



ANARYA'S SECRET
AN EARTHDAWN NOVEL BY TIM JONES

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Sample file

To Kay, who's always wanted me
to write a fantasy novel.



With thanks to everyone from RedBrick and the Earthdawn community who has helped to bring this novel to fruition and educate me in the ways of Barsaive, but in particular to Richard Vowles for getting in touch to initiate the project, James Flowers for guiding it to completion, and Carsten Damm, whose patience, helpful suggestions, encyclopedic knowledge of Earthdawn—and team of eagle-eyed helpers—have been invaluable in the creation of this novel. And, finally, to Nigel D. Findley, now sadly deceased, whose Shadowrun novels first got me interested in the Shadowrun/Earthdawn universe.

The Age of Legend



Before science, before history, an era of magic existed in our world's dim past. Magic flowed freely, touching every aspect of the lives of men and women of the Name-giver races. It was an age of heroes, an age of fantastical deeds and mythical stories. It was the Age of Legend.



As the levels of magic rose, so did the dangers in the world. The rise of magic lured the Horrors from the depths of astral space—nightmarish creatures that devoured all life in their path. For four centuries, entire nations hid underground as the Horrors devastated their lands during the dark time that came to be called the Scourge.





During the past century, the people of Barsaive have emerged from their sealed kaers and citadels. Trolls, dwarfs, elves, orks, and humans live side by side with exotic races: the lizard-like t'skrang, the small, winged windlings, and the earthen obsidimen. Fantastical creatures dwell once more in the forests and jungles. Arcane energies offer power to those willing to learn the ways of magic.



In the Age of Legend, bold heroes from all across Barsaive band together—ready to fight for life and freedom against the remaining Horrors and the oppressive Theran Empire, which seeks to bend the rebellious province again to their yoke. Through noble deeds and sacrifice, the heroes of the world forge Barsaive's future, arming themselves for their daunting task with powerful magical spells and treasures.



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PROLOGUE



We all have to eat.

Anarya grew up in a community sliding down the long slope to extinction. She played with toys handed down through the generations, and followed her parents from plaza to farm, from farm to market stall, from market stall to plaza, without wondering why there were so few other children, or why the lights were dim, or why so much of her world was shadow and silence. And as for the sun and the sky, she never thought of them, for she had never seen them.

Fifteen generations ago, the ancestors of her ancestors lived in the fertile valley of the river then known as the Volost, which rose on the northern flank of the Tylon Mountains. There they farmed, and sometimes fought. They traded with the human communities of the Tylon and the t'skrang of the Serpent River, and did not give undue thought to the future.

Then emissaries from the Theran Empire came among them and told them of the coming Scourge: the time when the magical potential of the world would be so great that Horrors from other dimensions would be able to enter and ravage it, devouring bodies, devouring minds. The people of the Volost took a lot of persuasion, but the Therans were persistent; and as the years went by, even farmers who never stirred from their soil could no longer deny the reports that reached them from north and south, of terrible things gathering at the margins of the inhabited lands, and breaking through to wreak havoc on the innocent and the ill prepared.

So the elders of the villages along the Volost swallowed their pride and began the construction of Kaer Volost within the mountains at the valley's head. They paid a high price in coin and freedom, but they built well, hewing as closely as possible to the Theran plan; and when the time came, they retreated behind their orichalcum doors and prepared to wait out the Scourge deep within the rock.

The doors and the barriers, both magical and physical, held against the worst that came to their world. Even as their valley was turned from fertile earth to Horror-haunted wasteland, its people survived deep within the kaer, and recounted their history in the plaza at night, comforting themselves with the hope that, though they would never again see the sun themselves, their far, far descendants would once more walk free on the surface.

But if Kaer Volost was a refuge, it was also a prison: a prison for the souls of the old, living out their days in a growing darkness, and a greater prison for the souls of the young, trapped in a cage they could not escape.

For the first ten generations after the doors were sealed it was, at least, a well-lit and well-provisioned prison. Using natural water and magical light, the people could grow all the food they needed, and though their skins became deathly pale from the absence of sunlight, and their bones were unduly prone to breaking, in most respects they were healthy enough in body.

Then the magic began to fade. Who can say why? It may be that a little knowledge was lost as each generation of magicians and adepts passed on its learning to its successors, until some irrecoverable threshold was crossed. It may be that the loss of magic within the kaer was connected with the loss of magic in the world outside, for it was at this time that the kaer's elemental clock first showed movement. The ball of True earth, suspended above its dish of True water, began, infinitesimally, to fall. The closer it got to the water, the less