

E18 Interlude: Sheepship

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Sheepship

The Gate to Rath is in the middle of a large sloping field half way up a mountain. It is filled with bloodstained and butchered sheep corpses. It is cold and cloudy with a light drizzle. In the distance, large waves can be seen crashing against a shore. Out to sea, another mountain island is disappearing over the horizon.

At the bottom of the hill is a burnt and deserted village. Mist (white, but with blackened edges) swirls around it. There are shepherd corpses in the streets and a large crude stylised scorpion has been graffitied on a wall.

The entrance to the Twisted Library lies on the road that leads towards the shore. As per the description from Shimmersand, it looks like a pillared Greek portico reflected in a distorting mirror. The supporting columns are twisted and the large green copper double doors are so warped that there seems no way that they could open. On either side of the entrance are two four foot high pillars supporting large stone owls that stare fixedly at people approaching the doors. Above them are sconces (several degrees off true) containing torches that burn with a green flame and no smoke. Slight detects that the whole area is intensely magical.

Despite appearances, the doors open easily when the floral wreath knockers are pulled, revealing a staircase lit by more of the green flame torches that descends into the ground. Like everything else, the stairs are warped and care must be taken as the treads are subtly different heights and angles from each other. Pairs of owl statues peer out from alcoves in the wall every thirty feet or so as the staircase twists downwards. The air is dry and dusty.

Eventually the stairs end at another pair of twisted doors. These open into a vast cavernous space smelling of parchment and dominated by enormously tall book cases that reach up and out into the darkness. All the bookshelves are warped, as are the books themselves. The higher shelves are linked by metal walkways reached by abnormally long twisty spiral staircases. Wooden carved owls with big staring eyes stand on ledges and in alcoves. In the centre of the space is a reading area containing dozens of owl-shaped lecterns, lit by green-flame candles. You get a sense that something, or many somethings, are watching you from the shadowy corners.

There is only one other reader in the library at present, a young fair-haired woman in a black silk dress with many pockets, who looks up when you enter.

"Ah, you're here at last". She flashes up a card, and Walker strobes and disappears. Rathgard, Wishbone and Fish Trader are frozen.

Painter's third attack

Summary: The heroes find the Twisted Library.

Waiting for them is Painter, who freezes everyone else (except Slight), captures Walker with a painting and immures him in:

- A cage with hungry lions.
- A spiked pit full of snakes
- A pool of sharks

"I don't know how you got out of that pit I left you in, but I'm not making that mistake again."

Dilemma: Painter shows Flame a picture of the surface of the sun and threatens to send Walker there unless she gives him the Book. "So, which shall it be - the Book, or your lover?"

- Slight can realise that Flame's connection to the Book won't dissipate immediately if she hands it over.
- Slight could do something with the Pearl e.g. make a facsimile of the Book. This might work.

If Flame hands over the Book, Painter releases Walker (or does she? She may decide to punish Flame for inconveniencing her for so long, though killing Walker seems too be going a bit far. Sharra wasn't evil as such.). Flame can then claim the Book is still hers. She starts to glow - one of her eyebrow feathers bursts into flame and turns to ash.

A blinding beam of fiery light lances out from Flame and towards the Book, which becomes the centre of a piercingly bright magical explosion. It catches Painter full in the chest, enveloping her in a radiant glow and sending her backwards through the solid rock of the Twisted Library, which the brightness of the light has made translucent. "Noooooo!" goes Painter. Further and further she goes, a bright comet that gets smaller and smaller as she recedes. For a moment it illuminates the silver paths between the spheres and then it disappears into the blackness. Reality reasserts itself within the library. The Book is on the floor. Walker reappears. Flame collapses.

If Flame hands over the Book and decides not to claim it back, Painter takes some time to laud it over Flame. *Give Flame one last chance to claim the Book back.* Painter steps into one of her own paintings and disappears. The Book is gone. How does this affect the campaign outcome? Theoretically, the heroes cannot battle against the Mist. Slight can push the Mist away with the Pearl, but it is exhausting - it needs to be renewed every few minutes (Wishbone can help, but only for a limited time). The Library shortcut will need to be used for the heroes to reach Everguard, or the heroes will have to find Urumora.

If Flame refuses to hand over the Book, Painter carries out her threat. Walker strobes in rainbow colours and appears in the painting, tumbling towards the fiery furnace. Tell Walker that it's agonisingly hot and there's no air. Ask him if there's anything he wants to do. [The correct answer is "let go", but the following happens anyway].

Walker's outline becomes blurry and indistinct as he becomes the Shifting Man. The figure vanishes and reappears in the Twisted Library. It reaches for Painter. "Keep away from me, you annoying shadow!" she cries, but it is no good. The Shifting Man picks up a painting which shifts and changes into a whirlpool of absolute chaos, and throws it at Painter. Painter's screaming form can be seen as it is sucked into the chaos pool. The Shifting Man drops the painting (Flame can incinerate it) and turns back into Walker, who collapses.

Other possibilities

Flame tries to throw the Book into the fiery sun painting. No dice - the painting isn't drawn to accept the Book so it bounces.

Flame tries to burn the Book up so Painter can't have it. Hmm, that might work. But the Book resists being burnt and gives Painter time to carry out her threat to immolate Walker.

Flame tries to use the Library candles to set fire to Painter or the painting. The Library objects to this - it chucks everyone except Painter out into Everguard. The owls all come to life and mob Flame - when she can see again, the library has vanished and the heroes are all surrounded by Black Mist...

Aftermath if Flame defeats Painter: A few of Painter's pictures are left behind.

- One shows the Cellars, which are full of refugees huddled in blankets. Treb and Veil are delivering food, watched over by some of Voulge's thugs who are heavily armed.
- Another shows Bleak Street, looking south. A wall of Black Mist stretches across it, high up into the sky. If the heroes watch this for a bit, they see two huge spider-legged automatons - clearly Why's work - emerging from it, with sacks full of grain hanging from their abdomens.

If some of the heroes stay outside the Twisted Library

If Flame, Painter or Slight annoys the library, it chucks everyone out and vanishes. The heroes will have to go the long way round.

Flame has Faced her Fate

- **Plot Shortcut:** Twisted Library travels while the heroes are in it straight to Everguard. Some heroes could be left behind.

The Twisted Library

Represents: Knowledge (Truth/Falsehood)

This singular edifice appears in realms throughout the Thousand Spheres. It is reputed (wrongly) to be the creation of a powerful wizard (whose identity varies from realm to realm) who took pride in collecting knowledge in all its forms. Eventually, however, hubris claimed him and he began to boast that his library made him as wise as the gods themselves. So the gods caused a subtle falsehood to enter into one of his spell books. When the wizard had cause to use the spell, it summoned a demon to the library who carried the wizard off screaming to the nether hells. The demon's evil, it is said, twisted the library and sent it hurtling off through the Thousand Spheres.

Certainly, reports of the library's appearance would bear this tale out. All the bookshelves are warped, as are the books themselves. The library is on several floors which are linked by abnormally long twisty metal spiral staircases. Light from the ever-lit candles fails to illuminate pools of inky darkness in its maze-like recesses, and scholars have reported a feeling of being watched as they browse its shelves or read from the owl-shaped lecterns. Nonetheless, seekers of knowledge still flock to it when it appears in their realm, for though there is no index nor any apparent order to the books, the answer to any question you care to ask can be found in less than a day's browsing. Unfortunately, half the time the answer is subtly or blatantly wrong.

If the heroes get rid of Painter and don't annoy the library

They can spend some time browsing the books. Allow each hero to ask a question. On a positive FC, they get a truthful (but possibly incomplete) answer. On a negative FC, they get an answer that is subtly or completely wrong.

After everyone has had one question, the library gets bored. The candles start to flicker. The shadows become deeper and more menacing. The owl carvings start to move. A whispering begins. The bookshelves become more warped, some twisting up vertically. Perspective becomes difficult to judge. If the heroes refuse to take the hint, the owls eventually mob them and they are chucked out in Everguard (if they are all present) or Sheepship (if they are not).

The Long Way Round

If some heroes remain outside the library (and having them be caught up in its disappearing act seems implausible), they will have to make their way to Everguard via the Gates.

- The Gate to Great Plains is on the next island which is slowly drifting over the horizon. The boats in the harbour have been burnt, but the heroes can find one that could be made seaworthy with some effort. The heroes can sail across under black-tinged skies.
- The shepherds on the next island are almost all dead, but some (around 30) have turned into white scorpion warriors. They have adorned their heads with the skulls of sheep. The heroes will have to fight them or sneak through their camp to reach the Gate, which is pumping out Black Mist. Ideally, Slight will develop his Black Mist fighting technique, but the heroes are now strong enough that they can just bulldoze their way through.
- Unfortunately there is no way of telling where the Gate leads. The local village is completely destroyed.

Great Plains

No doubt to Slight's disappointment, the Gate leads to Great Plains rather than Man-Sun. The only way to tell this is to look at the very faint orange disk that is the sun that occasionally appears from behind threads of drifting black mist.

- Underfoot, the ground is covered with dead grass.
- The mist has a current which the heroes can follow back to its source.
- As they move, they encounter the bones of bison-like creatures, which have been picked clean by starving scavengers.
- Encounter: A pack of starving wild dogs. 12 - **A 2, E 3, F 4, W 2**
- They encounter yellowing, skeletal trees and bushes. They lead down to a large river. It is still flowing, but the water is inky with swirling blackness. The corpses of fish float past, belly up. Slight's pearl trick can purify the water.
- The mistflow is flowing with the river. The heroes can follow it upstream for many miles as it winds between vertical rock faces (actually a Grand Canyon-like valley, but in the dark it may be difficult to tell this). It will take 2 days to reach its source - the heroes will have to camp for the night, which becomes very cold.

The Gate to Everguard

- The source of the river is a lake high up in the mountains. The mist is coming from an oval hole under the water from which black mist is billowing. *Slight must develop his Mist resistance trick in order to pass through this gate.*

- The journey through the Gate is unusually turbulent. The Mist flows all around the silver path, threatening to pluck you off it. It requires a huge effort of will to keep to the trail.
- The pathway finally ends as you tumble through the Gate, utterly exhausted. Slight's protective sphere just catches the edge of a military-looking fortification. Two halves of a broken sign hang over an archway - "Welcome to Everguard. Please prepare goods for inspection."