

EVERWAY SCENARIO 6: THE TELLING OF TALES

Plot Logistics

Heroes get to know Wormwood a little better and find out about Everway, especially the politics.

Meet the Basahn - Slight encounters his sister. She directs him to Urumora, who gives him a Lizard Pyramid to take to Cunning.

What's in the Pyramid? Some information that Urumora has discovered on her travels (she is a Founder and therefore an ally of Cunning). What is Cunning interested in? He wants to create a new sphere. He has studied the legends of Spheremaker and knows that the Edge of Light and Darkness, the Book and the Pearl of Making are required, as well as distilled essences of Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Which of these could Urumora have found something out about?

1. The Edge - perhaps she talked to a Returner Basahn who knew how Earthshaker was destroyed. Like it - but is it plausible that it has taken 70 years for the Founders to figure this out? Only if the Founders have no interest in what the Returners are up to. No - Cunning is investigating this in Everway.
2. The Book - Urumora could have discovered that Shadow had it but has passed it on to a spherewalker. How? Don't think this one works.
3. The Pearl - who has this? Shadow would have nicked it from Spheremaker's lair along with the Edge and the Book. Redfox stole it from Shadow along with the Edge (Shadow foolishly kept them together). The Twelve have it now, a fact of which Shadow must be aware having read the accounts of the Transcendence of the Twelve. The Pearl is in a secret room in the Library of All Worlds - Cunning hasn't been able to track it down yet.
4. Something directly germane to the heroes - the general location of Shadow's lair. Like this one - Urumora would be strongly motivated, and she would have been prevented from finding out more by the White Scorpion tribes in the surrounding realms and / or the effects of the Mist itself.

Some tales are told that may be of relevance to future plot developments.

Possibly meet some fellow travellers, one of whom sends a message ahead that Wormwood is coming... Either that, or heroes get delayed at gate. Or a local in Tales. Yes! One of the scholars in the Repository of Dead Tales is a member of the Scratch family (call her Quill), who is an old friend of Wormwood's. I like the idea of Wormwood being betrayed by someone he trusts. So - why and how does she do it? Why - because she is a member of the Twelve, searching through all the tales for evidence of avatars and how they are made. How - she sends a runner (I also like the idea of a recall spell provided by Ulrich - say an undead bat - but this implies that he can do magic that can pass through gates. This would need a trapped avatar.). Who is the runner? A youth - *Inkhand* - who is a Shadow Child. The heroes will encounter him again in Everway if they should visit the Scratch family.

What tales could be told?

The Edge of Light and Darkness

The Wall of Odin

The Daring Kingdom - the Legion of Shadows, the Kingmaster, the Mirror of Shadows, Apex Soulsinger and the Tempest Threshold.

The Mother Statue.

The Journey to Tales

The journey to Tales takes about a week. The path follows the base of an almost unclimbable cliff (Fire 6 needed) which runs to the northwest.

By default, the weather is generally dry and calm, but gets progressively colder and greyer as the heroes travel further north. *Fortune card* for the last three days.

The Telling of Tales

The path runs across sand, gravel, shingle and large rocks. Occasionally, a headland juts straight out into the sea and the path follows a cleft cut into the side of the cliff itself. Habitation are scarce as there is virtually no land to build on. On the first, third and fourth day, however, the heroes can find a fisherman's hut (the fisherman is called *Narrow* and remembers Wormwood), an egg collector's hut high up on a ledge (occupied by a harmless lunatic called *Guillemot* who is looking for the "one egg" that was laid by "the great auk" to save the world. He stinks to high heaven as he smears himself in guano so that he can creep up on the nesting sea birds without being mobbed), and the tiny fishing hamlet of *Rockharbour* (which, as its name suggests, consists of a rocky cove with small huts nestling in the shelter of huge rocks. If the heroes befriend the locals (who, of course, are missing the regular caravans from Plenty), they set up a fish barbecue on the rocks).

In the afternoon of the third day, the heroes come to a place where the path has been washed away altogether. They can either wait until the tide goes out or attempt to set up a rope bridge across the crashing waves (level 3 Fire, level 3 Water needed, modified by Fortune card).

Food is difficult to come by. The heroes can try fishing, or catching sea birds, or stealing their eggs.

On the sixth day, the path turns inland following a wide river (the *Fable*). The heroes can stay overnight at a small village called *Parable*, from which it is less than a day's journey to *Storyhome*.

The Realm of Tales

A land where storytelling is considered the highest art form, and storytellers are found on every corner.

Virtue: The Eagle (Mind Prevails)

The people of Tales are by nature extremely articulate. This allows them to solve problems by clearly describing them. They also have a wealth of folk wisdom to draw on.

Fault: Fish rev (Shallowness)

The people tend to reduce complex moral choice to trite sayings or simplistic parables. They make inappropriate comparisons and use stories rather than intuiting the situation for themselves.

Fate: The Hermit (Wisdom/Isolation)

If faced with a threat to their realm, will the people react with wisdom, or isolate themselves in a world of stories?

Usurper: The Father of Stories (Reality/Fantasy)

The Land

Wild and cool but fertile, mostly covered in light scrub and sparse woodland. It is cold at night - ideal for sitting round a fire and telling stories. Villages tend to be small and sparse.

Rule

Such central governance as there is comes from the *Arbiters*, a group of senior storytellers who judge the annual competition for the best tale. Villages and towns are largely autonomous, holding their own tale contests to determine their leaders. The law (such as it is) relates largely to matters concerned with the stealing of tales or misunderstandings arising when the worth of a tale goes unappreciated by its auditor.

Religion

The dominant viewpoint in Tales is that "life is a story in which nothing should ever happen". Many religions, particularly of an ascetic bent, can be found here, but it is difficult to get the people to take any religion at more than metaphorical value. The only native religion is based around a vaguely benevolent deity called the Father of Stories.

People

Fair-skinned, red-cheeked and dark haired, they tend to plumpness (baldness in the men). Simple brown robes and practical grey trews are worn by both sexes, bound at the waist with rope. Brown pointed woolly hats are worn for outdoor work. Flashy clothes are frowned on

since for storytelling, it is the story which counts and not the teller.

Economy

Essentially an agrarian economy, its chief unusual feature is the use of stories as a form of currency. A person can buy anything they want if they tell a story that the vendor hasn't heard. The value of the story is somewhat subjective, but usually correlates with its length. A shaggy dog story (a minute to five minutes) will buy a loaf or a flagon of beer, an epic will buy a house (the workmen work by the day and don't turn up the next day if they don't like the story). This can make shopping a lengthy experience. Alternatively, simple barter may be used - but the townsfolk drive a hard bargain. One rather pleasant feature of this arrangement is that almost nobody is poor, since even the most destitute can think up something that will get them a crust of bread. A slightly less pleasant result is that it is almost impossible to move in Storyhome for importunate storytellers shouting in your ear.

War

It is possible that earlier in their history the people of Tales may have warred with one another, but this is quite impossible to disentangle from the mass of legends and myths surrounding great fighters. There are several stories of attempted invasions from Everway - including one in which an Amazon army spirits off the men for breeding purposes and another in which the invading army is demoralised by storytellers disguising themselves as enemy troops and telling licentious tales about their commanders.

Magic

Magic to do with words is immensely effective in Tales, but there is no native magic.

Technology

Standard mediaeval peasant. Paper-making and printing is an advanced though despised technology.

Learning

The people of Tales have an enormous accumulated folk-wisdom from the stories they have told and re-told down the years, but a somewhat shaky sense of history. There are some strange individuals who collect dead stories on paper, but these are generally regarded as somewhat eccentric.

Domesticated Animals

Big heavy oxen, chickens, pigs, sheep, cows, cats, dogs, horses. Animals tend to be large and shaggy.

Common Foods

Breads, pastries and pies are common and good. Potatoes are the staple diet.

Outsider Contact

The people are quite used to contact with sphere walkers because of the gate to Everway. There are two other gates:

1. One is high up in the mountains to the north, but to reach it is an arduous trek across high mountains and over glaciers. It leads to a realm called *Mist Dew*, a swampy land inhabited by strange wraith-like creatures. Mist Dew itself is a stepping stone to the Glorious Empire, but not the most direct route.
2. The other is three days trek to the east over a bleak moor. It leads to *Remnant*, where a motley collection of happy people live, all survivors of sphere-destroying wars. It is also one of the places where the Basahn gather.

Storyhome

A small city located on the banks of the Fable river. Buildings are pale grey stone with dark wooden beams. Roofs are red tile and steeply pointed.

Chief sites of interest -

The Masterteller's Palace - a grand building where the Masterteller (winner of the

annual storyteller's competition) lives during his year in office.

Teller's Square - an enormous open market place located by the Masterteller's palace. The centre is adorned by a statue of a man looking remarkably like Rathgard. Some people say that he is the founder of Storyhome, others that he is a great general who saved the people, others that he was a priest who sacrificed himself to save the realm, others that he is *Epic*, the greatest storyteller ever known. At night, dozens of small fires are lit in shallow square pits for the people to tell stories around (*Story Circles*) and food and drink sellers ply the trade around the edges. The ashes are swept away every morning by the owner of the fire.

The Teller's Amphitheatre - a stone amphitheatre with wonderful accoustics, built into the side of a nearby hill. Can seat the entire population of Storyhome.

The Gate to Everway - a horizontal glowing doorway situated in a pool to the north of the city. The pool is walled and the sides have been richly carved in friezes depicting famous events in Everway history. Steps lead down to the gate - the water is very cold. It is guarded but somewhat laxly, mainly to stop Basahni from trying to enter Everway.

The Arbiters' Judgement Hall - on the opposite side of Teller's Square from the MasterTeller's palace.

The Temple of the Father of Stories - on the third side of Teller's Square.

The Repository of Dead Stories - a building full of scrolls with stories written on them, in one of the side streets leading to the Teller's square.

Sites of interest to the heroes:

Talekeeper's Tavern - a pleasant establishment built on three sides of a courtyard, just off Teller's Square, where the heroes can sleep in proper beds for the first time in several weeks. The proprietor, *Openhand Talekeeper* (40s, black beard, balding), runs one of the Story Circles in Teller's Square. He will be suitably impressed by any story the Heroes care to tell.

Quill Scratch's house - a modest two-up two-down affair just a few minutes walk from the Repository for Dead Stories. Downstairs there is a kitchen-cum-sitting room and a study, which is full of scrolls. A diligent search of the room will reveal Quill's instructions from Ulrich ("The man W whom we discussed must be dealt with. If you see him, send word to me at once. Coldwalk."). Upstairs are Quill's and Inkhand's rooms. Inkhand will sleep downstairs while Wormwood is staying.

Characters

Quill Scratch (50s, stout, long grey hair, smooth red cheeks, kindly smile, silver-framed spectacles). A senior member of the Scratch family, outwardly she is a kind and respectable scholar. When asked why she chooses to spend her time in a backwater like Tales rather than in Everway, she says that it is long tradition of the Scratch family to collect wisdom from other worlds, and the nature of Tales is such that it naturally accumulates the sort of thing she is interested in (all this is true). She also hints that she and Codex Scratch do not get on (for reasons on which she will not elaborate), so it is better for the Scratch family as a whole if she remains in her self-imposed exile (not quite so true). She appears to have a particular affection for Wormwood, and a rather more distant but motherly liking for Inkhand.

Inkhand Scratch (15, tall and lanky, dark hair and pudding bowl haircut, wears dark robes which are too short for him, and gloves on his hands). Typical teenager - very embarrassed, won't look people in the eye and mumbles when talking to them, gazes with staring eyes when listening to them. Will be *extremely* embarrassed by Flame's appearance. Spherewalker. Slight may notice that he has a completely unrecognised magical talent, centred on his ink-black right hand.

Storykiller (M, 70s, ink-blackened fingers, shakes) Head of the Repository of Dead Stories and colleague of Quill Scratch. Always carries a sheet of vellum and an inkpot and quill. Asks politely if he can write down any story that anyone starts. The other townfolk treat him for the most part with amused condescension (much as we might now treat a Victorian butterfly collector), though there are some who consider what he does to be dangerous.

Events

Afternoon. If the market is still taking place when they arrive, the heroes may see an altercation between two Basahn, a large male and a small female, and a stall holder who accuses them of taking produce without paying for it. Several passers by seize them - the large man (shouting "Kefin Basahn! Kefin Basahn!") shrugs them off with what Flame may realise is incredible strength and makes his escape, but the smaller is captured and dragged before the Arbiters (unless the heroes intervene). They decide to make an example of her and decree that she shall be publicly ridiculed the next day, forced to sit in the centre of the square while various Tellers make fun of her and her antecedents. Meanwhile she is confined overnight in the basement of the Arbiters' House. Slight may or may not recognise her, and may or may not decide to effect a rescue (an almost insultingly easy task for one of his powers).

Early Evening. Wormwood directs the heroes to the Talekeeper's Tavern, then leaves them saying that he is going to stay with his old friend Quill Scratch. He agrees to meet them at the Talekeeper story circle in Teller's Square after supper. The heroes must tell Openhand a tale to get accommodation for the night - the quality of the rooms depends on how good the tale is. The other guests at the tavern are mostly tradesfolk from the outlying villages - *Leopard's Eye* is the only sphere walker.

Evening. Openhand Talekeeper invites the heroes to join him at the Story Circle., promising them free breakfasts if they tell a tale. If they agree, they join him round a crackling fire in the Teller's Square, eating roast potatoes and drinking warmed spicy wine. The heroes get to choose whether they join the tale circle (hopefully at least one will) or join in the rescue attempt on Lynx.

The Tale Circle

Other people in the tale circle:

Wormwood and Quill, who sit together and become increasingly amorous as the night goes on.

Inkhand (if Flame is present, too embarrassed to speak)

Leopard's Eye (F, 30s, dressed in a leopard skin with a pointy fur hat, crossbow and quiver on her back and knife in thigh belt. Moves with a sinuous grace. Straw-blond hair, hacked short). A huntswoman from *Chase*, a realm far from Everway where everything hunts everything else. Her most recent hunt was in *Longwall* in the realm of *Dread* (where the people live in constant terror of Dark Things which haunt the earth at night and tear anything they find to shreds), the realm beyond Mist Dew. She dealt with a plague of giant spitting snakes which had invaded the sewers. This will remind her of a similar infestation - of cockatrices (see hunting cockatrices, page 25) Storykiller (M, 70s, ink-blackened fingers, shakes). He does not tell a tale but politely asks if he might document any tale told. Most other tellers agree unless they think that their tale is valuable.

Ploughshare (F, 50s, puffy cheeks, pork pie hat, farmer's smock). A farmer, come in to sell chickens in the market and staying "to hear a tale or two", as she puts it, before heading back to her farm. Her horse and cart are tethered outside the tavern and she is carrying a lantern on a pole.

West Walker (M, 30s, dark eyes, long dark hair, walks with a crutch (missing a leg below the knee), checked tunic in grey and brown). He is a weapons seller who is returning to his home realm of *March* (beyond Mist Dew). The heroes can trade with him for Everwayan hefts if they wish. He lost the leg in a gladiatorial combat in the arenas in Strangerside.

Openhand invites someone to start. Unless the heroes jump in, *Leopard's Eye* goes first.

Leopard's Eye's Tale

I am a Huntswoman from the realm of Chase. My home realm is a hard one, full of creatures with great snapping jaws and poisonous spines - if you cannot hunt in my realm, you yourself will be hunted to death.

Recently I hunted for the citizens of Longwall in the realm of Dread - a pusillanimous people who live in constant fear of Dark Things which haunt the earth at night. I and a

fellow huntsman, *Silent Stalk* by name, rid their sewers of a plague of giant spitting snakes, and it is he who told me of cockatrices and their habits.

[Spherewalker Sourcebook p25]

As for Silent Stalk - he, alas, is dead. He had taken a festering wound from a cockatrice spur and had for months wandered the spheres seeking a cure. We took the job in Longwall so that he might afford the services of *All Heal*, a physician of great renown, but the man was a quack. All he could do as my lover died was to give him poppy extract to quell the pain. I had to burn the body, though it is not the custom among my people, as the stench was so great that no scavenger, not even vultures, would come near.

So I go now to Everway to sell his possessions, and then on to the Mystic River to return his ashes to his people.

Wormwood's Tale

Sad tale. That reminds me of a story I have heard in a number of realms on my travels of a being called the Hooded Councillor

Now the Hooded Councillor appears as an ordinary grey-haired human in a black robe, with perhaps just the faintest whiff of ordure, or the odd fly buzzing about, to warn the perceptive of his true nature.

When he arrives in a realm, he seeks out the powerful visionaries - young princes with noble visions of a better world, wise viziers whose words have brought headstrong sultans to their senses, holy men and women whose dedication to their deities has inspired all manner of good works.

With a little word, a humble observation, a slight suggestion, he slowly corrupts their pure vision, turning the enlightened ruler into a tyrant, the holy woman into an intolerant bigot, the wise advisers into fools who push for war when peace should reign, and peace when war is the only answer.

And from the leaders the corruption spreads to the whole of society - husbands turn on their wives, children on their parents, neighbours on their fellows. Crops are abandoned, houses fall to ruin, plague and poverty stalk the land.

Now the home of the Hooded Chancellor is never his true home - always there is a secret passageway down below ground, into sewers or caves. There the Councillor makes his lair, taking on leeches and fungi and moulds and undead and, of course, cockatrices as his servants.

As the society gradually decays and rots, the sewers overflow onto the streets, filling them with carrion and excrement and slime, forming a huge stinking pile on which he mounts, triumphant, in his true form - a giant cockatrice!

Strangely, there are also tales of destroyed societies where a hooded chancellor gives wise advice, vanishing as good and just rule is restored.

I cannot explain these last tales, but I do have a theory about why the Hooded Councillor appears so frequently among the spheres. You see, the Cockatrice is one of the cards in the Fortune Deck and I think [Quill interrupts, laughing, at this point "Yes that's quite enough of that! Let me tell a tale."]

Quill's Tale

Now this is an old and well-known tale, but, I think, a good one. It is the tale of the Kingmaster and the War of Great Endings.

[Spherewalker Sourcebook p 67]

Ploughshare's Tale

I too have a tale of a powerful mage who was undone by his hunger for power, in his case quite literally.

His name was Obsidian. Your typical monomaniac - no sorcery too great for his challenge, no sacrifice too great for his knowledge, blah, blah, blah.

I think his wizard's tower must have been on the small side, if you get my meaning, because he had an unpleasant habit of picking fights with his fellow mages, considering combat to be the only true proof of his mettle. So like a man. He even tried to take on the legendary lame Nemesis, she who is a living Gate and has a foot stuck forever in another

land to fulfill an ancient curse, but she had the sense not to rise to his challenge. Now magical fights are all very well, but they don't half make life difficult for people like me who are trying to scratch an honest living from the land. And when one of Obsidian's fireballs went astray during his fight with the Crimson Mage of Crom and killed all poor Farmer Leafmould's cattle, leaving her in penury, the farmers got together and decided to do something about this magical menace. They went to see Many Masks at her cottage and begged her to do something. And Many Masks said "No. I'm retired. Go away." But the farmers begged and begged, and when another of Obsidian's fireballs singed a corner of her garden, she said "Oh very well, I'll deal with this Obsidian for you. But - you are going to provide me with all my food for the rest of my days, and a handsome young man to cook it for me. And another handsome young man will come every day and sweep my house and dig my garden. And another handsome young man will come every day and attend to all my other physical needs. Make sure that he's got a good pair of nail scissors."

Then Many Masks searched through the spheres and found a powerful being. Some say that it was the Dragon who Hates Humanity ["She means Alurax," says Wormwood in a stage whisper.]. Others, a Spirit of Mischief, Loki or Coyote perhaps ["Now that's very interesting..." begins Wormwood, but Quill shushes him]. And she suggested an idea to the being, which, being amused by her presumption, agreed to her request.

Next, Many Masks created many images of herself and climbed a crag next to Obsidian's rather small tower. When Obsidian appeared at the window she started capering and dancing, making rude noises and raising her skirts to shake her bare buttocks at him. "Ha ha, you'll never get me!" she said.

Obsidian got angry, and called up a mighty whirlwind which carried Many Masks far, far away. But it was only an image, and Many Masks soon appeared again, capering and showing her bottom once again.

Then Obsidian called up a thunderbolt which blasted Many Mask off the crag and sent her tumbling to the ground below. But it was only an image, and Many Masks soon appeared once again "Ya, ya," she yelled, "is that the best you can do? Even my farts have more power than that!"

Then Obsidian summoned a great snake that slid up the crag and swallowed Many Masks whole. But as soon as it was gone, back came Many Masks, right as rain.

Obsidian tried everything to get rid of the annoying mage. He summoned demons to tear her limb from limb, called forth might tidal waves to drown her, dropped great rocks on her head. But it did no good - back Many Masks came, every time.

Eventually, Obsidian had tried every spell in his spellbook, all to no avail. By now he was absolutely furious, and he went raging through the spheres, crying "I'll give my kingdom, my heart, my soul, anything to someone who can give me the power to defeat this woman!"

Then the being whom Many Masks had talked to came to him and said "I will give you power to defeat your enemy - but I must make a few small adjustments to your body first. Don't worry, it won't hurt a bit."

Obsidian was so desperate to prove his virility that he agreed, not stopping to wonder why the being had not asked for any sort of payment. Anyway, a great vortex of power whirled out of the being and struck Obsidian full in the stomach - oof! - knocking him out. When he came to, the being was gone and in his belly was a great gnashing mouth, full of sharp yellow teeth. "Feed meee," it said.

"Not until after we've defeated Many Masks", said Obsidian, and set off to find her.

Many Masks was still capering on the crag when Obsidian got back. "I have you now, woman!" said Obsidian and came striding towards her.

Many Masks fired off the illusion spells that had befuddled Obsidian before, but the mouth in his stomach went heeeeyooup!, and sucked in the magic and swallowed it whole.

Then Many Masks created multiple images of her herself until she was surrounded by illusions, but as Obsidian drew closer the mouth swallowed up each one. Heeeyoucop! As fast as Many Masks created her spells, the mouth ate them, until there was left just one old woman frantically gesturing to cast an illusion that would save her. Obsidian, laughing delightedly, struck her down with his staff.

And the mouth in his stomach said "Feed meee". At the same time, gnawing pangs of hunger struck Obsidian, worse than he had ever felt before. "Very well," he said, we'll have a victory meal when we get back to the castle."

"No!" said the mouth. "Feed me on her!"

"Very well," said Obsidian, and cut up Many Mask's body and fed it to the mouth which ate it in great slavering gulps, hyeoucorrhh, hyeoucorrhh, hyeoucorrhh!

Eventually the body was all gone, and although the hunger had subsided somewhat, Obsidian was still ravenous. So he headed back to his tower and ordered his servants to kill and roast a whole boar, which he had been saving for his marriage feast with Gentle Dove, a beautiful sorceress who lived nearby. Obsidian had not attacked Gentle Dove because he fancied himself to be in love with her, and he thought that she would fall in love with him when he proved himself the most powerful wizard in the world. Don't ask me where men get these ideas from...

Anyway, by the time the servants had cleaned the hog and stuck it on the fire to roast, the hunger pains had returned. "Feed meee!" said the mouth in his stomach.

Such were the pains that Obsidian could not wait for the boar to finish, but pushing the servants aside with an oath, he ripped off still bleeding chunks of flesh and stuffed them into his mouth, washing them down with ale straight from the barrel.

But as fast as Obsidian put the food and drink in his normal mouth, the mouth in his stomach spat them out, leaving a great pile of masticated meat gobbets and spilt beer on the floor.

"What are you doing?" cried Obsidian.

"That's not what I want! Feed me mage flesh!" said the mouth.

Then Obsidian swore and raged, and set off for Gentle Dove's tower, for his hunger had driven away his imagined love.

He approached and without so much as a challenge attacked the tower with great thunderbolts, planning to rip it apart as you would crack a lobster to reach its soft flesh. It was then that he discovered that the mouth in his stomach was not choosy about the source of the spells it ate. Yes, every single thunderbolt that Obsidian produced was swallowed by his own stomach, hooowurrrp! Gave him spectacular heart-burn, it did. Didn't assuage the hunger though.

Then Gentle Dove counter-attacked with spells of fire and darkness, but the mouth swallowed those as well.

So seeing that none of her spells were effective and that Obsidian had no magic of his own, she simply ordered her tower shut up and sent out guards armed with spears and swords, who drove the wizard away.

Then Obsidian gnashed his teeth with rage, and the stomach-mouth gnashed its teeth with hunger.

With heavy steps, he turned towards his own tower, knowing that he would not be refused and that his own apprentices would be there. "Yes," said his belly-mouth. "They are small mages, but mages nonetheless and they will fill the void."

But it was not to be, for a little wraith had entered Obsidian's tower and found the apprentice's quarters. "Flee!" it said. "Your master comes to eat you!" And the apprentices believed it, for they recognised the ghost of Many Masks, whom their master had killed. All fled save one, Graven Image, who, more fearless than the rest and certainly more foolish, waited to see what her master had become.

When Obsidian entered his hall, he fell upon Graven Image with desperate hunger, but neither her defensive spells nor his attacking ones had any effect for they were all eaten. When Graven Image saw that the situation was hopeless she turned and fled, and her swiftness saved her. Obsidian was left alone in his tower.

"I am starving!" moaned the mouth-stomach. "FEEED MEEEE!"

"I'm starving too", said Obsidian. "And it's all your fault. You keep eating my spells. I can't get you any more mages!"

"I can't help my nature," said the mouth. "Anyway, you're wrong. There is one mage that I can eat..."

And with that, it bit down hard on the mage's own foot, chmmmp! and swallowed a toe.

"Tasty," said the mouth. "I think I'll have a bit more of that." And it bit off a foot.

"Scrumptious!" said the mouth as it chomped on the rest of the leg. "Sure you don't want

some?" Obsidian didn't reply as he was too busy screaming.

"Would you like some more? Don't mind if I do," said the mouth, and tore off the other leg. Obsidian's screams rose higher and higher. This irritated the mouth, which bit off Obsidian's head, savouring the delicious jelly of the brains as the skull crunched beneath its teeth.

After that there was no stopping it. It devoured through both arms, spitting out the rings on the fingers, pah!, pah!, then started on the internal organs. It didn't like the heart, which was a bit chewy, but the liver and kidney were divine, and it sucked up the intestines like spaghetti, hyeeeeeeoooooooouuup! The wizard's big fat rump was tremendously satisfying, which made up for the rather inadequate size of the genitals. "Ah haggis! I always like to save the best for last," remarked the mouth as it started on the stomach.

Eventually it was almost done. "Just one little morsel more, and I shall be replete." So saying, it ate its own lips, teeth and tongue and went "pop!" out of the existence.

And that was the end of Obsidian. Though some say that if you visit his deserted tower, you can still hear those chattering teeth in the darkness, moaning and biting and ever hungry for magery...

And Many Masks - well, she crawled out of the cave where she had hidden - magic-less now, for she had given all her power to her last and greatest image which Obsidian had killed - and was borne away by cheering villagers. And she lived in her hut, with a handsome young man to cook for her, and a handsome young man to clean and dig for her, and a handsome young man to tend to all her other physical needs, for the rest of her days.

Openhand's Tale

My tale was told to me by a sphere-walking scholar - perhaps Master Wormwood or Mistress Quill has heard of him - called Magus [they shake their heads].

I met him as he was returning from Everway, where he had visited the Library of All Worlds. In return for a room for the night, he told me of his researches.

He had become obsessed with a question that I must admit has not been keeping me awake at nights - why are there only 1000 spheres?

Of course, no-one, save the gods and perhaps some senior members of Chamber Platinum, know precisely how many worlds there are, but Magus' researches in the Library had showed that there are indeed about 1000 (he told me that the most recent list of known worlds had 987 entries). Though there may, of course, be many others that do not have gates and of which we can therefore never know. But why such a limited number? Why are there are not an infinite number of worlds?

Now, as I am sure our Everwayan guests would tell us, the reason may be that there are an infinite number of worlds but the Walker has not visited them yet.

But Magus was not satisfied with this explanation. As he said to me, the number of known worlds has not changed significantly for over 300 years. If the Walker has been actively visiting new worlds looking for the capstone to the Pyramid, new gates would be created all the time and the number of known worlds should constantly be increasing.

I do not know the Moondancers' explanations for that one, and I do not wish to offend our Everwayan guests' sensibilities by speculation about their patron god. I shall simply tell you the explanation that Magus gave me.

Well, Magus had travelled widely amongst the spheres, asking the question "why are there only a thousand worlds?" of all that he met. The response was invariably a shrug, or the tale of the Walker, or a declaration that the local deity had decreed that it was so.

He visited all the libraries, temples and other centres of learning that he could find. He sought, but failed to locate, the Twisted Library. He engaged in seances to contact the dead. He even told me, in a whisper, that he had attended ceremonies where angelic beings and even demons were summoned, but none were able to give a satisfactory answer to his question.

One day, while seeking a mystic in a distant realm called Whirling Sand, he was caught in one of the dust-storms for which it named. As he stumbled through the biting winds and blinding grit, he became totally lost. The dust-storm ceased, but he was lost in the desert, totally alone.

For many days he wandered, half delirious with thirst, until in the middle of a vast, empty

plain, he spied a cowed figure. Magus staggered towards him.

It was not the mystic he was looking for, but another, who called himself the Hermeneutic. Magus, whom you must remember was delirious, did not recall what he looked like other than that he had a beard and cowl. Nor did he remember their conversation. but he knew when he left the man - still thirsty, for he had possessed no water - that much wisdom had been imparted.

A short time after he saw a rock, which he then remembered the Hermeneutic telling him about. Beneath it was a trickle of water, and Magus was able to quench his thirst. A little further on, he encountered a cactus in flower. Again, following the Hermeneutic's advice, he ate the flowers and was refreshed. A little further still, and he found a wadi that led to a Gate. Still following the advice of the Hermeneutic, he entered it and found himself on a cold, windswept shore where a tribe of fur clad fisherfolk were celebrating a sacred ritual around a bonfire.

The tribe, who called themselves the Whale Chasers, made him welcome. They were worshippers of the god called Odin and his family. Magus asked his question once again, expecting one of the standard responses. But instead, their shaman, Bone Reader, a tall thin man wearing a seal lion's skin with the tusks jutting from his forehead, looked into his eyes and said "Join in our ritual, and if Odin wills, you will see why there are but a thousand worlds".

So Magus agreed, and they anointed him with whale blubber and made him drink a filthy and bitter concoction of fermented seaweed, lichen and reindeer's piss.

Then, naked, they danced around the fire to the beats of a great drum and a great horn as tall as a man. Faster and faster they went, till all was a blur.

The fire became brighter and the flames seemed to cease moving, forming shapes that Magus thought he could recognise if he tried hard enough. The bodies of the other dancers became hard and gleaming, the sea and shoreline flat like a children's drawing. He looked at his hand and found his fingers wriggling and elongating, twisting and distorting.

And Magus found himself rising up into the air, higher and higher. Looking down, he could see the fire and the dancing figures receding from him.

He saw the shore line stretching away, and then the continent of which it was part. As he rose further, he saw other continents across the sea.

At length the whole world lay below him. Oceans gleamed in the moonlight, mountain peaks pierced the clouds.

And the whole earth receded and grew transparent, and other worlds came into view, linked by silver paths than snaked through the darkness between them.

And he rose above all the worlds, so that they were below him, and then in the faint silver glow of the sky shapes began to appear.

Magus looked closer and saw that the shapes were bones - thousands upon thousands upon thousands of them, jumbled altogether, wing bones and arm bones and tail bones and skulls and vertebrae and ribs.

And the creatures that these bones were from? Dragons! Not dragons as we know them now, but great dragons as large as worlds.

The remains formed a great barrier, enclosing the worlds. Magus looked, but no gap could he see.

He tried to rise higher, to pass beyond the wall to whatever lay beyond creation, but found he could not. Instead he plummeted down, faster than he had risen, down into the sea of worlds, down into a single world, faster and faster. Clouds flashed by, continents, then a coastal shore, then a fire, then a brief glimpse of his own body before wham! he came awake, dizzy and retching, in the grey light of day.

Magus consulted with Bone Reader who said that the vision had been a true sending from Odin. The wall was Odin's creation, though why he built it and where the bones came from, he could not say.

Perhaps some will say that what I have told you should be a secret and sacred thing, but I don't see why - it's just a tale, after all. It may be true, it may be false. You decide!

West Walker's Tale

[He only tells this if Openhand gets to tell his tale and the players still look interested].

I think I may be able to explain the origins of the dragon bones in our host's tale, for my story is of the Creation of the Dragons and the War in Heaven.

It was told me by another traveller, who said that she had heard it from a Greenskin Basahn, having learned the basics of their language. I find this hard to believe - the Basahn are not known for their interactions with human beings and the Greenskins least of all - but that is what she said.

Well then - in the beginning, the goddesses and gods had dominion over everything. From it they made all things, dry and wet, small and great. Some say that they used the Pearl of Making, others that they threw the four elements on a great wheel and shaped them into worlds as potters shape pots, still others that they cast a great spell that brought all the spheres into being at once.

[Spherewalker Sourcebook p 29]

Other Tales

[Can be told if the subject comes up]

Magical weapons - Summer I Am and the Sword of Everguard - pp 12-13

Corruption of Religion, good merchants - The Blue Merchants and the Temples of Mercy - pp20-21

Plagues, sweet dreams - The Cinnamon Plague - p 24

Dragons, origin of thunder, rainbows and serpents - The Family of Three Dragons - p 30

Dragons - The Punishments of Heaven - p 31

Dragons, Alurax - The Deceiver Worm - p 32

Magic swords, alternative ways to get between spheres - Scars, Furiously Bright and the Edge of Light and Darkness - p 36

Avenging spirits, water elementals, wizard who lives behind a waterfall - The Serpent of Ice - p 38

The perils of knowledge, Coyote - The Fortune Deck - p 45

Golems - p 57

Griffins, bravery - Whistler Gold - p 58

Sacrifices for love, musical instruments, trickery - The Harp of the Hidden City - p 60

Magical creation devices - Crimson Dream and The Pearl of Making - p 77

Creating women, impiety - The Tale of Evermore and Elidriel - p 77

Sacrifice for love, black-handed, origin of Legion of Shadow - Ocean and Shadow - p 93

Sacrifice for love, black-handed, the Drowning Gift - Dawn and Dusk - p 95

Dragons, cockatrices, orbs, lens and axe, women-only race, Alurax - The Tale of Two Dragons p 105

Self-sacrifice, the Shadow Legion, alternative Gates - the Storm Threshold and the Sacrifice of Apex Soulsinger - p 109

Lost cities, Edge, Pearl and Mirror of Shadows, Dragon of Air, Tempest Threshold - The Undiscovered City [make it a flame city] - p 114

Unity Mages, Nemesis, hydra, alternative Gates - The Seeker of Six - p 117

Cleacuun, Verbalists, words - Gift and Wish - p 121

Everway: How Grandmother Snakering drove the serpents into Shimmermoon Bay.

Everway: Making the Plague Welcome - a Host Tale.

Everway: The Feast of Jackal.

Rescuing Lynx

Lynx is being held in a cellar of the Arbiter's Judgement Hall. The stairs down are in an antechamber to the right of the main hall - depending on when the heroes make their move, there is a chance (Fortune Card) that a servant will be encountered, either preparing for or clearing up after a meal. There is a single guard on the front door, mainly to prevent drunks from disturbing the peace of the arbiters.

Living quarters of the three Arbiters (*Longhand*, *Chronicler* and *Yarn*) are on the first floor. There are several servants.

The cellars are unguarded. A single torch fitfully illumines the passage. Doors (unlocked) to left and right open into storage chambers for firewood and wine (of varying quality).

Round the corner are six cells with the thick doors with grills and large and primitive locks - the door guard has the key. The lock can be picked by Why or Slight unless they are very unlucky, or mindless violence can be used. Lynx is currently the only inhabitant. Her cell is quite reasonable as such places go - dry and relatively clean (there is a slop bucket in one corner), with a bunk bed with a blanket. A tray with some breadcrumbs, an apple core and an empty cup indicate that she has been fed.

Lynx - a dark-eyed young woman in her mid-twenties, dressed in the standard Basahn woman's get-up of shapeless ragged shawls and head-scarf.

She has a scratch down one side of her face which has marred her beauty, long fingernails and a fierce disposition.

Observant heroes may notice her remarkable likeness to Slight on a lucky fortune card (though Slight takes care to make his own features as unremarkable as possible). She feels nothing but contempt for her younger brother.

Lynx will at first assume that her rescuers are her fellow Basahn ("Terak!" "Terak!") - when she realises her mistake, she will assume that they are villagers come to laugh at the Basahn and address them fiercely in broken Tongue ("What you want? Spit at Basahn? Beat? Rape? I warn you - do not harm or my kind will revenge.")

If Slight makes himself known - "Well, if it isn't my little brother! What a fine man-child you've grown into! Hah! Terak could split you apart just by looking at you!"

If she is rescued, Lynx will not be particularly grateful (she will NOT say "thank you" under any circumstances, but may make an acknowledging grunt), but may acknowledge that "Father was wrong - maybe you are good for something after all". If Slight or anyone else involved admits that they are heading for Everway (and she will ask them what they are doing in Tales), she will direct them to Urumora.

Lynx will not explain what she is doing in Tales ("our concerns are not yours"), nor say anything more about life with the Basahn.

Lynx: A 4 (Bargaining), E 4 (Staying Put), F 6 (Basahn Leaf Sword), W 2 ()

The Basahn Camp

Two or three miles out of town along the east road.

It consists of a dozen or so caravans (Wormwood would point out that this is an unusually large camp by Basahni standards) and smells of wood smoke, old food and mud (oddly not of excrement).

Any attempt to approach the settlement will cause a watch sprite alarm (Small creature about six inches high with homunculous-like body and large membranous wings. The head, which is large in proportion to the body, appears to be that of a bald human with large sunken sad eyes, a sharp nose and a wide flat mouth with protruding lips. Shrunk human-like arms are used for feeding - the rear legs are for perching and are permanently bent into a crouching position. The torso has a protruding breast bone necessary to support the wing muscles and an iridescent crest that runs from the nape of the neck down the back. The join between the crest and the back and the area of the chest where the wing muscles connect to the breast bone are covered in blue-green reptilian scales. The head, limbs and lower torso are covered in hairless brown-orange skin). High-pitched piercing yells rent the air, as if a small child is being murdered.

There is an instant response - two dozen burly men and women of varying ages tumble out of the caravans and surround the interlopers. They are armed with leaf-blades and short bows. Observant heroes may note that several form a detachment guarding a small blackened caravan in the centre of the settlement (this houses an idol of the Basahni god).

The heroes will recognise Terak.

A few of the Basahn look decidedly - odd. They are hairless, their skin is green and wrinkled like a reptile's, they have snouts instead of faces and their eyes have lens-shaped irises. Their ears are ribbed and fan-like, although bizarrely one sports a single human-looking ear.

The Basahn babble to each other in their own language. Emphasise how bizarre this is - *everyone* speaks the Tongue, it's a gift of the gods.

There is also a needle demon (thin, lanky, green, three eyes) in a covered cage (the heroes may hear its mournful humming, a piercing and distracting sound which the

Basahn seem not to notice).

The leader of the caravan is acknowledged to be *Urumora* ("Faithful"), a short plump woman apparently in her late 50s with one hand noticeably bigger than the other (it was cut off when she was captured for stealing - the man who did it subsequently had his hand removed and the needle-demon sewed it on in its place). She is a Founder, and is working with Cunning.

Things could get tense unless Lynx is with them (Rathgard's public speaking ability won't help much here).

Assuming things calm down (and assuming they have rescued Lynx), Urumora offers to do a reading of the Fortune Cards to answer any question they may have. Three cards - past causes / present situation / future developments, two cards - virtue (forces working with the heroes) and fault (force working against them) and one card - fate (what hangs in the balance). Check for correspondences with Heroes' virtues, flaws and fates and look for links between the cards. Then make something up...

Depending on what the heroes tell Urumora ("So you're going to the Eternal City, are you? May I ask why?"), Urumora will ask them to wait and goes into her caravan. A few minutes later, she emerges with a Lizard Pyramid (show picture), which she asks them to take to a curios stall in the Bazaar run by *Prester Ironholt* (description, if asked for: short, broad, long dark hair, big nose, walrus moustache and goatee beard [in fact he's a dwarf, though she won't say that]) and give it to him. He will pay them.

If the heroes agree to take the Pyramid, Urumora tells them not to try to open it. Lynx thinks to warn them that they will be questioned about it on the way into Everway and under no circumstances should they say who gave it to them.

It's possible that Urumora or Lynx may let slip the fact that Slight is not his father's son.

They may also reveal why the Basahn took Lynx - she is a payment for medical treatment for Brook (Slight's mother) at the time of Slight's birth. Watchful wanted to give Slight to the Basahn, but when the time came he couldn't find him, so he gave them Lynx instead [the reason that Slight couldn't be found was that Brook hid him, persuading him to lie low with the tale of Barbarian raiders].

Only Why has a chance of opening the pyramid, and unless he gets an exceptionally positive card (such as Knowledge, his virtue) will trigger two of each sort of Lizard Pyramid:

Black: Bite causes temporary blindness - Earth 4 plus a fortune card.

White: Cumulative poison - Earth 1 for first bite, 2 for second etc. up to Earth 5.

Red: Instant poison - Earth 3 - one bite only.

All lizards have A 1, E 1, F 4, W 1.

The message inside is written in Cleacuun. In the unlikely event of the heroes figuring out how to translate it, it reads as follows:

My dear Cunning,

I may have news of our mutual enemy. My contacts in Remnant have heard tales of a powerful sorcerer in the realm of Everguard. His name is given variously as Blackjack, First of Wands, Thousand Eyes and Oakstaff - I am sure that all of these are false. He is reputed to have a castle high in the mountains, but no one has seen it. Some say that the castle moves from place to place, others that it is invisible, others that its entrance is a gate to another dimension, still others that all entering his realm come under a powerful misdirection spell. The wizard rules the mountains and the authorities in Everguard dare not challenge him. He is reputed to have changed an entire army sent against him into sheep, which his soldiers then cooked and ate. These stories are many decades old - no traveller that I have met has visited Everguard in years. Perhaps you could ask your associates in Chamber Platinum?

I have attempted to reach Everguard, but it has proved impossible. Woodhall is now rife with White Scorpion tribes, presumably from Great Plains [Jayson's home realm]. The gate from Skylight has recently been destroyed by persons unknown. I shall seek for another entrance.

I fear that Darga is about to make another attempt on the Eternal City. The Glorious Empire is massing an army under General Ten Sticks, who I believe is one of her plants. Have a care.

Nuy has borne another son, Magor. Saelna and Xederin are joined. We have had good trading with the Wind River People.

May Odin protect you,

Your loving grandmother,

Urumora.

[PS - Here Urumora describes the heroes, including the news that Slight is Lynx's brother if either mentions this fact to her, and says that they are "sympathetic to our cause".]

In the Night

As the story circles disperse, Quill decides that a message must be sent. She tells Inkhand to leave for Everway with a message for *Huckster Motley*, a talentless street magician (and one of Ulrich's agents). Inkhand starts that night. Meanwhile, Quill distracts Wormwood with an amorous encounter.

The Pool Gate

Other things being equal, the heroes assemble for their journey to Everway. Wormwood is late and turns up hand in hand with Quill. Inkhand is not with them. If any of the heroes ask, Quill explains that she sent Inkhand on some errands so that she could have some time alone with Wormwood (who blushes).

The Gate to Everway is about two miles north of Storyhome down a well-trodden path. It leads into a valley with a reedy pool at the far end, which is filled by streams that tumble down from the grey mountains above.

A number of men and women stand in the clearing by the pool, dressed in drab robes and cloaks and wearing tall domed helmets with a ridge down the centre. These are the *Tollhearers*, who listen to the tales that travellers tell as a tax for entering Tales from Everway.

The path leads to the pool's edge, where there is a richly carved stone balustrade has been built. Friezes on the balustrade show the following:

The Walker (portrayed as a giant with a blurry face and indeterminate sex) carrying a block of stone towards the semi-completed Pyramid, surrounded by a crowd of adoring townsfolk

A battle scene showing a great tower on a promontory being destroyed by flaming rocks thrown from ship-mounted ballistae (Wormwood explains, if asked, that this is Hardhand Tower being destroyed by the Whiteoars)

A plague scene with people wandering the streets, blood streaming from their eyes, noses, mouths and fingers

A female warrior plunging a glowing sword into a huge skeletal crown-wearing humanoid, apparently made of elephant tusks and bones (Jackal Crookstaff defeating the Bloodless Monarch with the sword Sacnoth).

A battle scene in which Everwayan armies struggle against an army of pelted barbarians led by a semi-naked sorcerer whose torso bears a tattoo of a swirling circle surrounded by arcane symbols (Thumbprick Noshadow and the army of Remnant).

Steps lead down into the water, which is about three foot deep. The glowing entrance of a large gate (20' x 20') shines out.

Wormwood and Quill join hands and stand looking into each other's eyes. "A thousand times you have opened your heart to me." "A thousand times I have gazed into your eyes." [If asked subsequently, Wormwood says that the relationship between him and Quill is "a tale best left untold. Suffice to say that there is a long, long emnity between her family and mine, so some things are not possible."]

After that, there is nothing for it but to brave the freezing waters of the pool. The Tollhearers shout farewells ("May the Father of Stories make yours a happy tale").

The Telling of Tales

Slight and any other heroes who choose to be observant see Wormwood, who uncharacteristically is the last to enter the pool, turn back and look at Quill, who raises a hand in farewell. Her eyes are glistening. They get the impression that here, at least, is one story that will not end happily.

14/03/2004