

HIS ETERNAL PROGRESS

A WANDERING ENCOUNTER BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

A mummified wizard has ensared one of the last **emperor tortoises**, which walked the paths of the gods. Its holy **procession** has dwindled, but wretched **shadows** continue to follow it.

THE EMPEROR TORTOISES

The emperor tortoises have walked the earth since before there were people. Supposedly, they follow the paths of the gods—ley lines and other, subtler scars of creation.

Walking for so long as the gods did has given them immense wisdom. Pilgrims, whether scholars, penitents, or mad hedge wizards, follow them for as long as they can.

The humblest hope to earn wisdom as the tortoise has, slowly, by walking. The impatient or ambitious hope to hear the tortoise actually speak.

Venerable Ganth-Nndu is rumored to have spoken at the foot of the Ivory Library of Pelark, which promptly collapsed in shame at its ignorance. Great Mmth-Endu is said to have uttered the word that destroyed all of Darpera.

Most who follow the tortoises, however, learn only their own inner lessons: while the tortoises can speak, they almost never do.

BONES OF THE EARTH

The Seree wizards tried several times to defeat and capture emperor tortoises, but never succeeded. The tricks the Seree used on dragons—jumped-up reptiles that they are, swollen by magic and frothing with schemes and cleverness—had no effect on these ancient beings.

The tortoises remembered the cooling of the earth! Mere hot-blooded sorcery could not sway them. Magic crashes on a tortoise's mighty hide like waves upon a mountain. All is noise, but the mountain is unchanged.

NINE-CROWNED NAUZ

One wizard, however, did not completely fail. Nauz, once the chief necromancer of the Seree Lycaeum, left his esteemed post (and his mortal body) in a final bid to bend a tortoise to his will.

Nauz lives as a **floating head**. Half mummified, he is kept alive by the nine demons bound to the **spikes** jammed into his head. He lurks in the **procession**, mingling with the pilgrims and

shadows, waiting for newcomers to help him further his aims.

At will, Nauz can use the following magics:

Eye of Weakness—his penetrating gaze reveals physical weakness. When sustained for several minutes, psychological weaknesses reveal themselves; for an hour, the way to undo magics.

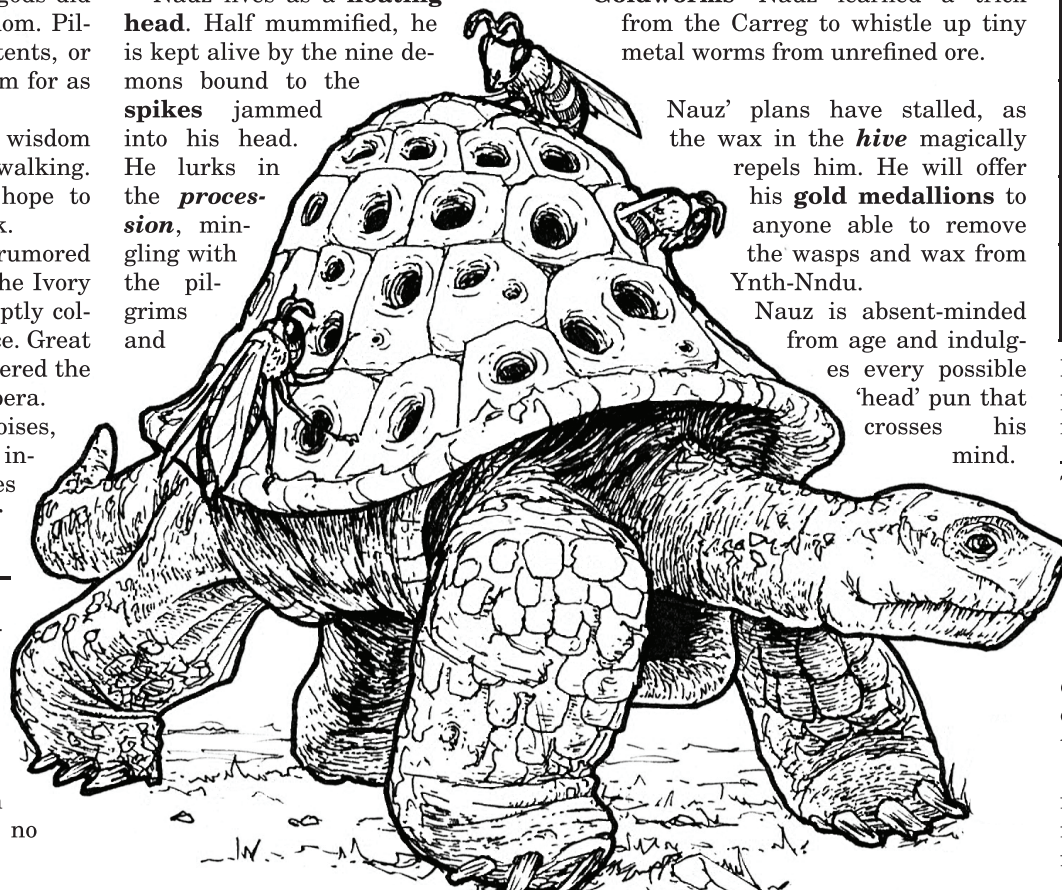
Brush Fire—Nauz can call up and direct the fast-moving blazes that sweep grasslands.

Binding—Nauz can bind stray demons (or sorcerers, while they are casting) to his crown; this freezes them until he releases his concentration.

Goldworms—Nauz learned a trick from the Carreg to whistle up tiny metal worms from unrefined ore.

Nauz' plans have stalled, as the wax in the **hive** magically repels him. He will offer his **gold medallions** to anyone able to remove the wasps and wax from Ynth-Nndu.

Nauz is absent-minded from age and indulges every possible 'head' pun that crosses his mind.



d8 Weird Procession Members

1	d3 anxious swamp-wisps, helplessly drawn along by Ynth-Nndu's ancient wisdom
2	d2 brass-and-wood hunting automata, whittling spears to throw at Ynth-Nndu
3	d6 grass-furred "greendogs", hoping to use newcomers as bait to lure wasps (which they eat)
4	d3 "craesten", giant terrestrial lobsters, here as penance for their crimes against their people
5	Rubbery, one-legged "void gulls", collecting fallen scales from the tortoise to complete the earthquake machine they drag behind them
6	d6 pilgrim skeletons, walking out of sheer habit. If disturbed, they fall to dust.
7	Nauz; reroll to see who accompanies him.
8	Bandit wasp possessed by a shadow , walking upright, thinking itself a pilgrim.

Despite his apparent friendliness, he pursues his goals with monstrous disregard for human life.

THE HIVE TORTOISE

Nauz floated behind the emperor tortoise **Ynth-Nndu** for sixty-two years before the Eye of Weakness showed him him the tortoise's vulnerability: **bandit wasp** saliva.

With great care, Nauz procured bandit wasp larvae and introduced them onto Ynth-Nndu's shell in the hopes they could breach it.

After years of failures, he finally found the strain that could pierce the mighty carapace. They have colonized it, multiplied, and filled it with larvae.

The colony of huge wasps decimated the **procession** of pilgrims that followed Ynth-Nndu, then expanded their search for victims to the surroundings.

Safe from their natural predators (or reprisals by people), the colony was unstoppable. Ynth-Nndu became feared in all the lands as a harbinger of terror. In summer, he is a roving hive that spawns new bandit wasp colonies all along his eternal progress.

BANDIT WASPS

These giant wasps live in colonies of 2-20 adults. The larvae are forearm sized and secrete a trail of soft wax. Adults grow as big as ponies. They fly noisily; their glossy chitin protects like metal armor, though the legs and eyes are delicate.

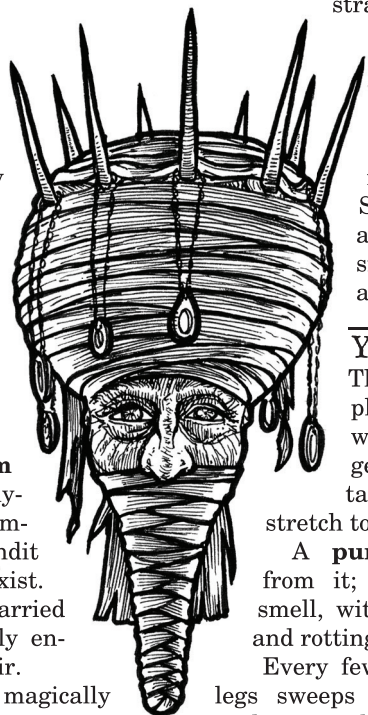
They arrive in groups of d6, seize people, sheep or goats with their hooked legs, inject **venom** and fly home to feed their larvae.

Bandit wasp venom has a powerful effect: anyone injected becomes completely unaware of bandit wasps, as if they did not exist. Many victims have been carried off without protest, calmly enjoying the view from the air.

Bandit wasp wax is magically protective, and repels demons.

THE WEIRD PROCESSION

Once the wasps ate or drove away the miles-long trail of pilgrims that followed Ynth-Nndu, only the inedible followers remained: the unearthly, the alien, the mechanical contraptions that had been mixed unseen among the masses of pilgrims all along. Roll on the table to determine each group.



THE SHADOWS

Behind the weird come the shadows of dead pilgrims. They number in the tens of thousands, and stretch for three leagues behind Ynth-Nndu like a dark haze.

Vicious, **biting flies** are thick in the air—possessed, they suck life for the ghosts that are too weak to attack the living directly.

One in a hundred shadows is a **shade**, strong enough to stab or strangle vulnerable living beings.

The shadows attack anyone who falls behind the procession by resting for more than an hour. Swarmed by flies, addled by feverish visions, then stabbed and devoured.

YNTH-NNDU

The mighty tortoise plods on, despite its wasp infestation. Bigger than a house, even tall pilgrims must stretch to touch the shell.

A **pungent musk** wafts from it; a bestial, barnyard smell, with hints of rock dust and rotting fruit.

Every few seconds, one of its legs sweeps forward in a great stride, crunching into the landscape. It lurches erratically, averaging a brisk walking pace. It never stops walking. Muted **buzzing** can be heard from within.

INTO THE HIVE

The colony inside has declined from its peak, but there is still a 2 in 6 chance of encountering d3 wasps squeezing out of the manhole-sized pores in the shell, or

returning with fruit or rodent prey to feed the larvae.

The holes are lined with soft wax, which melts on contact with human skin. The winding, branching tunnels that fill the interior will soon become soft and sticky if human explorers linger too long.

FIRE WITHIN

The wax is flammable. While it will not catch easily, a deliberate fire will turn the upper interior into an inferno.

Ynth-Nndu will endure this unharmed, but the burning hive will disgorge 12 wasps, half on fire and all aggressive.

EVER INWARDS

Ynth-Nndu's ancient body has reacted bizarrely to bandit wasp secretions—magically expanding into a volume much larger on the inside than the outside.

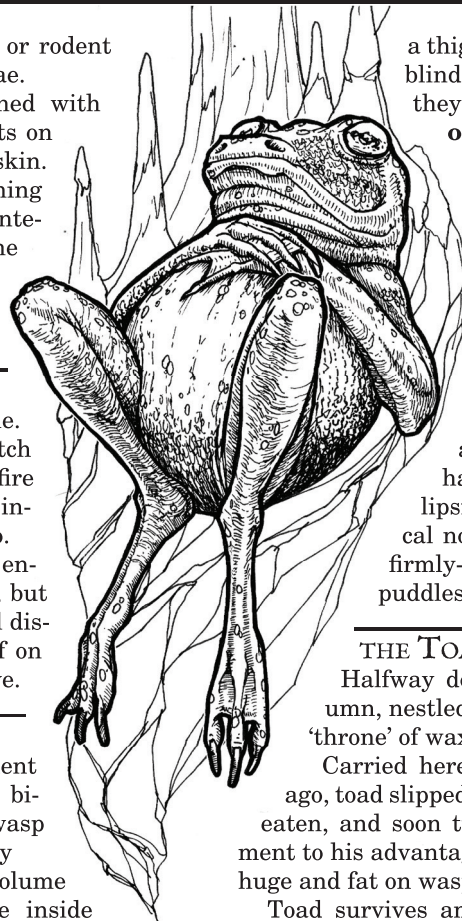
After thirty or forty paces of steep, wax tunnels, explorers will start to encounter ever larger spaces, fissures, and finally a vast, **dark canyon**.

A vast **column of wax** hangs downwards in this black void, oozing down imperceptibly like a waterfall of milk-colored rivulets, waves and drips.

Anyone falling into the void becomes Ynth-Nndu for d6 minutes—fully inhabiting his huge body—and is then shat out (as themselves once more).

THE LARVAE

Creeping all over the column are dozens of **wasp larvae**. As big and fat as



a thigh, they nose about blindly. If bothered, they attack with a **jet of hot wax** (painful and blinding).

Having absorbed the flavor of Ynth-Nndu's aura wisdom (if not its content), they can also initiate a powerful **psychic attack** against anyone learned—a hammer blow of solipsistic, philosophical nonsense that melts firmly-held truths into puddles of doubt.

THE TOAD

Halfway down the giant column, nestled into a 'throne' of wax, is the **toad**.

Carried here by a wasp years ago, toad slipped away before being eaten, and soon turned his predicament to his advantage by growing cow-huge and fat on wasp larvae.

Toad survives among the larva by *not knowing anything*. He feigns curiosity to be polite, but will stubbornly (then angrily) refuse to listen to anything remotely like a *fact*. He reflexively contradicts anything he hears.

Arguing with toad is risky, for he is deeply connected to *what might be*. Anyone hearing one of toad's contradictions (especially about the world outside Ynth-Nndu) has a 1 in 6 chance of being imperceptibly shifted into a reality where it is actually true.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES