, revealing the village ahead. Sounds of merriment and the frantic ringing of a cracked bell are clearly audible. The main street, with its colourful confusion of bright bunting and moving people, stands in stark contrast to the dark sky.

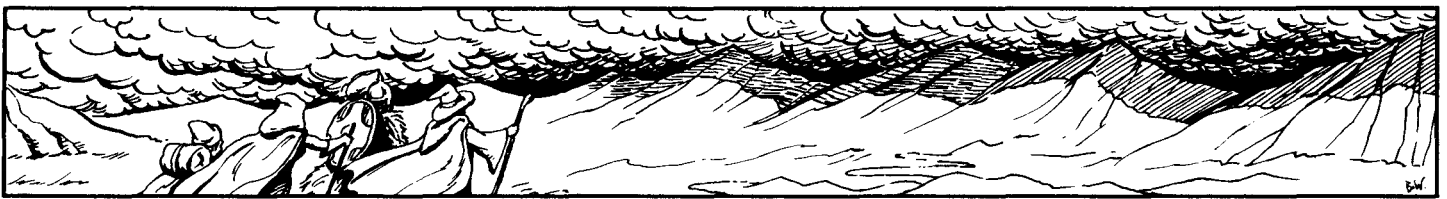
On both sides of the street, tradespeople ply their wares from small booths. Cries of "lucky talismans, guaranteed good luck", and "beautiful ribbons, who will buy my bright ribbons", rise above the noise of the crowd. There are six vendors here, selling trinkets, ribbons, pies, beer, cheese and sweetmeats, all at very reasonable prices — most of the goods on sale are priced at a few copper pieces. Most people are heading down the street to the village square.

### The Square (Map 2)

The middle of the village is filled with excitedly chattering people, who jostle each other for a view of a large wooden platform at one end of the square. Just discernible through the crowd is a large, overweight, red-robed figure standing on the platform by a stout post. He holds up a pair of tongs with bright blue feathers grasped in them and grins broadly. He speaks, but his words are lost in the excited cries of the crowd. A few feet in front of you, a grey-haired old woman screeches, "Pluck its feathers, Bernhardt. Show it, it don't scare us." Bernhardt turns and you briefly glimpse a figure tied to the post. The cleric moves towards it and a cry of agony follows, but is drowned almost immediately by the roar of the crowd.

Bernhardt is ceremoniously plucking Tcho'eh the aarakocra, attended by Penryk and Grunb, two third level clerics, and by Murdoch, the temple's champion (see page 6 and **Map 2**).

The characters will be unable to see any more of the proceedings without securing a better viewpoint for themselves by either elbowing their way through the crowd (2 rounds), or by employing magical means. Shouting from the back of the crowd will not have any effect on the proceedings, as characters will not be heard by those on the platform.



When the characters get a clear view of the platform:

Tied to the pole is a sorry-looking man-like creature, now looking rather like a half-plucked chicken. Around its clawed feet lies a mass of bright blue plumage and tears of agony run down its hooked beak.

Bernhardt moves forward saying, "Now demon, what are you doing here?" With a mighty tug he plucks another feather, much to the crowd's delight. The birdman slumps forward, apparently dead. Grasping it by the beak, Bernhardt savagely pulls back its head. "So you refuse to cooperate, do you?"

#### Asdos Interrupts

After 1d4 rounds, Asdos will intervene in an attempt to stop the "trial", but he will be prevented by a couple of over-zealous crowd members:

A shout of, "Stop this barbarism! Let it go. It has done you no harm." comes from the middle of the crowd. There, an old man in sky blue robes is pushing his way through the mob. Before he gets very far he is dragged to the ground, kicking and screaming by those around him.

Asdos will be left unconscious and bleeding on the ground. He will recover consciousness after 1 round. Unless the adventurers have already gone to his aid, Asdos will soon notice their presence and push through the crowd towards them. After hurriedly introducing himself, Asdos will explain the local custom of trial by combat and suggest that one of the characters champions the aarakocra's cause, "lest a great injustice take place" (see **Trial by Combat** — below).

#### Interrupting the Trial

If the party intervenes, Bernhardt will demand to know who they are. He will accuse the characters of being in league with the 'demon' and will attempt to stir up the 'mob' against them. The crowd will boo and jeer the adventurers but will not attack without good cause.

#### 6 THE DARK SKY (area 3)

Should the party initiate combat or cast offensive spells, the crowd will surge forward and attack until 50 of their number have been killed or incapacitated, at which point they will flee. During combat, the clerics (Bernhardt, Penryk and Grunb) will cast spells from the safety of the platform.

**Penryk and Grunb:** AC 5 (chain mail under red robes); MV 9"; C3; hp 8, 11; #AT 1; D 2-7 (mace); SA/SD Spells; Int Ave; AL LN; Size M; xp 157, 169; THACO 20; PHB.

#### Spells:

First level: **bles**, **detect magic**

Second level: **hold person**

**Crowd (120 villagers):** AC 10; MV 12"; F0; hp 4 each; #AT 1; D 1-4 (dagger) or 1-6 (club); Int Ave; AL N; Size M; xp 9 each; THACO 20\*.

#### Trial by Combat

If pressed, Bernhardt will reluctantly agree to a trial by combat. The rules of the combat are simple: **no magic of any kind is allowed and neither armour nor shield is permitted. Any non-magical weapon may be used. Before the combat begins, a detect magic spell will be cast by one of the clerics on the character's weapon. If it is magical, the character will be given a second chance to comply, and failure to do so will result in the crowd attacking (see above). Opponents fight until either unconscious or dead; an accused character who wins (or whose champion wins) is proved innocent, defeat means the defendant is guilty as charged.**

Having agreed to a trial by combat, Bernhardt will present his champion, Murdoch, and a space will be cleared in the square for the fight to take place.

**Murdoch:** AC 8 (dexterity 16); MV 12"; F5; hp 35; #AT 1; D 2-8 + 5 (broad sword plus strength); S18/91%, I5, W8, D16, C14, Ch8; AL N; Size M; xp 360; THACO 14; PHB.

If Murdoch is defeated, Bernhardt will storm off to his temple and the crowd will slowly disperse. The characters and Asdos will be able to release Tcho'eh and tend to his wounds (see **NPCs - Pull-out Sheet I**) without any interference. Defeat for the character means that only extreme measures can save the aarakocra's life.

#### Tcho'eh's Tale

When rescued, Tcho'eh is badly wounded and weak from ill-treatment. Once tended to, he will recount the following:

"My people live in the Cloudscape Mountains, soaring on the high winds. All was well until the giant came in his castle, turning the clouds black and spitting lightning on our nests. His power is great and we cannot stand before the might of his cloud castle.

"We aarakocra, who normally have no dealings with you people, need aid. Alone, we fear we will be destroyed. Already three of our nests have been laid to waste and even now our chicks go hungry. Come with me to our nest at Tikka-ti-jarra. Our shaman, Kirraka, saw you in a vision and sent me to find you. You are surely the ones of whom he spoke, the ones chosen by the great sky god to save us."

Tcho'eh will tell the party that the first attacks were about three weeks ago, shortly after the sky began to darken. The cloud giant in his castle usually attacks at night, and so far, three nests have been destroyed (these were some miles south of the Scarrabere and are not shown on **Map M**). It is only a matter of time before Tikka-ti-jarra (page 11) is attacked.

If asked, Tcho'eh will promise monetary rewards; the aarakocra have many "large, bright, shiny stones" they could give the party. Should the players be reluctant to accompany him to Tikka-ti-jarra, Tcho'eh will encourage good aligned characters by pointing out how the little chicks are going hungry because the hunters are either returning with no food or are not returning at all. "Think of all the nestlings; they will die without you." If pressed, he will promise great rewards, believing that Kirraka can fulfill this promise.

#### 3. The Shrine of Asdos

After the trial by combat, Asdos will suggest that the adventurers and Tcho'eh journey with him to his shrine (area 3, **Map M**), since it is on the way to the aarakocra nest. If the characters choose to go, the journey to the shrine will be uneventful.

The shrine is a simple stone building set 30 yards from the road. Inside are three rooms; a small area with an altar, a room for travellers to rest for the night, and Asdos' private quarters. Although simple, the shrine is well kept and comfortable.