

Eidemon's Journal Entry

18 Varsten, 1084

Thurstan is dead, by my hand.

The words look strange to me. Even as the ink dries on the page I still find myself struggling to believe that the horrific events of that night truly happened. Perhaps Nedrick is right – maybe committing these things to paper will help to settle my mind and heart.

It began innocently enough, as most tales of atrocity do. We were at sea, reveling in our victory over the frost giant vogar and his shape-shifting thugs. Felucia called out from the crow's nest that there was a launch adrift a half-mile to port, and that there were moving bodies in it. Damn her rogue's sharp eyes!

We were 60 miles off shore, so we knew the boat had to be stranded. We changed course and came upon the launch a few minutes later. She was battered but floating – drifting, really, as her oars were gone – and inside were two men and four women. They hailed us and begged for aide, though in truth no begging was needed as only a monster would have left those people to die. A monster ... in retrospect, I wish we had considered that more carefully.

We brought the people on board and gave them food and blankets. They told a plausible enough story. They were passengers on the *White Lady*, bound for Corusk, and had been caught in a dreadful storm. The ship had lurched and nearly capsized, spilling them and many of the crew into the sea. The boat they were in came loose and they were able to grab on to it to stay afloat, but they got separated from the *Lady* and never saw her again. They'd been drifting for three days, they said, and we believed them because they looked dreadfully pale and starved half to death even after we gave them a hearty meal. Nedrick spent half his daily spell count on Restoration spells before they looked able to survive the night.

The meal and the healing put our charges in high spirits. They thanked us most profusely. The women flattered us with their rapt attention while we regaled them with stories of our exploits. Fools that we were, we counted ourselves lucky when the drink seemed to make them brazen and forward. Nedrick's obvious disapproval notwithstanding, we led them to our beds with no thought but of our own lust.

I owe my life to being a light sleeper. I awoke in the dead of night to the sensation of a smooth, cold something brushing against my arm. My low-light vision picked up a blue-black tentacle slowly moving to encircle me and my instinctive recoil caused me to fall off of the bunk. I grabbed for my trusty kukerí and retrieved it just in time to slash and dodge as more tentacles lashed out at me. To my horror, I saw that they came from within the body of my seemingly innocent bedmate. She was looking at me with tears in her eyes; she barely got out the words "I'm sorry" before her eyes bulged in pain and the life left her.

From behind the girl's body emerged the rest of the horrific creature, a bundle of writhing, twisting tentacles. It was no taller than a halfling, but had the reach of a large creature. There was no true body to speak of, merely a place where the tentacles seemed to bunch together. It had an obscene-looking maw and a pair of eyes mounted on more of its stalks.

Its foul tentacles groped at my limbs as quickly as I could cut them away. In desperation I lunged for the bed and stabbed at the central mass of the creature, such as it was. My kukerí opened one gaping wound, then another. I felt the creature grab my legs and inject me with some kind of filth that made me clumsy.

Brute force and my adamantine kukri saved me – before the creature could inject me with more of its poison I cut it open and spilled its black blood all over the place. The thing made no sound, but in my mind I heard it scream in pain as it died.

With all the speed I could muster I quaffed an anti-poison potion, threw on some clothes and ran to see to my comrades. I found Nedrick flailing away at another of the horrors with his silver mace in the passage between rooms. Nedrick is a strong man, yet it seemed to do little damage. The creature gripped his weapon arm and I reached in to slash at it. My kukri bit well into the thing's flesh. Nedrick saw this and, with a grim smile, dropped the mace to draw his adamantine morningstar. "I've got it now," he told me. "Look to Felucia!"

I found our halfling sister cornered in her room by one of the beasts. It already had her in its grip and was crushing her with all four of its tentacles. I plunged my kukri into the thing from behind and felt it scream. In my mind I sensed it threatening to kill Felucia; since I'd already seen what it did to its victims that lived, I paid the thing no heed and hacked at it anyway. Felucia managed to wriggle free, so I told her to grab something adamantine. The thing's poison had her nearly immobile but she managed to crawl to her pack for a weapon. The thing grabbed for me and I paid it no mind, knowing its poison could not affect me now. I cut and thrust at it until it died.

Felucia also had a potion for the poison, thank the gods. The three of us joined forces to slay two more of the disgusting creatures on our way to the foredeck where Thurstan was supposedly on watch.

We found him stretched out on the deck, his weapons at his side. In the dim light I could clearly see a blue-black tentacle disappear inside him. His eyes bulged and his body shook violently. His frantic gaze fell on me and his mouth moved. "Kill me," he begged. "Please, kill me."

Thurstan was my friend and my brother in arms. There was no hope of saving him now; I could only do as he asked. I knelt over his form, ignoring the already-emerging tentacles that sought to grab me, and slit my friend's throat. Nedrick and Felucia stood ready and destroyed the creature as it emerged from his body.

These events occurred some three weeks ago, yet I still feel the heat of Thurstan's blood on my hand. We have been able to learn little of the creatures that attacked us; they seem to be beyond the ken of most sages. We have pieced together a few facts, which I set down here lest they be lost.

The *White Lady* never arrived in Corusk. We know not what came of her or the crew, but fear the worst.

The creatures call themselves 'tsochar'. They are attracted to sources of magic, but driven by a cold and alien intelligence that goes far beyond random impulse. No doubt they intended to use Thurstan for his magic and the rest of us as carriers until another mage came along, as they had used the innocents on the ship to get to us. These tsochari are resistant to cold, acid, and fire; to weapons, lest they be made of adamantine; and to spells if the caster be unlucky or inexperienced. They communicate through telepathy, though we know not if they can read minds or only speak to them. They regard all sentient life as merely a selection of potential hosts with varying degrees of available power. Yet they are not parasites; they are able to live indefinitely without a host but seldom choose to do so.

What they want, aside from lust for magic, we cannot say. Nor do we know how many of these things exist, nor where they come from. It is hard to believe such things are native to this world.