

5E

RUINS OF  
SYMBAROU

The Throne of Thorns I

WRATH OF THE WARDEN | THE WITCH HAMMER







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RUINS OF  
**SYMBAROUM**  
*The Throne of Thorns I*

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THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and at the dawn of days was Wyrhta, the power that creates.  
Where Nothing had reigned supreme, Wyrhta gave life to All;  
shaped here and there, spawned now and then,  
formed the one and in chorus the other.  
And where attraction arose,  
the wild thrived and multiplied...

... but out of the untamed Wielda appeared, the power that rules:  
the power of willful violence, that bends here and there,  
that curves now and then according to ideals and cravings;  
that harvests the one and rejects the other.  
With time, Wielda's appetite grew,  
and the birth was inevitable...

... because violence begets hate begets Wrath, the power that reacts.  
Born of Wielda's hunger for Wyrhta's design, Wrath is everywhere and nowhere,  
always close where mother meets mother,  
always mounting in strength with the force of the violence.  
The arrival of the black fruit is fated,  
as inescapable as terrible...

... and it happens, has happened, will happen again,  
that Wrath grows boundless, furious, blind in her hunger.  
It happens that the blackness grows flesh and spirit and the sharpest of claws,  
that the fruit sheds seeds that poison the first,  
in the aim to suppress the second.  
Then dies All..."



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# The Fight for...

... the Throne of Thorns begins in Thistle Hold, before moving on to Karvosti, the cliff of the High Chieftain and the Huldra.

It has been said that the town in the shadow of the great forest is like a shielded island located where a foaming ocean breaks against jagged rocks. Ambria, unruly and beset by growing pains, would be the ocean; the unforgiving horrors of Davokar the rocks, and the waves would be the flood of humans fleeing north from despair and misery. Similarly, Karvosti is often described using maritime terms – as a lonely island rising from an ocean of trees.

**THESE ANALOGIES HAVE** their merits, but also reflects a romantic idea that a wooden palisade, steep slopes, and strict regulations can function as an effective shield against the destructive forces of nature. Sure, Thistle Hold and Karvosti are in many ways both safer and less chaotic compared to their surroundings, and they offer comforts which one can only dream of in the wilderness or on the Ambrian countryside. But one should never be duped into believing that the safety and comforts benefit all residents and visitors to the settlements. And, above all, one should never feel confident that serenity is unthreatened.

In this book you will find the two first episodes in the adventure chronicle *The Throne of Thorns*, adapted for play with the 5e OGL ruleset and the *Ruins of Symbaroum* setting books – the *Player's Guide*, *Gamemaster's Guide*, and *Bestiary*. Having access to the supplement *The World of Symbaroum* is not a requirement but its descriptions of Thistle Hold and Karvosti can certainly help the GM make both settlements feel rich and deep. Also, the gaming experience when playing *Wrath of the Warden* and *The Witch Hammer*, will likely be more rewarding if one or two of the players have read parts of the setting book's opening section, *What You See...* This should make them feel more at home in Thistle Hold and on Karvosti, and ready to take the lead in problem-solving situations, without having to hold the Gamemaster's hand at every twist and turn.

Before moving on to the adventures, a few words should be said about the chronicle as a whole. Be warned: it will require quite a lot of reading and preparation, molding the adventures to fit your playstyle, and the goals and competence profile of the group's player characters. But if this does not scare, but rather enthralls you, then you are in for a long, epic, and unforgettable ride!

## Level Expectations

These adventures have been prepared with the expectation that characters embarking on *The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* are of 7th level. It is expected that characters will have explored Ambria and Davokar to some extent, by experiencing some of the adventures already released for *Ruins of Symbaroum* or in the companion to this volume: *The World of Symbaroum*. If this is not the case, we recommend that the group use that material to begin their journey and only turn to the Chronicle once they have some experience. Similarly, if the characters are of higher levels, the Gamemaster will have to adjust the adventures to keep the danger level appropriately high.

## The Throne of Thorns

**THE BARBARIAN LEGEND** recounted on the previous spread gives voice to an allegory describing the basic design of the world. The clanfolk have borne witness to battles between the three principles of the legend, and have again and again been victimized by the fallout of such conflicts. Wyrhta represents Creation, Wielda the willful cultivation of Creation, and Wratha the furious force with which Creation reacts when cultivation extends into exploitation – a phenomenon known as Corruption among Ambrians.

In reality, these principles have no names, no more than they are bound to some bodies or physical forms – they are

not gods. But the principles are none the less real, and over the years countless individuals and creatures have acted as their more or less distinct representations.

*The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns* is an adventure campaign consisting of six episodes, set in a time and place where the power called Wielda is growing in strength, threatening to stir its age-old antagonist, Wratha, into action. What happens in Ambria and Davokar has happened before, in ancient Symbaroum but also in the citystate Lindaros and in the realm of the Dark Lords, once known as Lyastra. One who can gaze even further back in time will find more examples of regions

where Wrath has been fed to the extent that its rage has affected not only the agents Wielda but also Wyrhta's creation, resulting in widespread death and destruction.

All episodes of the chronicle will touch upon what happens as Wielda (and thereby Wrath) mounts in strength, but it will take some time before the player characters understand how to interpret the signs. Even if a majority of the scenarios deal with situations related to the grander scale of events, the players will most likely perceive them as being rooted in conflicts about resources, knowledge, or fame and glory – in short: in the quest for power. It is only during the final episode that they will realize what is at stake and are given an opportunity to influence the course of history.

Another guideline when designing the chronicle has been that the episodes should be created as independent from each other, meaning that the players will not have to play the same characters from start to finish, and also that each episode will have radical but local consequences. Regarding the latter, the individual episodes will only have a marginal effect on the game world at large, so that existing campaign material will not become obsolete but may be of continued use after some small modifications. Of course, the sixth and final episode, aptly called *Davokar Awakens*, differs from the others in this respect: there, the outcome will be world-altering and the player characters' influence great.

Finally, it should be mentioned that *The Throne of Thorns* do not assume that all adventuring parties, or indeed player characters, have the same goals and motivations – there is no obvious arch enemy that must be vanquished, and no ideal or world order that they are required to protect. Instead, the setting of Symbaroum is full of conflicts, between peoples, factions, and individuals, and it is up to the characters to find their place in this world. During the course of the campaign, they will make friends and (in turn) enemies, deliberately or as an effect of the stances they take and what they choose to strive for. And before the end, they will have the knowledge and power to play an integral part in shaping the future of the Davokar region.

The lack of pre-determined incentives means that the chronicle is a bit more demanding for the gaming group, compared to adventures with a more clear-cut plotline. But hopefully the gaming experience will prove more intense and immersive, when the players get to decide what actual role to play in the epic and world-altering saga that is *The Throne of Thorns*.

### WRATH OF THE WARDEN

Aside from a couple of tours into Davokar, the chronicle's first episode will be played in Thistle Hold. The player characters will struggle to identify and combat a cult of darkness worshippers, threatening to bring great suffering down on the town and its residents. As *Wrath of the Warden* is the start of it all, the main design principle has been that the adventure shall introduce the players and their characters to the basic conflicts of the game world; they are meant to get acquainted with the chronicle's main factions, and learn a thing or two about their goals, methods, and internal as well as external struggles. No matter if the characters act

on their own accord or are employed by a quest-giver, they will confront representatives from House Kohinoor, the Iron Pact, the various divisions of the Sun Church, and so on.

### THE WITCH HAMMER

The second episode focuses on Karvosti and its surroundings. The player characters will enter the labyrinthine caverns inside the cliff, but not before they have traveled to several sites in the outer regions of the Forest of Davokar. The main theme of the adventure deals with the escalating conflict between various Ambrian factions, especially between House Kohinoor and the Church of Prios. Another important premise has to do with establishing the importance of the legendary city of Symbar and its equally mythical Throne of Thorns – a premise expressed in the plot of the adventure, designed as the hunt for a person who claims to know where the fabled capital city of Symbaroum can be found.

### WHAT FOLLOWS

This book will be followed by two more, each featuring two episodes of the chronicle. The second one first takes the player characters from Yndaros to a stone ship in the Yonderworld where they will discover the true location of the ruined city of Symbar; then, in the fourth episode, they will actually (hopefully) reach the legendary capital of the Symbarian empire, and get to explore it in competition with hunting parties from several other factions and organizations.

In the third and final book, the fifth episode will see the player characters (and some foul rivals) travel to the lost realm of Alberetor, in search of an artifact that can make it possible to wield the awesome power of the Symbarian high seat. As they return, they find that the final hunt for the Throne of Thorns will rage through an awakened Forest of Davokar, full of famished abominations and undead. During the journey, they must decide what to do if and when they make it back to Symbar – fight to claim the prize for themselves, help someone else ascend the throne, or try to destroy the high seat by cutting it off from its power source in the Yonderworld. Whatever they decide, whatever they do, their choices and actions will greatly impact the future of the region.

If you want a bit more information about the chronicle's episodes and main factions, you are welcome to download the PDF *Throne of Thorns – Campaign Overview* from the Free League Symbaroum page ([www.freeleaguepublishing.com](http://www.freeleaguepublishing.com)).

### Gamemaster Material

Two documents entitled *GM resource – Wrath of the Warden* and *GM resource – the Witch Hammer* are available for free download at Free League's Symbaroum page ([www.freeleaguepublishing.com](http://www.freeleaguepublishing.com)). In them you will find all portraits, maps, and handouts included in this book – to be printed or, of course, viewed on electronic screens.



HE RAIN BEATS down on the Toad's Square and dawn comes creeping like a barely noticeable shift behind heavy skies. Autumn has arrived in Narugor and in Thistle Hold. It is a time for the successful to sit back and wait for more favorable traveling weather; a time for the families of the diseased to fear the hardships to come; a time for the desperate to make a final attempt – in other words, a typical autumn among those living in the shadow of Davokar.

But despite everything being as usual, the past few days have been characterized by a strangely subdued, almost sinister atmosphere. Everyone feels it, even the successful ones who should have no worries in the world – a lump in the throat, a fiery ache in the belly. Most keep the feeling to themselves, thinking it is caused by the shifting weather. The rest say a few words to their neighbor, friend or lover but let it rest once they have been assured that everything is alright.

The only person who seems to take the sensation seriously is crazy Toruld, standing drenched outside the Salons of Symbaroum, raving about her nightly dream visions, about a recurring bellowing which is drowned out by the roar of the wind and the hammering rains. But just as the town starts to wake, she too is silenced, by four guards of the Town Watch dragging her away to the Penitentiary, accused of public disturbance.

All goes silent. All is still. Everyone awakes to a new day, with a lump in the throat and a fiery ache in the belly..



# Wrath of the Warden

Sample file

# Introduction

With these words it begins – *The Chronicle of the Throne of Thorns*. Our hope is that it will offer a thrilling and engaging experience, but one which may differ a lot between different gaming groups in both structure and content. Sure, there is an overall intrigue and a theme that will be commonly experienced, also a number of scenes and sequences which most player characters will encounter. But large parts of the adventure are so open in structure and design that the players and their characters have the freedom to handle them in very different ways, depending on their individual goals and alliances.

**THIS FIRST EPISODE**, *Wrath of the Warden*, describes events which will have long term effects on the town of Thistle Hold. However, the idea behind the design and content is mainly to introduce the players and their characters to the chronicle's themes, areas of conflict, and prominent agents. Aside from partaking in and contributing to a dramatic, action-packed story, the players will get to learn about many power factions and begin to understand what they are striving for – for instance House Kohinoor's ambition to fulfill Sarkomal's prophecy, the Sun Church's aim to turn Ambria into a theocracy of the Sun, and the Templars' furious struggle to avenge their dead deity.

And if you for a second lower your eyes from the grander scale of events, you will see that *Wrath of the Warden* is a fairly straight forward adventure, primarily dealing with the hunt for the identity of a diseased quest-giver, and the subsequent showdown with a group of local cultists in Thistle Hold. Hence, the idea is that the insights mentioned in the

previous paragraph will be made while the player characters are occupied dealing with a series of very specific challenges in and outside of town – challenges related to the mutilation of a now dying forest god...

The adventure is made up of five chapters. The first accounts for the intrigue and its background; it also offers a general idea of how the adventure may play out and presents suggestions on how the characters may become involved in the story. After that are three chapters describing the acts of the adventure: a first act with scenes following more or less in sequence; a second act with a very open structure; and the third act including the culmination of the story.

The final chapter of *Wrath of the Warden* deals with what happens in the wake of the adventure and offers ideas on various interludes – that is, adventures and other activities which may occupy the characters before starting with the next episode.

## Background

**IN THISTLE HOLD** there are a handful of groups that deserve to be called cults. The members of these may be more or less fanatical but are all of the conviction that Corruption is not all bad. On the contrary, they regard it as something to make use of instead of something to fear.

*Wrath of the Warden* is about what happens when one such cult is lured (or tricked) into contributing to exploring the darkness of the world. They call themselves the Midnight Cult, are led by the antique dealer Erlaber and include the ogre witch Manaloum, the wizard Desidera, the changelings Klagander and Sibela, and the youngling Gardai, Erlaber's servant. Aside from Erlaber, the cult members are described in the scenes in Act III where the player characters are likely to face them (pages 96–97).

The aim of the cult is naturally to grow in strength and gain greater influence thanks to their powerful benefactor.

But things will not turn out as they hoped, no matter whether the player characters thwart their plans or if they are forced to realize that what was presented to them as a gift instead was predestined to become their doom.

### Erlaber Ambreagos

*“The future is dark, and it is mine.”*

Erlaber is the sole survivor of a lesser but still noble house who ruled a barony bordering the realm of the Dark Lords. His father, Baron Oramei Haaras, saw the enemy mount in strength and eventually began to study the practices which gave them such power. When the attack came, Oramei immediately surrendered and was welcomed into the dark fellowship of the Lords. But when that happened, the six-year old Erlaber had already been forced to leave the residence, by his older brother Herek. They barely survived the war