

STORYLINE: THE SECRET NAME

To know a being's true name is to hold power over it. The arcane fetters binding a summoned creature to a conjurer's command are tied to its name. Celestials, fiends and even gods must yield to the sovereignty of their one, true name. Hence, these mighty beings often go by many epithets, ever jealously guarding the word which could shackle them to another's will. But what if the secret name of a god were to become known? Such power was never meant for mortal men to wield...

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USING A STORYLINE

A Storyline is a self-contained mini-campaign tying together three Raging Swan Press products. While each instalment provides a complete, standalone scenario, they contain plenty of adventure hooks leading to the linked products, and can be played in any order. The Storyline provides an overarching narrative, tying together these three products in a flexible, non-prescriptive way.

While we have done much of the design, you, as a GM, still have some decisions to make to tailor this Storyline to your campaign. First, you must determine the Storyline's Four "A"s:

- **Antagonist:** Who (or what) is the main enemy?
- **Agenda:** What are they trying to achieve?
- **Agents:** Who is helping or supporting them?
- **Assets:** What special advantage(s) do they have?

Second, refer to *Running the Storyline* for ideas to help you decide where to start and how to weave the selected elements together. Third, *Conclusion* offers suggestions on handling the story's climax. It also lists several questions to consider during play, and you need to come up with definitive answers to these by the time you reach the end.

STORYLINE SYNOPSIS

Long ago, the cult of the Red Rubric learnt a god's secret name. The knowledge was far too dangerous to contain in a single place, so the cult split the name into three syllables and transcribed these onto gilded scrolls which they hid in separate sanctums until the time was ripe to unleash the power of the secret name.

The first syllable, *Rho* was hidden in an ancient barrow beneath Scarlock Hill, near Swallowfeld. The second, *Di*, was concealed in Craghollow Mine; a depleted lead mine close to Oakhurst. The third, *Sha*, was taken to the Shard Isles off the coast of Wolverton, where the Red Rubric had its headquarters.

Less than a decade later, however, a combination of natural disasters and unwanted attention drawn by their sinister rituals led to the destruction of each of the cult's unholy dens. Yet somehow, the runes bearing these stolen fragments of divine power remained undiscovered—until now...

When the characters discover one of the Red Rubric's fell runes, an evil force takes notice, marking the beginning of a thrilling race to obtain the secret name and prevent great tragedy from befalling the Lonely Coast.

THE FOUR "A" S

Select one from each of the categories below, or devise your own:

ANTAGONIST

Who seeks to uncover the secret name?

- **The Cabal:** Contrary to common belief, the Red Rubric survived the destruction of its sanctuaries. Controlled by an obscure triumvirate of hierophants, they long to finish what its predecessors started so many decades ago.
- **The Creature:** Created by the Red Rubric, a profane construct known as the Anathema was wrought from the bodies of the dead, sewn together in a twisted orgy of decaying flesh. Originally meant to serve as a vessel for *Rhodisha*, it reawakens with an unyielding desire to absorb the secret name and thus fulfil its dark, twisted destiny.
- **The Wizard:** Varennos Nero is a powerful wizard whose scholarly pursuits led him to discover the Red Rubric's secret. Nero's obsession with learning the secret name has him meddling with forces far beyond his control.

AGENDA

Why does the Antagonist seek control over the secret name?

- **Ascension:** *Rhodisha* is the name of a forgotten god, slain by Braal at the dawn of time. Used in conjunction with a mystic ritual, however, its dormant divinity can be rekindled to the point of allowing a mortal host to ascend to godhood.
- **Destruction:** *Rhodisha* is the true name of Darlen, god of law and justice. If the name were to be uttered in reverse as part of some dark ritual, it would sever the divine bonds with Darlen's priesthood and undo the god's existence.
- **Incarnation:** *Rhodisha* is the secret name of Braal, god of hatred and malice. Along with the proper incantations, its ritual utterance calls Braal to the mortal realm.

AGENTS

Who (or what) are the Antagonist's minions, servants, or followers?

- **Mercenaries:** Whether forced, bought, enthralled or just inherently evil, this enemy party of adventurers ceaselessly works against the characters, matching them move for move.

- **Monsters:** Summoned, bound or enslaved to their master's mighty will, these fell creatures prowl the land to do the Antagonist's every dark bidding.
- **Zealots:** A collection of cultist, fanatics and ne'er-do-wells united in their misguided dedication to a horrific cause.

ASSETS

What special item, power, or advantage does the enemy wield?

- **Dazzling Wealth:** Either because they are being funded by a wealthy patron, or because they possess a vast trove of treasure, the enemy can rely on an almost inexhaustible supply of gold to fund their sinister endeavours.
- **Excoriator:** The Antagonist or one of their lead Agents wields the *Excoriator Dagger*: a magic, razor-edged blade capable of permanently removing Abyssal brands by flaying the skin from the bearer. At your discretion, the *Excoriator* may possess additional powers.
- **Power at a Price:** The enemy has been hunting for the lost names of gods and demons for many years. The Antagonist and some of their Agents already know a handful such name fragments which, when spoken aloud, mimic the effects of powerful spells. The price exacted by the utterance of these forbidden words is terrible, however, causing the caster to age 2d6+1 years per level of the spell emulated. Feel free to alter this cost to your liking, perhaps instead using hit points, experience levels or attribute points.

RUNNING THE STORYLINE

Modify or ignore any of the notes below to suit your campaign.

WHERE TO START

This Storyline encompasses the following three Dungeon Backdrops, which can be played in any order:

- *Dungeon Backdrop: Scarlock Hill*
- *Dungeon Backdrop: Craghollow Mine*
- *Dungeon Backdrop: The Shard Isles*

Each Dungeon Backdrop presents several adventure hooks, to introduce the Storyline to your campaign.

DEVELOPMENT

All three Dungeon Backdrops contain multiple leads pointing towards each other, as well as several clues through which the characters can learn the story of the Red Rubric and their plot involving the secret name. Thus, the players can choose the order in which they these dungeons. Your remaining task is to weave the Four "A"s together.

The following encounters can develop the story at set points during this mini-campaign. The details have been left deliberately vague to make them easily adaptable to your own campaign.

I. AFTER THE FIRST ADVENTURE

At the end of their first adventure, the characters have almost certainly discovered one of the syllables of the secret name. In all likelihood, one of them is now branded with an Abyssal rune and keen to learn more about it. Before long, the Antagonist learns of the brand and sends Agents to verify the rumour.

SUGGESTED ENCOUNTER: LET'S MAKE A DEAL

The Agents begin by shadowing the characters, hoping to learn as much about them as they can. If the Agents are confronted, or when they finally choose to approach the characters, they introduce themselves as working for a powerful patron but remain secretive about the Antagonist and their motives. Attempts are made to strike a bargain with the characters, albeit one the Agents do not intend to keep: they offer gold, favour, or whatever it takes in exchange for revealing the leads to the remaining two Dungeon Backdrops. If you think the players need an extra incentive to check out the other dungeons, have the Agents hire them to clear the nearest of the two.

Encounter Goals: This encounter is meant to introduce the Agents and suggest the brands are part of someone's Agenda (although the Agenda itself should not be revealed yet). This confrontation also serves as a plausible way to have the Agents learn about the characters' strengths and weaknesses; information you can put to good use later on! Most importantly, however, you should try to avoid combat during this encounter, and have the Agents flee if needed.

II. AFTER THE SECOND ADVENTURE

When the second adventure concludes, the characters should have pieced together enough elements to realise the syllables form a key component in the Antagonist's sinister Agenda. Perhaps they were more careful this time and avoided being branded. Even so, if they simply left the second syllable behind in the dungeon, the Agents are certain to acquire it. The Agents, of course, remain on the characters' heels and are ready to show their true colours...

SUGGESTED ENCOUNTER: BROKEN PROMISES

The Agents reappear in force to ambush the characters when they leave the dungeon, or at some other suitable location. They come prepared, having adapted their tactics to counter whatever ploys the characters are known to use. The time for bargaining is over; the Agents demand the characters surrender both syllables immediately in exchange for their lives.

Encounter Goals: This encounter establishes the Agents (and, by extension, the Antagonist) as enemies. Unless the characters give up both syllables (difficult if one of them bears an Abyssal brand), combat is all but unavoidable. If the Agents are triumphant, they take both syllables, carrying away any branded characters. The others are left for dead. If the characters defeat the Agents, they can learn more about the Antagonist and their Agenda from a surviving enemy.

III. BEFORE THE THIRD ADVENTURE

Before the start of the final adventure, the characters find themselves in one of the following positions: either the Agents are in possession of the two syllables (possibly after having captured one or more characters), or the characters possess them. Whatever the outcome, the characters know the location of the final syllable. The Antagonist is close, however, and should they succeed in reaching its location first, there's no telling what havoc they could wreak—perhaps even with only a part of the secret name! If any characters were kidnapped by the Agents, they can also be tracked to the final Dungeon Backdrop.

SUGGESTED ENCOUNTER: ON YOUR MARKS

A few remaining Agents (most are preparing to travel to the final location) attempt to sabotage or waylay the characters, in order to prevent, or at least delay, their arrival at the final Dungeon Backdrop. The type of sabotage depends on the Agents you chose for this Storyline, but it could include: poisoning the characters' horses, conspiring to have them arrested, sinking their boat, setting ambushes along the road and so on...

Encounter Goals: This encounter highlights that time is of the essence. In addition, its outcome determines how you should stock the final Dungeon Backdrop:

- If the characters overcome the Agents' attempts at sabotage, they arrive at the location before the Antagonist and their Agents, who follow the characters into the dungeon and confront them after it's been cleared. Stock the Dungeon Backdrop as you would normally.
- If the Agents succeed in delaying the characters long enough, the characters arrive some time after the Antagonist and their Agents have cleared the dungeon, but before they are able to complete their foul ritual. Stock the Dungeon Backdrop with Agents and place the Antagonist in the complex's most suitable area.

CONCLUSION

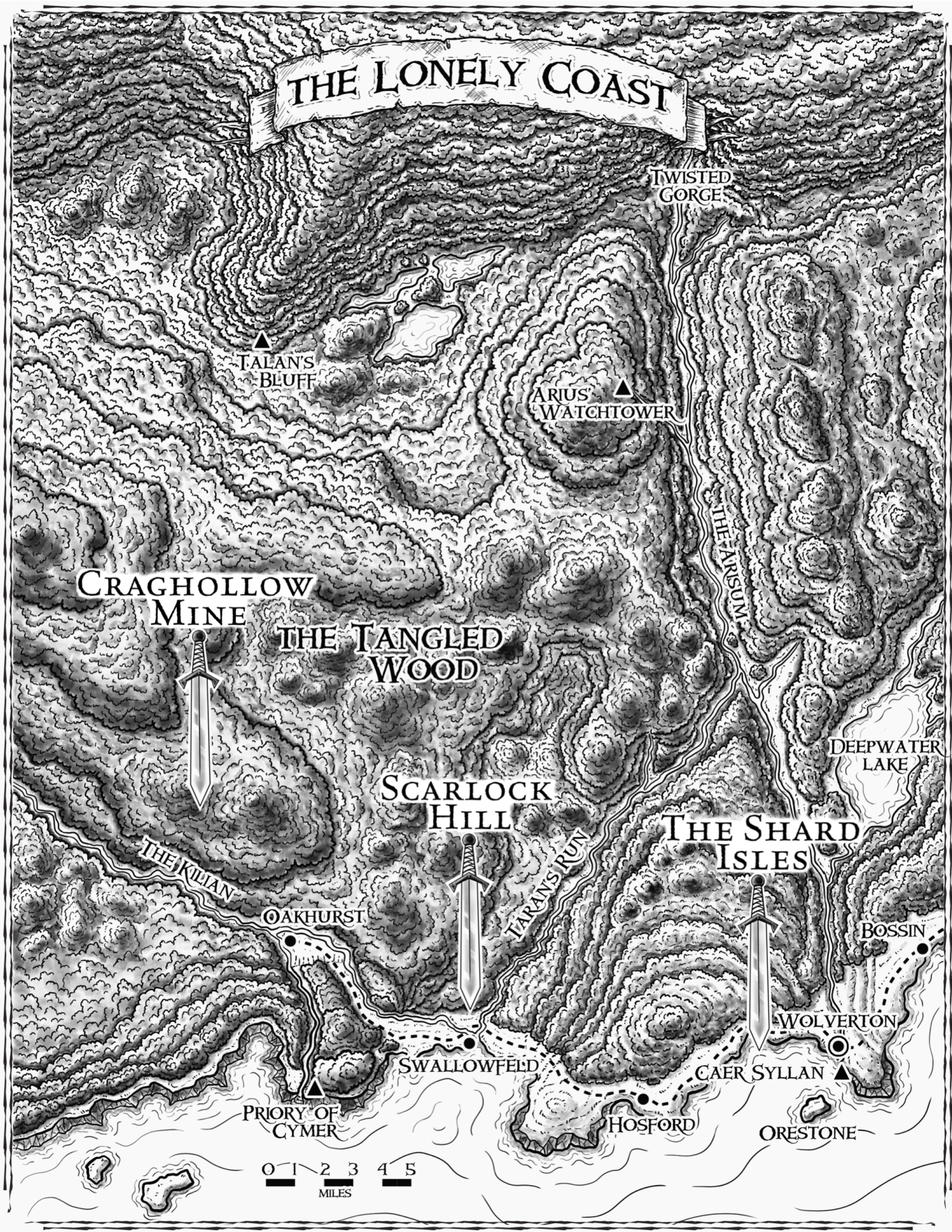
The final Dungeon Backdrop is where the characters come face to face with the Antagonist. Exactly how this confrontation unfolds depends entirely on your Four "A"s, as well as the outcomes of the first two adventures. If the Antagonist possesses the syllables of the secret name—or is bold enough to improvise without the full set—a diabolical ritual to fulfil the Agenda is probably the most fitting climax to this Storyline.

By the time you arrive at this point, you should have prepared answers to the following questions:

1. **What are the minimum requirements for a successful ritual?** Does the Antagonist require all three syllables to fulfil their Agenda? Must the physical bearers of the three brands be present for the ritual to succeed? Is it possible to take a few shortcuts instead, offering a lesser reward at greater personal risk?
2. **How can the characters foil the ritual?** Apart from preventing the Antagonist from obtaining the necessary elements to complete the ritual, how can the characters sabotage their efforts? Does it require a certain spell, action or item? Make sure they have the opportunity to learn how to disrupt the ritual before the confrontation.
3. **What is the ritual's effect?** Consider what happens in your campaign if the ritual succeeds. Does the Antagonist realise their ultimate goal, or was the secret name flawed after all? What happens if the ritual fails or the characters interfere part-way through? Do the effects manifest partially or temporarily?
4. **How do the brands work?** Do the brands bestowed by the Red Rubric's scrolls have any effects beyond safeguarding the syllables? Can they be removed from a bearer?
5. **What if the characters fail?** What happens if the characters fail to thwart the Antagonist's plans. Remember: under no conditions should failure mean the end of your campaign!



THE LONELY COAST



TALAN'S
BLUFF

ARIUS
WATCHTOWER

TWISTED
GORGE

CRAGHOLLOW
MINE

THE TANGLED
WOOD

THE ARSUM

DEEPWATER
LAKE

SCARLOCK
HILL

THE SHARD
ISLES

THE KILJAN

OAKHURST

TALAN'S RUN

BOSSIN

WOLVERTON

PRIORY OF
CYMER

SWALLOWFELD

CAER SYLLAN

HOSFORD

ORESTONE

0 1 2 3 4 5
MILES