

Scenario 19

The Fortress of Shadow

"You fools! Now the Walker will escape with the capstone and everything will end! You have doomed the Thousand Spheres!"

Plot Development Notes

Visions

- Big castle in the mountains. Radiates Black Mist. Formerly belonged to Earthshaker, the wizard that Shadow trained and sent against Everway.
- A skinny, flapping ghost haunts the walls - Lathe, the human from which Shadow took the organs that were sewn into Cunning. Wishbone can speak to it. It will help the heroes find a secret way in.
- Innocent, Hooded Councillor and the Phoenix Queen are wrapped together in a complex magical cage that slowly rotates, crackling with power. The Mist billows off them like an inverted water spout. Magical energies spark off the cage from time to time and are guided by magical mirrors into lines of force that funnel the Mist into paintings set up around the walls of the room - they show various sources for the Mist
- Another painting shows a bleak plain covered in hundreds of copies of the capstone. A stone colossus is slowly moving between each one, reaching out to touch each one, which then vanishes. Hanging in the air above the plain is what appears to be a bright star. In fact it's a mirror, and Slight can sense that it's linked to Shadow.
- A dungeon full of anaemic, emaciated prisoners. They are on the point of death, having been systematically drained of their blood and life force through holes in their necks.
- Dark-skinned Basahn woman locked in a cell. Appears to be in her 50s. Black hair pulled back, expression of suffering. This is Lefun - Urumora's daughter, Cunning's mother, Slight's grandmother. She has been incarcerated for 70 years.
- Shadow - encounter in the castle courtyard. Invisible at first. Slight can unpeel his glamours one by one (the power of the Pearl will help). Gradually a wizened skeletal figure is revealed. He looks like a very ancient, dark-skinned, translucent version of Slight. You can see the borrowed blood pulsing round his body, the heart squeezing and relaxing. His right index fingernail is some 3 inches long, filed to a razor sharp point, and crusted with dried blood. Slight can detect the magical link between him and the bright shining object in the painting of Bleak.

The Realm

Everguard, protector of the Great Road

Virtue:

Defender (Safety): The Everguard made travel across the realm extremely safe.

Flaw:

Drowning in Armour (Protective measures turn dangerous): The Everguard relied too much on their defensive walls and magicks. Shadow used their paranoia to turn them into his pawns.

Fate:

Cockatrice (Corruption / Recovery). Can Everguard be rescued before the Black Mist corrupts it forever?

Usurper:

Old Wrongs (The Past Triumphant / The Past Overcome).

The People:

Solid and broad, in many different colours. Men and women dressed in metal or leather armour with shields on their backs and helmets on their heads. Waist sashes denoted the clan they came from. Now the few remaining people are White Scorpion Warriors.

Craft:

Stonecrafting, brick-making, armour- and shield-making. Magical crafting was aimed at devices and spells to contain magic use.

Tamed Animals:

Shire horses, giant porcupines, giant tortoises

Deities:

Warspear Orangebeard was worshipped as a new incarnation of Horus the Protector. The Wadjet (all-seeing eye) became a symbol of the Everguard.

Rule:

The Everguard were divided into clans, each specialising in a different form of defence: shield-making, earthworks builders, fort and wall builders, defensive magics. Each built their own mighty fortress. A central council sought to unify and address grievances.

The Land:

A mountainous realm that is criss-crossed with mighty defensive forts, earth-works and walls. Think the Great Wall of China on steroids.

History:

Everguard was founded by ex-members of the Shadow League. They formed the Everguard, an elite group of defensive soldiers and wizards who vowed to defend all who asked them against aggressors such as those who had destroyed the Daring Kingdom.

The Plot

Opening:

The heroes arrive in Everguard, either after being disgorged from the library or via the Gate from Great Plains. It is completely enveloped in the swirling Black Mist, but Slight can light and protect the way. The heroes can follow the Mist to its source, a huge fortress in the mountains from which it emerges like a vast tornado. The drawbridge is closed and there is no other obvious way in.

Interaction:

If the heroes scout (they can't use Hawk), they encounter *Lathe*, a skinny, flapping thing that is all that remains of the human from which Shadow took the organs that were sewn into Cunning. Wishbone can communicate with it. It can show them a secret entrance, a crack in the rocks that leads into the dungeons.

Progress / Conflict:

The heroes can enter either by blowing up the drawbridge, which will alert the White Scorpion Warriors who are guarding the keep, or via the secret entrance. If the latter, the heroes can release the prisoners.

Interaction:

The powerful defensive spells that Maba has placed around the keep will kick in:

- Any latent suspicions that the heroes have of each other are magnified. If Flame chose to sacrifice Walker to keep the Book, Walker's resentment builds up; if not, everyone starts to suspect that Flame is a secret assistant of Maba. Rathgard and Fish Trader become convinced that each is about to betray the other. Slight is convinced that Wishbone is

about to take the Pearl. Wishbone suspects that Slight is about to leave them.

- The rooms become mazy. Every way they go, they seem to go round in a circle. Terrifying things lurk in the corners.
- The heroes go off into their own personal nightmares (use the ones from Golden Mounts as inspiration)
- A huge monster the size of a house guards the entrance to the Keep. A fiery djinn. It seems impervious to spells and sword blows.

These illusions are powerful (7W). Slight can dispel them with the Pearl, but it takes effort.

If the heroes can battle past the illusions and any alerted White Scorpion Warriors, they can reach the entrance to the inner Keep.

Decision:

The main entrance of the Keep is protected by a lowered portcullis. The heroes can find a way to deal with this, or scale the sides of the Keep and come in from above.

Action:

The entire central area of the keep has been hollowed out and turned into a vast casting room. The magical cage with the trapped Avatars is in the centre, the pictures showing the destinations of the Mist on the walls. Three emaciated prisoners are shackled to the walls - one is Slight's father Watchful. Maba will use them to replenish himself during the fight. The towers contain rooms including Maba's workshop, library, artifact room, Returner HQ (which has paintings of Darga and other Returner generals), guards' barracks, and the room where Lefun is imprisoned.

Rising Tension:

Maba himself will be here, but will be invisible until Slight pulls away his illusions. He is a formidable opponent, able to syphon off power from the Mist to unleash black fireballs and lightning at the heroes, as well as distracting the more weak-minded with powerful illusions. There is also a detachment of White Scorpion Warriors here.

Decision:

The heroes will have to decide how to deal with these multiple threats. Undoing the magical cage is an obvious action but easier said than done - it's the magical equivalent of defusing a nuclear weapon. Slight and Rathgard can use the Pearl to strip away Maba's defences. Maba will try to use the prisoners to replenish himself, but the heroes may prevent him.

Climax and Resolution:

Eventually heroes will get the upper hand, either by denying Maba the blood he needs to continue or by freeing the Avatars. Maba becomes transparent as the last of his powers drains away. "You fools! Now the Walker will escape with the capstone and everything will end! You have doomed the Thousand Spheres!" He collapses to the ground, a mass of bones and organs in a translucent skin. The magical thread connecting him to Blight snaps. Slight and Walker feel an overwhelming sense of dread.

If it hasn't already, the magical cage disintegrates. The cockatrice unwraps from the boy and gives a great screech, then slithers down a nearby drain emitting an overwhelming stench of putrefaction. The boy steps down from the burning egg, which cracks open, revealing a man-sized phoenix burning with bright orange and yellow flames that flies straight up towards the roof. It hovers there for a moment, transforming into a woman who looks down at Flame with an expression of respect and thanks. Then she resumes her upward flight, bursting through the ragged roof. You all have to dodge the flaming rafters that come crashing down (if Maba is still alive, he gets pinned by one of them). Only the boy remains. He looks at all the heroes and smiles, raising his arms towards you, the image of innocence and purity. You feel an overwhelming urge to protect him. But as you move closer, he drifts backwards into a tunnel that opens behind him and then he is gone, leaving you all with the just the memory of his smile.

Despite the heroes' triumph, they feel uneasy, as if something huge has been unleashed.

Walker can feel the beginnings of a change into the Shifting Man. Slight can discover the Bleak picture (if he hasn't already). The capstone copies have vanished, leaving only one. The stone colossus is in the act of picking it up.

The heroes can discover the meaning of this picture by looking at Maba's notes in his workshop, which will reveal the truth of the splitting of Death and the Walker's true identity as the Avatar of Stasis. It will also reveal the Capstone's purpose as the element of Earth in the spell of sphere creation. There is no doubt. When the Walker reaches Everway and seals his twin in the Pyramid with the capstone, everything will end.

As the heroes make this appalling discovery, a strange figure strolls into the room. He? She? - it's very hard to say - is dressed in a smart suit and trousers, in bright white. They are holding a small round mirror in one hand. "Hello," they say. "My name is Kayte. It looks like you need some help."

Hook

Depending on how they get there, the heroes may find themselves dropped into a swirling darkness with very little warning. The air is cold and the ground feels rough and rocky. It is eerily quiet, apart from a faint rumbling like a volcano erupting very far away. It's completely dark - well not completely, because there is a faint glow coming from Slight's backpack. It's the Pearl. Little streams of light evaporate off it.

If he hasn't already, Slight can figure out that he can expand the Pearl's influence by a few yards. It's much easier if Rathgard helps with the Book. Slight can also detect some ill-maintained misdirection spells, but the Pearl can negate them.

The Pearl's glow illuminates a high wall that snakes into the darkness, following the contour of the ground upwards. The top is ruined, but it's still twenty feet high. A path runs along its base. The heroes can determine that the Mist is flowing down from above. Even with the Pearl's resisting influence, the Mist still tries to push them away.

The Castle

The wall continues for another couple of miles before ending at a ruined watchtower. The volcanic rumbling sound is noticeably louder here - you can start to feel it through your feet.

The path takes a left turn from the watchtower's entrance and descends slightly for a few hundred yards before ending at a ruined gatehouse overlooking a dry moat about twenty feet across and 8 feet deep. On the far side, just within the Pearl's range, is a sheer grey stone wall with arrow slits. A raised wooden drawbridge is held against the wall by strong chains.

As the heroes approach, Slight and Wishbone can sense that the Black Mist's flow direction has changed. It is now coming from above as well as ahead. It is like standing at the bottom of a magical waterfall. *FC card to see if Slight becomes exhausted.*

Entry point 1: Across the drawbridge

The Drawbridge

The drawbridge is a solid wooden construction and the chains are thick. Walker can sense that strengthening spells were cast on it a long time ago.

The heroes can blast their way in, but even for Flame this will take a few minutes and will be noisy. An alarm bell will ring, summoning the guards to the outer courtyard.

Outer Courtyard

If the heroes batter their way in, they find that the outer courtyard is better lit than the world outside. A vast rotating wall of black mist spins high into the air from the top of the 60' high

square keep beyond the inner wall and flows down to the curtain wall on all sides. Pale torches illuminate high walls crowned by battlements and a covered well in the centre of the space. The floor is flat stones set in concrete. There are double gates leading to the inner space opposite and in front of them is a mass of warriors dressed in plate and leather armour and daubed in smears of red and black, the white mark of the scorpion gleaming brightly on the foreheads. They are armed with spears which they are beating on their shields. When they see you, about half of them charge. The rest form a shield wall in front of the gate.

The courtyard is full of Slight-style misdirection traps. FC for any moving hero to see if they get to where they want to go.

30 White Scorpion Warriors

- A 3** Battlecry - yelling makes speechifying pointless
E 4 Shield wall - the warriors link shield arms, making a wall that is hard to penetrate.
F 3 Mist frenzy - when charging, +1 F
W 3 The Master's Will - devotion to Maba makes them hard to persuade

Their leader is **Nyauw**, a Peacemaster who has been corrupted by the Black Mist.

Air: 4 Bargaining

Earth: 5 Resisting Magic

Fire: 6 Mist frenzy - when charging, +1 F

Water: 4 Nyauw can use the misdirection traps to ambush heroes by appearing out of nowhere.

The double doors lead into a maze of rooms built against the inner walls that were once the fortress' main living area. See Magical Defences below.

Entry point 2: Lathe and the dungeons

Lathe

If the heroes choose to scout the walls rather than try a direct assault, they can follow them round to the north. If they are quiet, they hear a strange sound above the all-pervasive rumbling, a regular flapping sound like a tablecloth being hit against the ground. Flap, flap, flap-flap, flap, flap.

Wishbone can sense Lathe's spirit from some distance away. It is almost painfully loud. "Pain... pain... Got to get in! Got to get in!"

Investigating the source of the sound reveals something rather horrible. Crawling along the base of the moat is a mass of leathery ochre-coloured skin in the form of a child that has been steam-rollered flat. The head still has some shape - the skull appears to be present - but the eyes are gone and the mouth is lacking a lower jaw. A fine network of stitches covers its entire body - it does not take a medical genius to figure out that they sew up the holes where bones and organs were removed. The thing cannot stand upright but instead manoeuvres by turning itself over and over.

Wishbone can use her new spirit empathy ability to learn Lathe's story, though she may wish she hadn't. She gets a nightmare set of images: while playing by himself in the street, a dark, hard-to-see figure comes up and holds out a wizened hand... waking up tied to a bench, painful leather straps holding him down... turning his head, he sees another boy with dark skin strapped to another bench, looking with terrified, betrayed eyes at the hard-to-see figure, who is standing nearby... a homunculus with a grin of sharp teeth sits on his chest and holds up a knife, then plunges it down... so much pain... the homunculus is back, holding a needle and thread... later, the knife coming towards his eyes... so much pain that he passed out... coming to in a rubbish heap outside the castle walls... trying to get back in... for 70 years, trying to get back in... kill Hurruch! kill the needle demon!

Wishbone, Walker or Slight can determine that Lathe's spirit is being held magically in what remains of his body. The magic is definitely Basahn-related, and it is powerful. It is tied to something inside the fortress.

If the heroes show any interest or sympathy, Lathe becomes more animated. He flaps off down the moat, then up a gully made by a rock fall. The heroes can follow it as it makes its way some distance up the crag against which the fortress is built until it comes to a narrow 4' high by 2' wide crack in the rock. It flops out an arm in the direction of the crack, then lies still. The crack opens up into a small tunnel, evidently intended as an escape route in case of a siege. The heroes can follow it to its exit point in a corner of the dungeons.

The Dungeon

The tunnel emerges in the farthest cell of the extensive dungeon that lies under the north wall of the fortress. It is now mostly empty, but the large numbers of shackles bolted into the cell walls show that the population of prisoners was once extensive. A dozen or so of the cells are occupied. The prisoners are filthy, anaemic and emaciated. They are on the point of death. The small blood-encrusted holes in their necks make it fairly evident what happened to them.

Wishbone and Walker can revive them. One of the prisoners is Slight's uncle **Cheerful**, who recognises Slight as Quick.

- He and Watchful were captured by White Scorpion Warriors in Woodhall and brought here through a Gate. He's not sure how long he has been here - a few days he thinks.
- Watchful was taken away with two other prisoners by White Scorpion guards a few hours ago. This is normal - prisoners are taken and usually brought back one by one a few hours later, minus another couple of pints of blood. Most survive a few rounds of this.
- It has happened to Cheerful twice - he was taken through a maze of rooms, then dragged across the inner courtyard to the Keep which is the last thing he can remember. Slight can attempt to find out more - on a good FC he can get a faint memory of Slight's mother Brook coming up to Cheerful and kissing him, which is clearly an implanted memory. Cheerful shamefacedly admits that he always had a thing for Brook. If he goes deeper, he just gets a sense of swirling darkness with a bright light beneath it, weakness and a stabbing pain in his neck.

The Inner Courtyard

This is accessed from the gate to the outer courtyard or by stairs leading up from the dungeon. Rooms have been built against the inner wall which once were the main sleeping quarters, kitchens and recreational areas for the fortress inhabitants.

Getting through this area to the keep should be simple, but the powerful defensive spells that Maba has placed around the keep will kick in:

- The rooms become mazy. Every way the heroes go, they seem to go round in a circle. Terrifying things lurk in the corners.
- Any latent suspicions that the heroes have of each other are magnified.
 - Walker: If Flame chose to sacrifice Walker to keep the Book, Walker's resentment builds up; if not, he starts to suspect that Flame is a secret assistant of Maba.
 - Flame: Slight is going to try to take Book away from her to give to Maba.
 - Rathgard and Fish Trader become convinced that each is about to betray the other.
 - Slight is convinced that Wishbone is about to take the Pearl.
 - Wishbone suspects that Slight is going to give the Pearl to Maba.
- The heroes go off into their own personal nightmares:
 - Fish Trader: A mist springs up around you and the air turns cool and damp. From out of the mist spring several of your Peacemaster companions in their natural shapes. They have a brand on their foreheads in the shape of a scorpion - a white paint has been applied to the scar tissue. "Kill! Kill!"
 - Flame: You see a cave in front of you from which a red glow is issuing. Now you are inside it - you're back in Phoenix Caves. Your wizard master is in front of you - his face

is shadowed so you can't see what he looks like, but you can hear his whispery voice. "Why have you not learned wisdom? Why are you so useless?"

- Rathgard: Somehow you're back in Everway, in the cellars. It's a mess - there's a riot or raid going on, and gang members' bodies litter the floor. Voulges and half a dozen gang members are cornered, surrounded by Watchers. He turns and looks at you. "How could you leave us? How could you?"
- Slight: Somehow you're back in Everway, in Crookstaff plaza. It's dark - menacing black clouds crackling with lightning have blocked the sky. The magical sigil that hangs over Crookstaff tower is flickering and trails of black smoke are twining round it. You're in a crowd of frightened citizenry clustered around the edge of the square, where Crookstaff magicians are performing some sort of ritual under the guidance of Glimmer Moondance, Necropolis Crookstaff, and Blemish Scratch, who is holding a large book with a binding of leprous skin, which you intuitively sense is evil. In fact this whole ceremony is wrong - they think it will banish the Mist, but it will just make it stronger. You push through the crowd, but it takes an agonisingly long time. You reach the front just as the ceremony come to a climax - Glimmer, Necropolis and Blemish take their places in specially inscribed magical circles and start chanting. Suddenly black lightning streaks down from the clouds above, striking the ground at their feet. They rise screaming into the air, pinned on columns of black smoke.
- Wishbone: Your feet leave the ground and you go flying up in the air. Whee! You glide and swoop, just like Hawk. But then there's an agonising pain in your chest and you look down to see an arrow stuck through it. As you spin and flutter towards the ground, you see the archer. It's your mother - she is dressed in rags and has a white scorpion painted on her forehead.
- Walker: Somehow you find yourself wandering back into Boarholt. Humility is there, tending to the sick who are lying on the grass. Suddenly tendrils of black mist emerge from the surrounding forest. Through them come fearsome warriors with white scorpion marks painted on their foreheads. They start to lay about them with swords, slashing at the helpless victims. You start to run towards Humility, but you don't seem to be getting any closer. A white scorpion warrior emerges from the mist and slashes her throat. She turns and looks at you accusingly, rivers of red blood staining the front of her white robe. "You ran away. Whenever it's difficult, you always run away."

These illusions are powerful (7W). Slight can dispel them with the Pearl, but it takes effort. Until a hero manages to break free, they cannot find the door that opens on the inner courtyard.

Once they do, a final illusion awaits them:

- The inner courtyard is dominated by a sixty foot tall square keep with four towers. Black mist billows up from the keep's roof. More importantly, a **fiery djinn** the size of a house stands stolidly in front of the lowered portcullis that is the only obvious entrance. It armed with a flaming sword. When it sees you it points its sword and a gout of fire erupts towards you.
 - It seems impervious to spells and sword blows (8W)
 - It can point the sword and fire flame at people, who will believe that are burning up. Flame is *not* immune to this, since it is coyote magic. She may believe that her powers have deserted her.
 - An 8W check is required to dispel it. The Pearl will eat it away if Slight can cast get close enough, particularly if reinforced by the Book.

The Keep

The keep stretches up in front of you. It is about 90' square and solidly built of grey stone with flecks of white. Four 25' square towers stand at its corners. The main body of the keep is around 80' high and rows of narrow arrow-slit windows start at 45'.

The rumbling of the great vortex of Black Mist that billows from the keep's roof shakes the ground and makes it hard to communicate. Black lightning flashes from it, occasionally striking the towers.

The stones of the keep wall are solidly mortared in place, but the mortar is crumbling enough that the walls could be scaled by skilled climbers (Flame and Fish Trader). FC to see if they get an unlucky lightning strike (-1 E and F), and another to see if they fall off if they are hit (1-3 E depending on how high up they were).

Assuming the heroes thought to bring plenty of rope and grappling hooks, they can also throw hooks through the windows and then again to catch the top of the wall ($F+FC \geq 5$ to succeed). The windows are too narrow for anyone other than Slight to slip through.

When they get to the top, the heroes discover that the slate roof has largely collapsed. A few thick joists hang out over the void below. The floors below are missing, so it's a long way down... The heroes can slide down knotted ropes or get to the top of the towers (beware lightning strikes) which have ruined stairs that can be climbed down.

The Portcullis

A 10' square metal portcullis bars the way to the two solid wooden doors beyond. This has been magically strengthened, but Flame can burn her way in at the cost of time.

If the alarm bell has not already sounded, it does now. 10 white scorpion warriors arrive within 2-3 rounds. Flame is too busy to help with them.

The Summoning Chamber

- The doors open onto a room that takes up the entire inner area of the keep. There is more delapidation than is obvious from the outside - the wooden floors of the three upper storeys have collapsed or been demolished, leaving only a few joists and beams poking out of the walls at 20' height intervals. From what you can see of it, the roof is mostly missing. There are doors in each corner to the four towers.
- A 20' magical circle is incised into the flagstone floor in the centre of the room, an impossibly complex pattern of lines, runes and sigils that glows in red and purple. Suspended about 5' above it is a globe made of circles of light that constantly move in a swirling hypnotic pattern, crackling with power. Hanging at its centre, wrapped in tangled tendrils of magic projected from the globe's edge, are three things - a cherubic-looking boy dressed in white, his arms outstretched, a huge cockatrice that wraps around him, and below them, a huge egg laced with fiery cracks. This unnatural construct is the source of the Black Mist vortex which billows up and out through the roof 80' above. Eight large paintings have been affixed to the walls at various heights and tendrils of mist from the vortex stream through them.

Slight and Wishbone can tell that a) the boy, cockatrice and egg are all avatars and b) the magical tendrils are sucking out and combining the power from them. The cage is the most intricate working that they have ever seen, a weaving of Air, Earth, Fire and Water with Basahn and Avatar magicks. It is also partially powered by the Mist, so disentangling it will be lengthy and dangerous. Think defusing a magical bomb...

Flame will recognise that the egg is a phoenix egg, though far larger than any she has seen before.

- The paintings, which are relatively new, are of items and landscapes. Many are unfamiliar to the heroes, but a few stand out:
 - A portrait of the Ring of Peace from the Peaceful Isles. In the picture, the Black Mist can be seen spreading out from it.
 - A city with the Egyptian-style architecture of the Hawk Empire.
 - A painting of the Mother Harvest statue that the heroes relocated in Plenty. Only a thin wisp of Black Mist trails from the vortex towards this one.
 - One of the pictures is different from the others because there is no mist tendril leading to it. It depicts a bleak plain covered in hundreds of copies of a large stone pyramid. A stone colossus is slowly moving between them, reaching out to touch each one, which

then vanishes. Hanging in the air above the plain is what appears to be a bright star. Closer examination reveals that this picture has a title - "Bleak". *Slight can determine that Maba has a magical connection to the star, which does not go via the picture.*

- There are no pictures of Everway.

The paintings are of course magical - the magic signature is similar to Painter's but has a Basahni twist to it.

- The back wall of the room has number of sets of shackles attached to it. Three emaciated prisoners hang from them.

Slight, if not distracted, will notice that one of the prisoners is his father **Watchful**.

- There are also a number of White Scorpion warriors, ranged defensively in front of the magical working.
- A paper-thin whisper echoes in the air. It is not clear where it is coming from. "So grandson, you have come to join us? And you, apprentice, have you learned wisdom?"
 - (Assuming the answer in each case is "no") "Ah, such a pity. So it shall be." As the white scorpion warriors attack, Flame feels a sudden pain in the neck (F6). On a bad FC, Flame loses 2 E and faints for a round. Slight may see a thin, shadowy figure that disappears again.

The combat

- There is not a lot in the room that the heroes can use to help them in their fight. The lighting is provided by glowing orbs in sconces
- The number of White Scorpion warriors will depend on how sneaky the heroes have managed to be and whether they fought them in the outer courtyard. If they went over the wall, Maba will only have access to the detachment of 20 that is based in the tower, since the portcullis will still be down. If the door is destroyed, any remaining White Scorpion warriors can join in later rounds.

White Scorpion Warriors

- **A 3** Battlecry - yelling makes speechifying pointless
- **E 4** Shield wall - the warriors link shield arms, making a wall that is hard to penetrate.
- **F 3** Mist frenzy - when charging, +1 F
- **W 3** The Master's Will - devotion to Maba makes them hard to persuade

Their leader is **Hopping Sparrow**, a big bearded man from Jayson's home realm of Great Plains. He is dressed like (and is) a berserker.

A 5 War cry

E 6 Throw it off

F 7 Spin attack

W 4 Sense attacks from behind

Specials:

2 Pet warthogs (F5 E3) Can charge opponents, knocking them off their feet.

Berserker's charge Charges with his pets. +1 F for that round.

- Maba is the big threat. He is invisible to everyone except Slight, moves extremely quickly, and can control the Mist vortex. However he must replenish every couple of rounds. Slight can attack him using the Pearl which will reduce his Water score by 1 on a good FC.

Shadow / Maba

A 7
E 4
F 7
W 8

Note: Maba will lose 1E and 1W after each round of the fight unless he gets to use the Drain Blood attack.

- **Invisibility (W7):** Maba is invisible to the heroes.
- **Mist bolts (F7):** Maba syphons power from the Mist vortex to create black lightning that can strike several heroes at once. If it hits, it does 1E damage.
- **Cloud mind (W7):** Maba can make one hero unable to fight due to utter confusion. On a bad FC, Maba can enchant a hero to turn against the others.
- **Mirror image (W6):** Maba can convince one or more heroes that they are attacking him when they are in fact striking empty air.
- **Draining Whispers (A7):** Maba can whisper directly in a victim's ear, depleting their morale and distracting them. Lose 1F.
- **Drain blood (F6):** Maba appears behind a victim, seizes them in a bony grip and pokes a hole in their neck, feasting on the blood that pours forth. The victim loses 2E. Maba gains 2E and does not lose W this round.
- **Rapid movement (F6):** Maba can flit around the battleground almost instantaneously. This costs 1F however.

Maba taunts:

- To Slight: "Ah, the Pearl! Where did you find that?"
- To Flame (assuming she still has the Book): "Foolish apprentice! The Book was not meant for you! Why did you not give it to its rightful owner?"
- To Fish Trader: "Ah, little kitten. The Peaceful Isles are mine now. Your people make my best White Scorpion commanders. So pliable."
- To Wishbone: "Ah, spirit worker. You will become a spirit yourself this day."
- To Rathgard: "You cannot stop us. Everway will soon be ours."
- To Walker: "We will help your master, you know. You should not be fighting us."
- Slight can disentangle the spells enough to free the avatars, but needs 3 uninterrupted rounds. Or he can use the Pearl to strip away Maba's glamours, making him visible to the others.
- When Maba W down to 6, Wishbone can see him on a lucky FC.
- When Maba W down to 5, Wishbone can see him, FT on a lucky FC. Slight can detect a magical link between him and the bright object in the Bleak painting.
- When Maba W down to 4, WB and FT can see him, Walker, Flame and Rathgard on a lucky FC
- When Maba W down to 3, all can see him.

Gradually a wizened skeletal figure is revealed. He looks like a very ancient, dark-skinned, translucent version of Slight. You can see the borrowed blood pulsing round his body, the heart squeezing and relaxing. His right index fingernail is some 3 inches long, filed to a razor sharp point, and crusted with dried blood.

- Maba will use the chained up prisoners as a food supply on alternate rounds, using his Fast Movement to reach them. FC to determine which one he picks - on a bad one, it's

Slight's father, who dies.

Combat end

- The combat ends when Maba's E or W reaches zero, or the avatars are freed.
- Maba becomes transparent as the last of his powers drains away. "You fools! Now the Walker will escape with the capstone and everything will end! You have doomed the Thousand Spheres!"
- He collapses to the ground, a mass of bones and organs in a translucent skin.
- Slight senses that the magical thread connecting him to a distant place snaps. Slight and Walker feel an overwhelming sense of dread.
- The magical cage disintegrates. The cockatrice unwraps from the boy and gives a great screech, then slithers down a nearby drain emitting an overwhelming stench of putrefaction.
- The boy steps down from the burning egg, which cracks open, revealing a man-sized phoenix burning with bright orange and yellow flames that flies straight up towards the roof.
- It hovers there for a moment, transforming into a woman who looks down at Flame with an expression of respect and thanks. Then she resumes her upward flight, bursting through the ragged roof. You all have to dodge the flaming rafters that come crashing down (if Maba is still alive, he gets pinned by one of them).
- Only the boy remains. He looks at all the heroes and smiles, raising his arms towards you, the image of innocence and purity. You feel an overwhelming urge to protect him. But as you move closer, he drifts backwards into a tunnel that opens behind him and then he is gone, leaving you all with the just the memory of his smile.
- Despite the heroes' triumph, they feel uneasy, as if something huge has been unleashed. Walker can feel the beginnings of a change into the Shifting Man.
- In the picture of Bleak, the capstone copies have vanished, leaving only one. The stone colossus is in the act of picking it up.

Returner HQ (NW tower)

- The ground floor is a large room that is dominated by a huge table with a large map of Everway and the Gatelands. It is not entirely accurate, suggesting that it is constructed from intelligence reports. Notes in Cleacuun are written on it, describing possible entry points. The Pyramid is ringed and is clearly the primary military objective.
- There are portraits on the wall of various military-looking types, many of whom are clearly Basahn. Most have a whirling background of Black Mist and have White Scorpion Warriors or other Basahn at their backs.

Slight can tell that the paintings are magical. Maba uses them to send orders and receive reports, using boxes that the pictures are designed to translate. Some of them are lying on a bench that runs under the paintings and contain half-finished instructions.

- The upper floor is a chaotic library containing thousands of years worth of reports of the Returners' activities in many realms and old invasion plans. There is an official history, which contains the information in handout #3.

Maba's Workshop (NE tower)

The 20' square ground floor of the tower is given over to a classic wizard's workshop.

- A 8' square region in the centre shows the ill-scrubbed out remains of a number of magical protection circles. Dust hangs in the air over them in an unnatural way.
- The walls are lined with shelves containing books, alembics, crucibles, retorts, glass jars of herbs, seeds, mannikins, snake skins and pickled body parts. Preparation benches stand in front of them. Paintings are set in little stands on the benches - Maba appears to have been experimenting with traps in which the focus of the painting is also the focus of another painting. The half rats and the sprays of blood in the paintings suggest what happens when this goes wrong.
- Somewhat incongruously, an easel has been set up in one corner. It has a half-finished picture of a grey metal citadel, glowing in the light of dozens of flaming forges where smiths are creating elaborate constructions of copper and brass.
- Another corner has a large elaborate desk with an ink and quill and an open leather-bound book covered in thin spidery handwriting. More books, hundreds of them, are stacked on shelves above it.

These are Maba's personal journals. They are written in high Cleacuun and go back 3000 years at least. Handouts #1 and #2 can be found with sufficient searching.

- On one wall is a display case. It is largely empty, but has a magical axe. There are hooks for a large sword, a square cushion with a circular dimple and an empty bookstand.
- Also on the walls are more of the shackles that line the main summoning chamber. There are some tell-tale dried bloodstains on the flagstones below them.
- Hung from the ceiling amid the bunches of herbs and dried crocodiles is a large cage about 6' in diameter and 6' high. Perched in it is an extraordinary-looking creature looking like a cross between a goblin and a vulture. Its skin is waxy green and two long lank tufts of grey hair hang off its otherwise bald head. Its 4 arms, 2 of which are attached to its body by stitching, are long and spindly, and end in dextrous fingers. The face is broad with a wide mouth and enormous pointy ears. It is crouched over the twitching body of a rat holding several blood-stained scalpels and a needle and thread. It looks up as you enter and grins, showing a mouth that is full of sharp needle teeth

This is Harruch, Maba's personal needle demon.

A 1 Welcome, fellow physician!

E 2 Avoid blood loss

F 6 Climb and jump

W 3 Self-preservation

Special: Impromptu surgery. The demon launches itself onto a victim - on a bad FC, it dextrously slices off a finger or other appendage. The next round, it attempts to sew it on elsewhere on the victim's body, or on another's.

- The floor above is a store room containing more magical paraphernalia. The floor above that contains a rotting mattress on the floor and nothing else.

Guards' Barracks (SE tower)

This tower is the most intact with all three floors still present. The ground floor and second floor have bunks and piles of dirty clothing. The middle floor is a rec room.

Lefun's Prison (SW tower)

- The ground floor is bare except for sets of shackles on the wall, a straw pallet in one corner and a large table and chair in the centre of the room, where the Jailer is sitting.

The Jailer

[Note: Maba may summon him into the fight if it's going badly for him]

The jailer is a nightmare monstrosity made by stitching several bodies together. Two entire torsos have been grafted onto either side of the flabby main body, each supported by a single

leg and waving a club in its one hand. The jailer's head is bald and his eyes are staring above a squat bulbous nose and thin red lips. His tongue has been cut out so he cannot speak. He is dressed in a Roman centurion-style leather skirt (pteruge) and an extremely dirty singlet stretched across all three torsos, a leather belt holding keys and loops for weapons, some stout boots, and very little else. His fingers are all raw and bloody from playing five finger fillet over and over again.

A 1 Horrible wheezing

E 6

F 5

W 4 Eye in the back of the head (literally)

Specials:

Three in one. The jailer can fight up to three enemies at once without disadvantage.

Kill me thrice The jailer has to be stabbed in each of his three hearts in order to die.

- The 2nd floor room above is a prison cell where Lefun is immured.

Lefun

Appearance

Dark-skinned Basahn woman, appears to be in her 50s. Black hair pulled back, expression of suffering. Dressed in rags.

Personality

Mother of Cunning (and therefore Slight's grandmother). Urumora is her mother. She has an ability to charm humans into liking her or ignoring her. A Founder Basahn.

Her 70 years as Maba's prisoner has left her completely mad. She screams out of the window in her room from time to time. She only speaks Cleacuun. She won't recognise Slight, though she will say Cunning's name (which Slight knows).

Rewards and Consequences

- The heroes can discover the meaning of this picture by looking at Maba's notes in his workshop (note: in Cleacuun, and old Cleacuun at that. Slight and Rathgard can work it out between them, or Kayte could translate for them), which will reveal:

Handout #1: The true tale of Spheremaker and the Enchanted Chair

- Aka what really happened during Guren's sphere creation ritual. The "godling" was the avatar of Death, which Guren tried to sacrifice. However, it did not go to plan - instead, the Edge split the avatar into two, creating an avatar of Stasis ("which the humans call the Walker") and an avatar of Change.
- The Walker left the avatar of Change bound at "the Heart of All" and sought midianite with which to wall it up for ever. It had retained the Edge as it was the one object in the Thousand Spheres capable of cleaving midianite.
- Maba realised the danger almost too late. If the Walker succeeded in its aim of walling up its opposite, then all change in the Thousand Spheres would cease and the Returners would never succeed in their ambition of re-taking Everway. So he reluctantly joined forces with his "fool brother" to stop that happening.
- They found the Walker in the remote sphere of Bleak, on the point of discovering the capstone. Guren and Maba created a mirror in the sky that translated the Edge away from the Walker and created a thousand false copies of the capstone to hide the real one (using the powers of a captured avatar - the Door Opener - Hope / Despair). The copies needed to be renewed regularly as the Walker found and destroyed them, a process taking much energy, and Guren and Maba agreed to take it in turns to do this.

Handout #2: The true tale of Slate and Ocean

- AKA Guren's sacrifice. Building on his learnings from the capstone mirror, Maba created a powerful new artefact - the Mirror of Shadows - that could translate away anything its wielder could focus it on. He decided to give it to a minion - a wizard called Slate, or the Kingmaster - to see what he would do with it. Slate decided to use it to take over a realm called the Daring Kingdom.
- Maba was of course opposed by his twin, who fell in love with Ocean, the Daring Kingdom's ruler. When Slate translated away her hand, leaving her dying of blood loss, Guren joined his hand to hers and gave up his life in her place. Ocean founded the Shadow League, recognised by their mismatched hands, which opposed Maba and eventually destroyed the Mirror of Shadows.
- Maba quickly found Guren's base and helped himself to the Edge of Light and Darkness, the Pearl of Making and the Book of Words. While doing so he encountered an image of Guren, who warned him that "you will be destroyed by your children" (Guren claimed that he had acquired the gift of prophecy later in life). Maba did not take this very seriously, and in a fit of mischief misled the tellers of the tale of the creation of the Shadow League into believing that he, rather than Guren, had been responsible, and that it was named after him.
- Maba only realised the subtlety of Guren's revenge later. The capstone mirror renewal spell now devolved entirely to him, and it slowly but surely sapped his life force. Maba was forced to negotiate with some renegade Crookstuffs from Deadwalk Coven for necromantic magicks to keep himself alive.
- At about this time, the Pearl and the Edge were stolen from him by persons unknown. Maba suspected that it was Redfox, the avatar of Trickery.

Handout #3: Actions against Everway

(In the Returner HQ)

- Some notes detailing Maba's various attempts to take Everway, including his fury that his protégé **Earthshaker** (the original owner of this very castle), was defeated by Ulrich Crookstaff using the Edge of Light and Darkness that was stolen from him. Ulrich's use of the Edge created a permanent gash in reality which the Everwayan authorities have covered up.
- Maba's encounter with Painter. It started twenty years ago when he encountered an innocent-looking young woman in a black dress who was painting a picture of a landscape. Shadow immediately recognised her as a powerful magician, specialising in a form of picture magic which he had never encountered before. They got to talking - Painter explained that she was painting the picture as a trap for a dangerous and powerful enemy who was lurking somewhere in the Thousand Spheres. Shadow explained that he was trying to bring about the downfall of a city whose inhabitants had wronged his people (not something he would normally have told anyone, but she seemed so innocent...). They agreed to help one another. Painter would teach Shadow something of her magic, and in return, Shadow would deliver to her the Book of Words.
- Painter created pictures for the Hooded Councillor and Innocence, and helped to trap them into the working. She then demanded the Book. Shadow refused, saying that he wanted to be sure that his spell worked first. Painter went off to look for her rival, saying she would send for the Book later. In the last few months she has done so, and Shadow gave it to "an amusing servant" to take to her in Everway.
- Recently Shadow has been able to enhance the Mist's effects in two ways. Painter had taught him how to create paintings which have allowed him to spread the Mist much more quickly by bypassing several spheres. Secondly, Shadow managed to trap the Phoenix Queen using a picture. It did not go entirely to plan - the Queen became an egg - but nonetheless her power has given the Mist a destructive edge in the form of storms of black lightning.

The Cavalry

- As the heroes make this appalling discovery, a strange figure strolls into the room. He? She? - it's very hard to say - is dressed in a smart suit and trousers, in bright white. They are holding a small round mirror in one hand. "Hello," they say. "My name is Kayte. It looks like you need some help."

Slight will immediately detect that Kayte is similar to Painter.

- "Who am I? Well, I suppose in your terms I am a god. Don't worry, I'm a friendly one. Thank you very much for getting rid of Sharra, by the way. I'm sorry if she threatened you. I'm afraid it's my fault. She's my nemesis, you see. She's determined to come after me, because I had a hand in the death of her father. But he was a mad mirror mage who was going to release the dragons of chaos and destroy shadow, so I had no choice."
- Shadow? "Shadows of Amber, the one true world. Or at least the most ordered. Every other world else is a more chaotic copy of it, or more imperfect, if you like. The further out you go, the more chaotic the copy. Oh dear, I'm explaining this very badly, aren't I?"
- The Thousand Spheres - "I think it's a second-degree shadowset, made with a shadow copy of the Jewel of Judgement. One of Fiona's or Brand's experiments, I fancy, like I was. Anyway, that's why things work a bit differently - all this earth, air, fire and water stuff, just like the Greek philosophers on Earth said. "
- Avatars: "Yes, I haven't seen anything quite like them anywhere else in shadow. It looks like shadow manipulation is much more - democratic - here in the Thousand Spheres than elsewhere. Usually only Amberites can manipulate shadow - that's people whose homeworld is Amber. In your case that would be the Basahn. But in the rules of your shadowset, it looks like ordinary shadowfolk can create their own magical constructs through sheer belief, and those constructs became sentient. If the stories I've heard are right, one of your avatars led a rebellion and pushed the Amberites out of Amber, I mean the Basahn out of Everway. It's quite extraordinary. I've never come across anything quite like it before."
- The instruments of Odin: "Yes, that's probably what the Jewel of Judgement became. There should be four of them. Put them together and you can make shadows which are stable. I imagine Fiona or Brand would be very interested if they could get hold of them. That's probably what Sharra was planning to do - trade your Book for more shadow manipulation powers to get at me."

The Threat

If the heroes haven't translated Maba's writing yet, Kayte can do it for them. "Oh dear. oh dear, oh dear. This is very bad. You need to get back to Everway at once!"

- Why? "Because it seems that the sorcerer you just killed was holding back the Avatar of Stasis, what you call the Walker, from finding the capstone of the pyramid. And I'm willing to bet that it's the last Instrument of Odin! If you don't stop them, the Walker will seal up the Pyramid and everything in the Thousand Spheres will go into stasis."
- What to do? "Use the other Instruments of Odin to open up the pyramid. The Edge of Light and Darkness should be able to do it, if wielded properly. Then you can get the Avatar of Change out."
- Why can't you go? "Because Everway is barred to me. It's like the Basahn, they can't just shadow-walk into Everway, and I can't just translate in there. But you're native shadowfolk, so I might be able to translate you. Do you know of a mirror in Everway that I could use? Preferably quite large?"

Assuming the heroes remember the mirror in the cellars, Kayte asks them to describe its location as accurately as they can. "All right, got it. Just stand over there would you? And remember to roll out of the way when you get to the other side. Good luck!" Kayte raises their mirror, and suddenly you are falling several feet onto a double bed that Flame and Walker know quite well. You're back in the cellars, in Everway.