

Campaign Background

Dennis' "Secrets Born in Shadows" Campaign

General Notes

This campaign is set in the year 735 BC, at the time of the original "Black Box" set for Ravenloft. The PC's are all natives to the demiplane. The over-all story arc of the campaign is my version of events that lead up to the "Time of Unparalleled Darkness." The story will be as close to canon as possible, with my own twists and ideas sprinkled throughout. The group will be put through the "Grand Conjunction" and "Grim Harvest" series. It's very epic in scope, and deals with the eventual, ultimate battle between good and evil.

In this campaign I will eventually answer the question of who the dark powers really are and what the purpose was in the creation of the Demiplane of Dread. Of course, these interpretations are where the story becomes "non-canon." However, for the time being, let's just say that I'm using many of the ideas that were created in the book "Lord of the Necropolis" by Gene DeWeese. I am attempting to take the players throughout the timeline of Ravenloft and see it all the way through to the end of days...or is that really the end? Time will tell. Please note, that for the time being, this campaign is still going strong and we are still using the AD&D Second Edition rules.

PC Descriptions

Robyn Linley

Robyn hails from the small town of Maykle, Darkon. His father is a peaceful farmer, who earns his living working the family's fields and crops. His mother is one of a handful of acolytes to the nearby temple of "The Eternal Order." Robyn is a loyal follower of the state religion. Robyn grew strong in body by helping his father on the farm and spiritually by his mother's religious teachings. However, Robyn chose to walk the path of the warrior, having been trained in basic weapons and combat skills by his grandfather. Growing up, Robyn was fascinated by his grandfather's outlandish tales. The old man claimed to have once come from an Outlander world called "Toril," where in the Kingdom of Cormyr, he was a valiant knight in the order known as "The Purple Dragons." It was years ago, during one such mission, that his grandfather was on the trail of a horrible beast that was terrorizing the countryside. He chased the beast into a thick patch of mist and mysteriously found himself in this strange new land called Darkon. After months of failing to track down this creature, Robyn's grandfather began to settle down and make a new life for himself. Eventually he met and wed a local woman and they started a simple, but happy life. Later in life, the older Linley would get confused, his tales would change in subtle ways, here and there. Towards the end, Robyn's grandfather's stories became muddled. He

couldn't remember much of this "old world," and he claimed many of his valiant deeds were done here in Darkon, at the service of King Azlin. Most of the family never believed his "outlander" tales to begin with, and thought of him as a harmless eccentric. Robyn was the only family member to actually believe his grandfather. Indeed, Robyn himself felt restless and wanting more than what was here in this small town. As the campaign opens, Robyn's grandfather has just passed away. On his deathbed, the old man seemed to be quite lucid as he clutched at Robyn and told him he was beginning to remember. He told his grandson that he really was not from this world, that this place played tricks with his mind. Curiously, over the past few nights, Robyn had been having strange nightmares. His dreams seem harmless, yet they cause great fear within him. His grandfather asked Robyn to tell of his dreams. In them, Robyn sees a lone candle in the darkness, and as he approaches it, he notices that the darkness around the candle is alive, full of hatred and evil. Suddenly, the candle is blown out and an evil, horrid laughing fills the air, and chills Robyn to the bone, so much so that he ends up screaming and waking himself up, drenched in sweat. His grandfather, seeming to make a certain connection, made Robyn swear that on his death, he would venture to the capital city of Il Aluk and meet with his aunt Miriam, who was a teacher of history and folklore at the great university there. Robyn promised to do so. Now the young fighter has set out for Il Aluk and his destiny, once the funeral rites had been preformed.

Sara Cuse

Sara comes from the small, fishing village of Prescott Cove, in southern Mordent. Her family earns a simple, but comfortable life as fisherman, and Sara grew up in a very happy and loving home. As a child, Sara found that she had a special gift, something no one else could do. Sara "knew" things. She had little "daydreams" and in them, she would see and hear things she knew nothing about. As she got older, these dreams or "visions" became clearer, more stronger in message and scope. It was after one such horrible dream that Sara begged her father not to go out fishing, for she saw a terrible storm that would wreck his boat. The girl was so persuasive that her father stayed home that day, and his life was spared. Many of his fellow villagers were not so lucky that day. It was after this incident that Sara's parents realized she had the gift of "precognition." Her mother warned Sara that this was indeed a blessing, but many people would not see it that way. Too many mystics and seers were burned as witches, or worse in this world. The young girl was taught to keep her gift secret as she struggled to learn how to use and control it. Sara was also very intelligent, and she learned to read and write and spent most of her free time in academic pursuits. It was no surprise then, that Sara began to dabble in the arcane arts as she tried to learn more about her special "powers." In addition, Sara and her family were deeply religious and were devout members of the Church of Ezra in Mordent. In fact, an uncle of hers had become a wandering anchorite and had just established a small chapel in Karg, Darkon. Darkon had not yet embraced the teachings of

Ezra, and her uncle had hoped to plant the seeds of devotion in the domains citizens. As our campaign opens, Sara has been having terrible visions of her uncle, she has seen fire and death and she's worried. Her family hasn't heard from her uncle in about a year. In addition, Sara longs to go out into the world and see if there are others like her with her special talents. With her parents blessings, she sets out for Karg, hoping that her visions do not bode ill for her uncle. Meanwhile, on the journey to Darkon, Sara had another vision. This one from a beautiful raven-haired woman who came out of the Mists and spoke to her. Sara was convinced this vision was Ezra herself. Ezra told her that she was about to take her first steps on a journey that was very important. Indeed, she would be meeting up with others who had special gifts and were "chosen" of the gods. Sara was to be the protector of a man in who's fate, the world's destiny rested. She was to be his guardian as well as advisor. Ezra had chosen her for this task and it was because of this, that the goddess had bestowed her "gift" of "sight" to Sara. Of course, Sara readily agreed. And so Sara journeyed onward towards destiny and an unknown fate.

Natasha Batenoff

Natasha was born somewhere in the wilds of Kartakass, to a member of the wandering Batenoff gypsy tribe. Currently, the tribe is made up of 30 family members, with Natasha's grandmother, Ireena, as it's leader. Contrary to what many people in the dark domains think, the Batenoff's are NOT members of any of the Vistani tribes. Though the family bears these tribes no malice, the Vistani themselves seem to look down upon these so-called, "gypsies." Despite the sometimes harsh and wandering life of the tribe, Natasha had a very happy childhood, with no regrets. The only hardship that Natasha had to endure was a special talent that her grandmother was able to discern when she was 9 years old. It seems that Natasha's "imaginary playmates," turned out to be actual lost souls in torment. Ireena concluded that Natasha was gifted (or cursed) with the powers of a "Ghost Watcher." Many souls, some good, some indifferent, and a few terrifying, drifted in and out of the young girls life. Ireena taught her granddaughter how to handle these troubled souls and over the years, Natasha was able to help many of them fulfill their final wishes before moving on. Others were more troublesome, sometimes forcing the tribe into fierce fights and sometimes forcing them to move on somewhere else. In addition, last year (734 BC), the tribe took up residence in Mordent. There Natasha met a traveling bard named Stewart. The pair was attracted to each other's wandering lifestyle and soon became friends. It seemed that Stewart had been shipwrecked off the coasts of Mordentshire and set up a small musical instrument shop in the town. He was making a small name for himself, but he was also growing restless. During the few months the tribe stayed in Mordent, Natasha and Stewarts friendship turned into romance. In fact, the pair were planning on running away together, however, something odd happened that Natasha still has no answer to. Stewart has disappeared. The last time Natasha saw him was on the afternoon of the night

they were to run off together. Stewart had just finished work on a custom made set of bagpipes for a unknown client. The bard told Natasha that the commission he was getting could set them up for life. He was to meet with his client, hand over the bagpipes and with the money made, close his shop for good and set out on the road to romance and adventure with his gypsy lover. However, that night, Stewart failed to turn up at their chosen meeting place. In addition, over the next few days, Natasha searched for word of the bard, but he seemed to vanish. Stealing into his closed shop, Natasha found no trace of the bard, except for an odd piece of piping that rolled behind the counter. It looked like no pipe or material that Natasha had seen before, but she kept it. The only clue to Stewart that she had. Unfortunately, time was running out and the tribe was moving on. Natasha still hopes to someday find her lost love or at least learn of what has happened to him. Recently, the tribe has wandered into the domain of Darkon. During a few "readings" and other "sessions" with the more superstitious peasants in the realm, Natasha has found that her "ghost watching" powers are becoming a bother. In fact, the last session ended horribly with a ghost almost attacking the gypsy's client. In fact, it was during the horrible fight with the spirit that Natasha lost her prized crystal ball. Needless to say, talk of evil spirits within the tribe has lead to less and less people coming for "readings." Not only is it costing the tribe income, word of mouth was traveling ahead of them and many villages and towns have chased the tribe away. Feeling guilty, Natasha has decided to leave the tribe before she causes worse problems. As luck would have it, the city of Karg is hosting a brewery festival and the crowds attending should be full of gullable souls with fat change purses. This is the start of a new life for Natasha and she hopes to use her small divinational powers to help her support herself, as well as learn how to control her "gift." She is also planning to find out what really happened to the one love in her life. Time will tell if she succeeds.

DENNIS' SECRETS BORN IN SHADOWS CAMPAIGN

First Sessions

DM Notes: We started the campaign with only the three PC's detailed in my first log. We're a small group and I was planning on starting the campaign from 1st level. A daunting task, but as you'll see, the first few adventures focus more on detective and puzzle solving than strong combat. I had each player create their characters with only myself present. Then we talked about the direction they wanted their characters to take and I jotted down a lot of information/notes to myself that I have been able to use in later games. So after 3 solo sessions creating the PC's, I then played out a series of 3 solo games, one for each of the characters, so that the players would be able to get a handle on their characters before all 3 met for the first game. As a gaming "in joke," our first official game as a group was the standard "all the PC's meet together at an inn." However, the solo games showed each player how their PC arrived at the inn, as well as giving each player their own agendas. It was a lot more work, but well worth it in the end. Also note, my players take really bad notes, so most of my campaign journal will be told as a summary from my own notes. I hope you enjoy and that it inspires some of you out there.

Robyn's First Session

735 BC -- Karg, Darkon

Robyn Linely, having just buried his grandfather a few days earlier, sets out from his modest home in Maykle, heading west to the capital city of Il Aluk. After a few hours of uneventful travel, Robyn enters the city of Karg. Unknown to Robyn, the city is hosting it's annual "Brewery Festival." Karg has 4 breweries, which give the city it's claim to fame, (not to mention the smells that fill the air). Curiously, each brewery is owned by a different race. There is the human "Golden Harvest" brewery, the Dwarven "Tankard Cracker" company, the elven "Spring Mist" ltd, and the halfling "Short-Tap" brewery. Robyn spends most of the day enjoying the sites and sounds of the festival.

DM Notes: As you can see, I enjoy a light touch with names and events. I feel it's the perfect contrast, before the horror and terror of any RL story takes hold. Also, I based my version of Karg on the small blurb it got in *Requiem: The Grim Harvest* boxed set, in the book "Necropolis." I created the look and feel of the city based on this, as at the time the Gazetteer series had not yet been published. I knew that facts would change but I stuck with what I had at the time and it turned out quite well.

At some point in the day, Robyn makes a point of seeking out the famed "Church of the Sorrowful Dead," as this great chapel is the second largest of the eternal order, outside of the temple in Nartok. Robyn wishes to pay his respects and pray for a speedy and safe trip to Il Aluk. Outside the church, one of the priests is preaching his "hellfire and damnation" speech, publicly declaring the festival to be unholy. The citizens of Karg should be supplicating themselves at the church, not indulging in this debauchery, as the festival happens to fall on one of the high holy days of the Eternal Order. No one seems to pay him any mind. As Robyn listens to the sermon, a commotion breaks out in the temple. Another priest bursts outside and declares that a holy relic has been stolen. He begs for help and Robyn answers the call.

DM Notes: I used the floor plan from the Kargatane hide-out/headquarters, in the secret societies section, from the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set as the basis for the church. This church has a special basement viewing section that all worshippers can view from above in the main chapel. Looking down from a railing, viewers can see a table of arcane items that the church has collected, with the intention of destroying the lesser magical items to keep them out of the hands of the dead. If

the items are too powerful, they are sent via Kargat agents to King Azlin himself, who destroys them and keeps the innocent safe. Or at least, that's what the faithful are told.

Robyn is taken to the viewing area, where the church keeps these "unholy" items. Apparently an item known as "The Dark Eye" amulet was taken from the collection. A thief, disguised as a member of the clergy, (full length gray robe, face painted with ashen make-up), has stolen this artifact. The amulet has a tragic history and even the priests are not certain of its true powers. The tale goes that a Dwarven clan from Tempe Falls had fallen on hard times. Their mines "dried up," and slowly, the clan members became more and more desperate. If they didn't do something drastic, the clan would die out. One member decided on a bold move. All the dwarves had heard tales of the mysterious land of Arak. The rumors told of so called "evil elves" that slaughtered anyone foolish enough to trespass on their lands. However, it was also said that they lived beneath the ground in caverns full of wealth and riches. The clan leaders thought this over and realized here was an entire domain ripe for the taking. How bad could these so-called elves be? They were dwarves, masters of the underground. They would make short work of these elves and build new mines, the likes of which the other clans had never seen. So after a quick clan council meeting, the entire clan moved across the mountains and into Arak, eventually beginning to dig a new mine.

No one knows exactly what happened. But within just a few short weeks, only one dwarf from the clan returned to Tempe Falls. He clutched a dark, uncut black onyx stone in his hand. He was battered, bruised, clinging to life. The healers did what they could, but the dwarf remained in a catatonic state. He wouldn't let go of the stone and he kept muttering about the "evil elves," how they came right out of the shadows, indeed they seemed to be a part of that darkness. Eventually the clan leaders were able to piece together a jumbled tale of how these elves slaughtered the entire clan, leaving this one lost soul as a warning. Not being able to help their brother, the dwarves sent the lost one to live out the rest of his days at the Asylum in Maykle. As a tribute, they gave the black onyx stone (after prying it from the dwarf's hands) to his best friend, a gnome very well skilled in the art of gem cutting. The gnome had listened to his friend's insane babbling. After hearing about how "the stone was like the shadows that the elf's came from. They could manipulate shadow and even see and hear through it." So the gnome fashioned the gem into the shape of an eye, and with fellow craftsmen he fashioned the eye into an amulet, which would eventually become "The Dark Eye." The gnome fell on hard times and had to sell off this trinket. The rumors surrounding the amulet say that the eye has passed through many hands, each time bringing ill fortune to all its owners. Eventually the Eternal Order was able to "acquire" it and up until now have kept it safe. However, the commotion of the festival has made it easier for the thief to steal it. The temple is outraged, and worried. For tonight is the high holy day when the clergy will attempt to destroy their evil collection for the betterment of the citizens of Darkon. If they can't do this, then it will be sent to King Azlin for study and eventual destruction.

Robyn agrees to investigate, and begins looking for clues. Using his tracking and observation skills, Robyn is able to follow the thief's trail out of the church. In the streets, Robyn encounters a Vistani tribe that offers him help with a Tarokka reading. The reading surmises that Robyn has more to him than meets the "eye." Pun definitely intended. They hint at the fact that Robyn's nightmares stem from something deeper and that he is about to start the first steps on a long journey. One that will take him to every domain of the Lands of the Mists, and end up with him deciding the fate of the world! Of course, they give very little clues as to his present predicament. Robyn thanks them and carries on.

Later, after Robyn has many other encounters with local citizens and enjoys the many delights of the festival, he runs into a mime. Using pantomime, the mime at first a comical, if not annoying creature, begins to show Robyn that he's seen the thief and knows his general direction. The mime also, having nearly been run down by the cloaked figure, became insulted and picked the person's pocket. He presents Robyn with a key. It has a number on it. Robyn thanks the mime and hurries off to a local locksmith. He eventually learns that the key is an inn key and by the design, the locksmith is sure that it's from the "Laughing Corpse" Inn, in the seedier part of town. Robyn heads off to the inn, with the key in hand. He is intent on gaining access to the room that the key opens. However, little does Robyn know, that fate is paving the

way for others to arrive at the same inn. Others who will be important in Robyn's future travels.

DM Notes: I used the Vistani fortune telling scene to hint at the bigger campaign plots to come. The mime was something I threw in as a lark, but the exchange between Robyn's player and myself (who never spoke a word), actually turned into a great roleplaying session. It forced Robyn's player to not give in so easy, as here was a person that could help him, which he did. I named the Inn "The Laughing Corpse," based on one of the Anita Blake vampire hunter novels by Laurel K. Hamilton. So now this was how Robyn came to the Inn. Meanwhile, my other two players would have their own games, bringing them also to the Inn BEFORE Robyn's arrival.