



Children of the Void

“Under bright skies, the silted harbor of Skara-Issk glitters along her rotting wharves and ruined avenues. But the eye is drawn west, upwards, towards the massive tower that served as lighthouse back when ships’ prows cut the waters of the bay. Come nightfall, the tower’s apex flares with a brilliant bluish-white that no hand tends, and no fuel feeds. Who can say what the lighthouse of Skara-Issk guides now . . .”

Adventure Overview

PCs journey to an abandoned harbor-town in order to investigate a nearby lighthouse that burns with an eerie, seemingly everlasting, fire. What few people know is the ‘lighthouse’ was once the tower of Araxenes the Astronomer, centuries before the harbor was built. Araxenes used magic and his knowledge of the heavens to call down demons from the night sky-- translucent, tentacle-covered horrors with a taste for human blood! These ‘Children of the Void’ eventually slew him, but at least one of his enchantments, the great spectral fire, remains intact.

PCs encounter an uncouth goatherd named **Ezech Stone**, who is more than he appears. Something of a wizard himself, Ezech feeds his goats (and the occasional human) to the Void Children who still visit the tower when the stars are right. The demons occasionally whisper arcane secrets in exchange.

Depending on their actions, the PCs might tangle with Ezech, or the notorious **Drogus Brothers**, who are cooling their heels in one of Skara-Issk's many abandoned buildings, before confronting the secret of the dread tower itself.

Involving the PCs

The 'default' setting has one or more PCs approached by the nervous scholar **Tinayne Taskoye**, while enjoying drinks at the Four Winds Tavern (or hanging out in a library, or haggling in a marketplace, etc.) Tinayne is compiling a reference of local ancient structures, and wants adventuring-types to investigate the lighthouse at Skara-Issk to learn its 'secret.' He isn't sure what this 'secret' is, but feels it's probably important enough to warrant an entire chapter in his book. Tinayne knows the tower is somehow connected to Araxenes the Astronomer, but won't reveal this to PCs for fear of scaring them off. He offers to pay handsomely, including whatever costs are necessary to outfit an expedition. Regrettably, Tinayne explains, his studies are such that he will have to remain behind.

If the above seems too contrived, the GM can simply have traveling PCs chance upon the lighthouse's gleam at night, hopefully drawing them to investigate.

Research

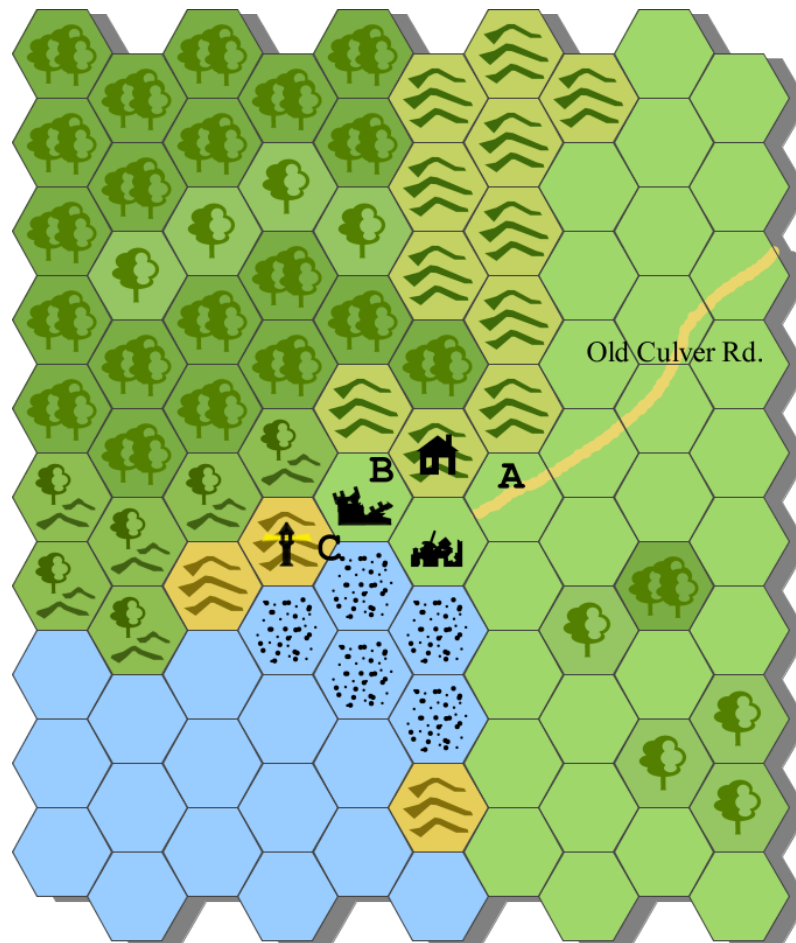
PCs with the Scholar/Scribe career can make a Hard (-2) Mind check to discover the relationship between Araxenes and the 'lighthouse', provided they have access to a library. Several texts speak of a "light that never warms" within the tower.

More general means of collecting information (carousing, "asking around," etc.) can glean the ruins of Skara-Issk are shunned, most likely because of the ghoul-haunted forests just west of the city. PCs with the Rogue/Thief background might overhear whispers that the Drogus Brothers have recently holed up somewhere near the ruins, following a robbery that left one of them wounded.

The Approach

PCs travel along the overgrown, Old Culver Road. Just towards evening a flock of mangy goats pours down from a nearby hill and obscures their path (location 'A' on the map). Successful Mind checks (no modifiers) reveal a group of black-haired, ferret-faced boys watching them from the concealment of a nearby hillock.

The seven boys are all sons of Ezech Stone, the goatherd. They are armed with slings and will try a few casts if the PCs menace their stock, but otherwise watch and wait. No cajoling will get them to speak. The goats themselves look wan and lethargic. Examination shows rows of strange sucker-marks along their legs and abdomen.



Ezech himself eventually appears and asks the PCs what they're doing on his land. He stands 6' 4" with a scraggly black beard, and speaks in a thick, rustic accent. However, he's not overtly hostile and will warn PCs of the local dangers (besides himself) if feeling favorably inclined. "There's ghouls of the leprous white variety jes' west of here, in them woods, and bandit-types down in the harbor yonder."

If PCs ask about accommodations, Ezech will reluctantly allow them to spend the night in his goat-pens nearby. "Yew want somethin' nicer n' that, you'll have to part with coin." PCs who

agree to pay will be put up in Ezech's sturdy sod house, and fed a meal of hastily-slaughtered goat. A number of Ezech's children will be evicted in order to make room for the PCs to sleep by the hearth. "Don't worry about them none," their father explains. "They kin' sleep in the pens and the ghouls most likely as not warr'nt bother."

If for some reason PCs attack Ezech, he'll use his magic to seemingly fade to nothingness and hightail it for the topmost level of the tower (see location 'C'), leaving his children to their fates.

PCs spending the night with Ezech and his family might notice there's no Mrs. Stone anywhere to be seen (Ezech sacrificed her to the Void Children about a year ago, when he felt she was getting long in the tooth). Ezech will be reluctant to speak about the tower, explaining the structure is cursed and best avoided. If asked about the strange sucker-marks on his herd, he'll explain "We git big ticks in these parts."

A loose stone at the back of the hearth hides a bag with all of Ezech's magical paraphernalia: an astrolabe, star-charts, large sacrificial dagger of meteoric iron, and a worn grimoire detailing star-magic.

City Ruins

The once-bustling port town of Skara-Issk (the two ruin hexes near location 'B') is now just an assortment of rotting timber structures, overgrown with weeds. Stone docks jut out into the silted, muddy harbor. There is one relatively intact building, a warehouse, set back a short distance from the waterfront. The entrance has been hastily barricaded with stone blocks and planking. The first PC to start moving aside rubble will be greeted by a pair of leveled crossbows.

The Drogus Brothers, Cam and Harm, have holed up inside the warehouse with their gang. Harm was badly wounded during a heist-gone-wrong, and now the bandits are waiting for him to recover before moving their loot (a small fortune in jade figurines) to a more civilized locale.

In addition to the brothers, there are a number of bandits (rabble) equal to the PCs plus one. Cam acts as leader. Not usually the trusting sort, he knows he's in a bad situation and is genuinely worried about his brother, whose wound has become infected. Depending on how the PCs conduct themselves, Cam might offer to trade some of his loot for supplies, or ideally, the services of a Physician/Healer to treat Harm.

Any PC with at least rank 0 in Rogue/Thief will know the Drogus brothers have a substantial price on their head for murdering a noble during the course of a robbery. This price is even more substantial if the two can be returned alive.

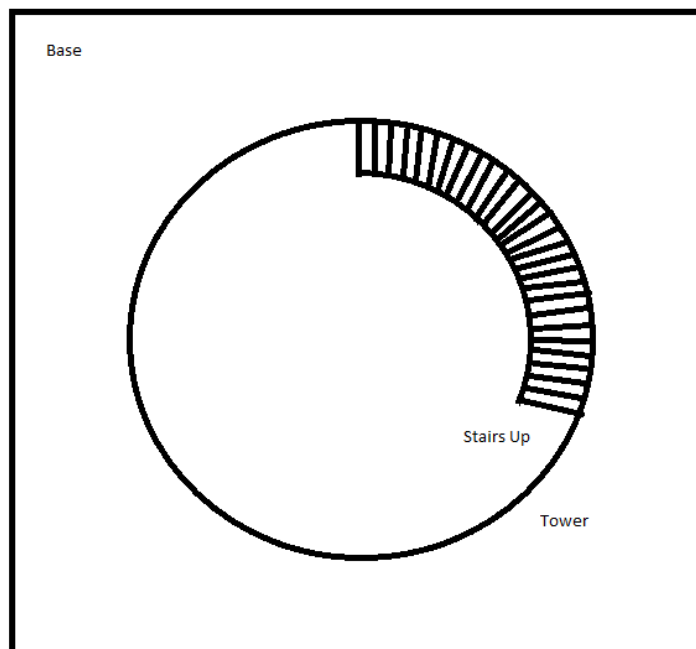
If the PCs prove hostile, Cam will use his powerful magical amulet to transform and attack, joined by his men and a desperate Harm.

The warehouse's interior contains the gang's bedrolls, personal possessions, and a dwindling supply of food. The jade figurines are kept in a steel box buried under rubble in the northwest corner of the building.

The Tower of Araxenes

There are two ways of approaching the 300-foot 'lighthouse' (location 'C' on the map). The most obvious is to move through the ruined city hex and then climb the hill on which the tower stands. This will bring the PCs close to the warehouse in the city ruins.

The second, "secret" route (which Ezech uses) winds through the wooded hills just north of the tower, before arriving at the structure's base and a concealed back entrance. Anyone with the tracking boon or a rank or two in Hunter/Tracker has a chance of discovering Ezech's trail, worn over the years by his many visits. Traveling this route allows PCs to skirt the city ruins, but if done at night will attract the attention of several (1.5 x PCs #, round up) hungry **Leprous White Ghouls**. The ghouls will try to spring a surprise attack from the cover of dark forest.



The tower has a square base of broad limestone blocks that form the first story and rises for 20' before tapering into a cylinder. Narrow windows are spaced high along this ground floor, and

the front double doors have long since rotted away. Room after spacious, empty room eventually leads to a great stairwell hugging the tower's exterior wall. These ground-floor chambers show signs of having been looted--bare patches on the floor and walls marking where panels of semi-precious stone and tiles were removed.

The hike up the stairs is taxing and uneventful. Occasionally, a piece of dried animal dung (goat) can be found. PCs eventually catch sight of a bronze portal near the top. A section of stairs 10' from the portal has had its stone supports removed and replaced with old timber by Ezech. This trap can be bypassed by staying within 4' of the exterior wall. A PC who is specifically examining the footing during the long trek up can make a Tricky (-1) Mind check, modified by levels in Barbarian/Savage, Thief/Rogue, or an appropriate Worker career (e.g. stonemason). On a success, the PC notices the stairs are sagging slightly lower on one side.

Each person passing over the weakened section has a 1-3 chance (d6) of setting off the trap, dropping them 15' onto the stairs directly underneath. The fall causes d6+2 damage, and the PC must then make an Agility check or tumble an additional 3-18 feet (3d6) down the stairwell, sustaining another 1 LB damage per 3' traveled. A Calamitous Failure on this check means the PC has slipped into the open, central shaft and drops over two hundred feet to the flagstones below (fatal).

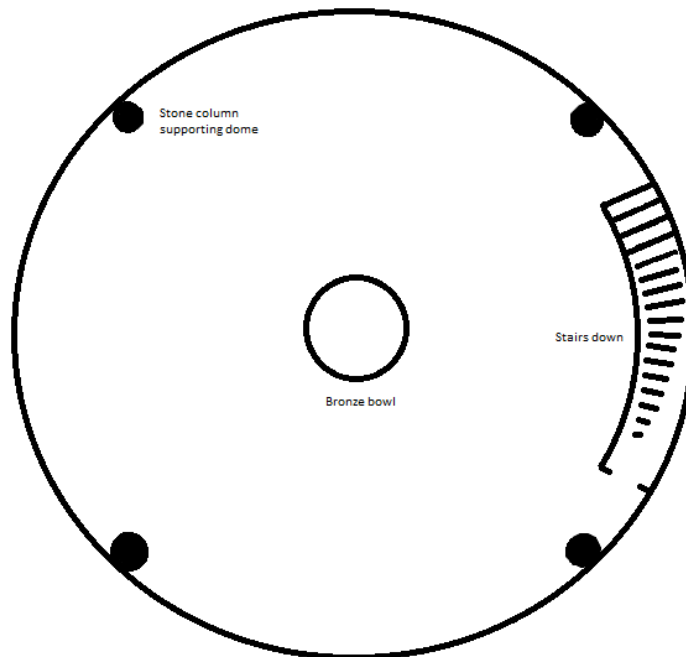
At the GM's discretion, a character who takes over half his LB from the fall and subsequent tumble will either tear a muscle or break a bone (Strength roll to avoid the latter). The wound will cause a penalty die to all appropriate physical actions until fully healed.

The bronze portal itself is also trapped: Ezech placed an enchantment on the door that causes it to burst into white-hot flames if a command word ("Desdinova") isn't uttered when touched. The flames are illusory, though they will seem to cause d6 damage per round of contact. Anyone brought below 0 LB this way will simply fall unconscious. A PC can try to 'disbelieve' the fire by making a Hard (-2) Mind check, modified by levels in Magician/Sorcerer. Success dispels the illusion.

Past the portal, the stairs climb into a large open chamber with 3' high walls. This is the tower's apex. Stone columns support a clear glass dome, and enchantments prevent strong wind-gusts from entering. The vantage affords a stunning view.

A huge bronze bowl occupies the room's center. This is the source of the spectral blue-white light, though it will not flare into life until the sun sets. The 'fire' sheds no warmth. Impressed into the floor around the bowl is an enchanted mosaic made of lapis lazuli and quicksilver. The mosaic slowly changes to reflect the night sky above, with the constellations identified in a glowing, ancient script.

What happens in this chamber depends on when the PCs enter it. During the day, the room is deserted. Around evening, Ezech will come trudging up the stairs with a couple goats in tow. *If* the PCs have arrived before him and left a clear trail of their passing (i.e. triggering the stairs trap, leaving the bronze portal open, etc.) Ezech will be forewarned and use his magic to become invisible. Most likely he'll leave before the hungry Void Children appear and attempt to feed on PCs (see below).



If Ezech is not aware of the PCs, then he will come blundering into the chamber with his goats, genuinely surprised. He'll make the hasty excuse he came to make sure everyone is alright and try to leave. Ezech knows the Void Children will be showing up soon and doesn't want to be around without the protection of a magic circle.

If the PCs arrive at night, they will most likely interrupt the ceremony of several (2d3) Void Children gorging themselves on fresh goat's blood. Ezech watches from the protection of a magic circle drawn on the floor. The Children immediately attack PCs, as they prefer human prey. However, their feeding has left them flushed with blood and fully visible. Ezech joins their assault by casting spells at the PCs. Note that if someone can obliterate a section of the magic circle, or force Ezech outside its confines, the Void Children will attack him as well! The (intact) circle of protection can hold up to three PCs. Any remaining Children will go soaring back to the stars just before dawn.

If PC's arrived before Ezech, and he has either fled or been killed, then 2d3 Void Children will swarm the tower shortly after nightfall, just as the star Algol appears above the horizon. Unfortunately, they will be invisible--a tough Mind check (-4) to even notice a faint distortion of starlight as they move. The Children attack PCs in a frenzy of serrated tentacles.

Conclusion

PCs who survive a night-time visit to the tower's topmost chamber will have learned enough of its 'secret' to satisfy Tinayne Taskoye (assuming they give the gullible scribe a factual accounting of what happened). If Ezech is killed, then the goat sacrifices cease and the Void Children eventually quit haunting the tower.

PCs who weren't hired by Tinayne to investigate can discover a small fortune in astronomical equipment (e.g. a golden astrolabe, a working telescope) hidden in the topmost chamber, provided the GM is feeling generous.

If Ezech survives, assume another year until he stumbles on a magical secret so powerful he becomes a *real* threat . . .

Appendix One: Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

Ezech Stone, Rustic Sorcerer

Attributes

Strength 1
Agility 1
Mind 2
Appeal 0

Combat Abilities

Brawl 1
Melee 1
Missile 0
Defense 2

Lifeblood: 11

Arcane Power: 12

Villain Points: 5

Protection: heavy robe (d3-1)

Weapons: staff, d6+1, knife, d6-1, or spells (see **Appendix Two**)

Boons/Flaws

Learned (Star Lore)
Country Bumpkin

Careers

Worker (Herdsman) 1
Rogue 1
Scholar 0
Magician 2

Tall, scraggly, and generally uncouth, Ezech's seemingly ignorant ways mask a powerful mind. His chief goal is the acquisition of arcane knowledge, for which he'll gladly sacrifice anyone, even family. Ezech specializes in celestial magics taught to him by the Void Children.

Typical Bandit

Attributes

Strength 0
Agility 0
Mind 0
Appeal 0

Combat Abilities

Brawl 0
Melee 0
Missile 0
Defense 0

Lifeblood: 3

Protection: d3-1 (very light armor)

Weapons: knife, d6-2, or crossbow, d6+2

Lean and desperate, these men are classed as rabble. Each is rank 1 in Thief/Rogue. For bandit-types, they are unusually loyal to the Drogus brothers.

Cam Drogus, Notorious Rogue

Attributes

Strength 1 (3)
Agility 2 (3)
Mind 0 (-1)
Appeal 0

Combat Abilities

Brawl 1
Melee 1
Missile 1
Defense 0

Lifeblood: 11 (13)

Protection: d3-1 (light armor) or d6+2 (special, see below)

Weapons: sword, d6+1, throwing knife, d6-1 (as human)
2 claws, d6-1 or 1 bite, d6+2 (in wolf form)

Boons/Flaws

Sneaky

Careers

Rogue 2
Assassin 1

Cam stands only 5' 5", with a wiry build and shaggy brown hair. A scar extends from the bottom of his chin, across an eye socket, and ends at his hairline. He cultivates his own sense of honor as a "gentleman of the road" and keeps his word (though he is loath to give it).

Cam wears a necklace of braided fur beneath his clothes-- a powerful item called *The Lanyard of the Wulf*, stolen from a witch's coven many years ago. The amulet allows him to transform into a wolf-like creature during periods of duress. In this form, he adds 2 to his Strength, 1 to his Agility, and subtracts 1 from Mind. He gains natural weapons and a protection of d6+2 from all attacks, save silver, magic, or fire (against which he has a protection of 0).

Any PC who gains possession of the necklace can use the transformation power, but the GM secretly rolls 2d6 every time he wants to turn back to human. On a roll of doubles, the PC is permanently "stuck" in wolf-form.

Harm Drogus, Cam's Wounded Brother

Attributes

Strength 1
Agility 1
Mind 1
Appeal 0

Combat Abilities

Brawl 0
Melee 1
Missile 2
Defense 0

Lifeblood: 11--currently 3, due to wounds

Protection: d3-1 (light armor)

Weapons: axe, d6+1, throwing knife, d6-1

Boons/Flaws

Wounded (penalty die on most actions)

Careers

Merchant 1
Rogue 2

Sandy-haired and taller than his older brother, Harm serves as the "brains" of the bandit-gang. He has a deep puncture wound in his abdomen, dripping pus. If untreated, the infection will kill Harm in less than a week.

Leprous White Ghouls

Attributes

Strength 1
Agility 2
Mind 0

Combat Abilities

Attack with 2 claws +2, d3+1, or 1 bite d6 +special
Defense: 1
Protection: d6-1 (rubbery hide)
Lifeblood: 6

These pallid, stooped creatures can be found haunting dark woods. They are faceless, save for a fanged mouth stretching from one corner of their jaw to the other. Once a bite attack from a Leprous White Ghoul hits they will "lock on," doing damage on succeeding rounds without needing to make an attack roll. Only death releases their jaws. The ghouls are nigh-completely silent, and communicate with each other through unknown means. Trying to hear a Leprous White Ghoul sneaking up on you requires a tough (-4) Mind check.

Note that these are not "undead" creatures.

Void Children

Attributes

Strength 3
Agility 1
Mind 0

Combat Abilities

Attack with 4 tentacles +0, d6-2
Defense: 1 (4 if "invisible")
Protection: d6-2 (non-terrene flesh)
Lifeblood: 13

These horrors are native to a planet in the loathsome Algol system, but can cross vast interstellar distances in a matter of seconds. Normally, their flesh is transparent to visible light (-4 Mind check to spot them when moving, with an effective defense of 4 if attacked), but when flushed with blood they appear as a mass of serrated tentacles floating in mid-air. Any tentacle attack that does at least 1 LB of damage will render the Void Child visible in this manner.

Void Children possess a certain amount of magical knowledge, though few of their kind actually cast spells.

Appendix Two: Celestial Magic

The following are several "star-themed" spells known by Ezech Stone.

First Magnitude

Magic Circle

The caster draws a magic circle around himself that blocks the approach of any lesser celestial demons. Note that the circle's protection is revoked if the caster attacks the demons. Requires Casting Time and Special Item. Cost is 3 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Moderate (0).

Bend Light

This spell is similar to Pass Unnoticed from the Barbarians of Lemuria, Legendary Edition rulebook, pg. 52, though the caster actually *does* become invisible.

Call Void

This spell plunges up to a room-sized area into cold blackness, blocking sight. The caster can still see as normal. Requires Obvious Technique. Cost is 4 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Tricky (-1).

Star-Bolt

The caster hurls a shower of bluish-white sparks, blinding a single target. Requires Line of Sight and Obvious Technique. Cost is 3 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Moderate (0), modified by the target's Mind. The blindness lasts until the target has a chance to recover.

Ask the Stars

The caster can perform minor feats of divination. This could include learning an enemy's name, predicting the general outcome of a course of action, or asking a 'yes' or 'no' question. Note that the result is heavily dependent on the GM's fiat--he does not have to reveal information

that could damage suspense or threaten the outcome of a story arc. Requires Casting Time and Hour Pour (midnight). Cost is 3 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Tricky (-1).

Celestial Fire

The caster summons a font of pale blue flames, directed at one target. The 'fire' burns with the coldness of vacuum and does 1d6 + caster's Mind in damage, ignoring armor. Requires Line of Sight and Obvious Technique. Cost is 3 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Tricky (-1).

Second Magnitude

Pull of the Void

The caster dramatically increases gravity in a 30' sphere, centered around himself (the caster is unaffected). Anyone caught in this area will have their Strength effectively reduced by 2, though LB totals remain the same. Anyone brought to a *negative* Strength total will be unable to move, pinned to the ground by high gravity. Characters with a '0' or higher Strength after the reduction can move at half speed and perform physical actions with a penalty die. Most missile fire directed through the sphere will fall to the ground before striking the caster. Requires Wounds (gravity backlash). Cost is 9 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Hard (-2).

Call Void Children

The caster summons 2d3 Void Children who will immediately attack unless placated by a sacrifice or kept at bay by the protection of a **Magic Circle**. Using the promise of fresh blood, the caster can try to compel the Void Children to perform a single action or reveal secrets of celestial magic. Requires Casting Time and Ritual Sacrifice--additionally, the spell can only be completed at night. Cost is 8 Arcane Power and Difficulty is Hard (-2).

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