

*excerpt from The Collected Journals of Magister Eldon Tashkettel Garrick, Volume One,
edited by Vitruvia Cato, Greyhawk Wizard's Guild*

Editor's Note: the reader will become aware that, especially in the earlier portions of these journals, Magister Garrick was never one to pay close attention to dates and times, at least in these texts. As an astrologer of no small skill, one assumes that he was conscious of the passage of calendrical time, and later entries do show at least an effort at time-keeping. However, in these volumes, I have left the dating and time-keeping as the author presented it (in most cases, absent). Those with a particular interest in the subject can no doubt determine the dates of events in a general way as they relate to the fall of the School of Babylon, which can be readily researched. -VC



MAGISTER GARRICK

The School of Babylon has fallen, with a rather literal stress on that particular term. I had been asleep after a late night reading Dithius the Lesser's Incantations & Celebrations, endeavoring to penetrate the old fool's intentionally occult language for insights into early observation of the stars, but was roused from my slumber by a great shaking and a cacophony of howls and screams (which were, ominously, brief). Climbing out of my bed in only my nightshirt (a rather nice one, of deep violet flannel with red silk accents), I rushed to the window of the quivering dormitory to see what was amiss. Although I saw destruction on a scale that I had heretofore not imagined, I saw no cause; apparently my sound sleeping had deprived me of the spectacle. I discovered later, from the report of one of my companions, that a flight of multi-hued dragons, accompanied by other airborne creatures of varied and unknown natures, had laid a rapid siege to the institution, burning and obliterating what had been the only home that I have ever known.

None of this did I know at the time, however. Glancing out the window I saw cracks and creases in the ground, and each dormitory and tower within my field of view was at the very least skewed from its true position, and in many cases tumbled down completely. Presuming that some geological shift had occurred, I wrapped my cloak around myself (a hard-wearing brown oilskin affair, festooned with pockets), slipped on my quilted wool slippers, slung my satchel over my shoulder, and began making an effort to escape what I was sure was a highly precarious position.

Egress via the chamber door had been rendered impossible, due to the collapse of a heavy beam, and I was forced to construct a makeshift rope from my bedding, all the while

cursing myself for not having learned the incantation of feather-falling when the opportunity had presented itself. Somewhat miraculously I made my way unharmed to the ground, such as it was, although the footing was far from certain and I was leery of aftershocks (still thinking that this may have been a mundane disaster). Keeping Wit's End close to hand **[editor's note: Magister Garrick invariably named whatever dagger he considered his personal weapon "Wit's End," a complex word-play of the sort that seemed to amuse him. - VC]** I made my way through the ruins of the school.

It wasn't long before I was able to determine that the disaster had in no way been natural; the reek of acid and unnatural magicks was thick in the blowing smoke that billowed from some of the larger buildings. The menagerie and the pens where the fighting beasts were kept had clearly been breached, and I was in a state of significant fear when I came upon a group of other survivors. None were from my own college, although I knew them from combined training exercises: Stor, a brave and muscular human fellow of few words; Primno, a priest in the service of Heironeous whose delicately pointed ears belied his half-elven heritage; Percy, a wood-elf with all of the natural inclination towards nature-craft of that race; and Brokk, a half-orc whose cunning was, as far as I could tell, only outstripped by his urge to exercise it to the betterment of his purse. A fortunate gathering, I thought, as I knew these to be skilled fellows, somewhat above the typical student body in ability and resolve.

We quickly decided to work together and began searching for survivors; failing that, we would at least need to requisition some form of equipment. It was evident that there would be no point in remaining in the school's valley, and there was no guarantee that the school's unknown enemies would not return. Stor, whose adventurousness far exceeded my own, had once climbed the towering peaks that surrounded the school, and had noted a port of some kind to the south of our location. This, then, would be our goal.

Of the days, possibly weeks, that we spent combing the ruins for signs of survivors, I would prefer not to speak. We found many of our fellow students, even friends, but to an individual they had been killed; crushed, burned, mangled...if I close my eyes there are still some scenes of injury and corruption of the humanoid form that are as vivid now as they were when I came upon them. Nevertheless, we persisted in the grim task, until satisfied that

we five were the only members of the student body to escape relatively unscathed.

A pair of points, though, were of particular note during those grim days. One was that not a single instructor appeared to be present amongst the corpses of our fellows; no sign of defense from the sort of magicks and abilities that one would expect to see were our teaching staff to rise together to defend the school. Was no defense mounted? Were the faculty, or at least some part of the faculty, in collusion with our unknown enemy? Brokk is inclined to think so, and our second discovery makes me firmly in his camp on the matter.

All five of us were orphans, as were many of our fellow students. The possibility of discovering some hint of our origin drew us to the administrative building, or the ruins thereof; it had been hit hard by whatever force or forces had decreed that the School of Babylon must stand no more. But when we consulted the areas where I know as a fact that the school's documentation was kept, we found nothing. Not, I should point out, nothing *useful* – no, the files and papers and other ephemera of our academic lives had been wholly removed by person or persons unknown, leaving not a single clue to any of our origins or what may have caused the school to possess such enemies. To move such a massive amount of documents at the instant of the attack seems both unlikely and even, possibly, impossible, leaving only the conclusion that they were removed in advance, by someone with foreknowledge that the devastation was coming. This is an eerie thought to me; it speaks of vast machinations moving behind the scenes and focusing at least some of their will at the five of us. As the old saying goes, “When oliphants go to war, the grass suffers.”

Having acquired all that we could from the ruins (including some remarkable enchanted items, including a powerful staff which I reserved for my own use, as well as a signet ring of a student which I intend to see delivered to its rightful inheritor), and established a destination (the southern port glimpsed by Stor), we fortified our supplies at the kitchens and attempted to reason out an escape from the valley that would not involve the difficult and dangerous climb that would be needed to surmount the valley's peaks, accessible now that the dome was gone.

(I should note that, for the first several nights, I had a constant sense of wonder at the sight of the night sky, unfiltered by whatever effect or substance had separated us from the rest of the world. To observe the motions of the spheres via orrery and astrolabe is one thing,

but to actually watch the grand dance of the celestial plane unfold before one's very eyes is quite another. My studies of astrology and astronomy were always a passion, and this was seeing a lover's face unveiled for the first time. Though surrounded by destruction and death, it is somehow reassuring to know that the stars and planets proceed on their courses, undisturbed...)

The stratagem that we eventually hit upon was this: the instructors must have had a method to enter and leave the valley, and in addition, the creatures of the menagerie (goblins, kobolds, and the like) would naturally seek out an exit via their own instinctual abilities. With Percy utilizing his skills, we tracked some of the menagerie's more "intelligent" former residents to some of the caves which, before the attack, had been used for training of students. Particularly heavy traffic seemed to head towards those caves used by the college of rogues, to train them in the disabling of traps and the evasion of same, and the college of war, in which fighters would proceed through simulated guard rooms and the like.

My assumption was that, in the event of an emergency, the instructors would be loathe to rush out of a tunnel which contained time-consuming traps or magical effects, and so we chose the fighter's cave as our first exploration target. Dispatching Florimell [*editor's note: Florimell was Magister Garrick's fey owl familiar; intelligent, but inclined to nip at those she considered a threat to her station. - VC]* to scout out the tunnel, and borrowing her eyes, I saw that there were some unaccounted-for inhabitants within: giant spiders, four of them, and some sort of spider-centaur being. Reporting back to the others that there was an evident threat awaiting us a short way down the cave, we developed a plan. Brokk and Percy constructed a cunning dead-fall trap over the lip of the cave, and I endeavored to contribute by producing, with the tools and parts in my tinker's satchel, a small clockwork fly to act as bait. Once the trap was complete, Percy hurled the chittering bait down the cave-mouth, near to the point where it twisted in such a way as to prevent watching further.

The trap worked well; when a trio of the massive spiders surged out of the cave in response to our mechanical intrusion, one of them was crushed handily by the dead-fall. The other two were dispatched with skill, but not without injury, as they seemed intent upon consuming Stor (possibly due to him being the most muscular of the group? Note to self: hunting patterns of giant cave spiders. Research). Primno almost suffered a grievous attack as

well, but fortunately I had foreseen in my spread of the cards that morning that the attack would fail (though I little understood the symbolism at the time, such being the relatively fickle nature of my gifts of premonition). I contributed little to the fight, struggling to overcome both my distaste for physical threat and my aversion to spiders, but did manage to hit one of the things with a bolt of fire.

Once that combat had resolved itself, we were still confronted with the spider-centaur and at least one remaining spider. Whatever the chimeric creature was, it had some kind of arcane potency, creating a 'darkness' effect within the cave which not even Florimell's eyes could pierce. In addition, our bait was returned to us in the form of a missile hurled at Brokk's forehead; the half-orc seemed fine, but the toy was ruined, which was upsetting.

After extensive discussion, Percy suggested using his innate stealth and an eldritch rod to which he had become attuned over the previous weeks to, in a sense, "ambush" the awaiting creatures. We executed this plan with some adjustments, as the surviving spider turned out to be significantly more canny than we had anticipated. However, Percy was able to activate the rod and withdraw slightly (in order to use his bow more effectively, as well as to give Stor, Brokk, and Primno room to maneuver in close combat); once battle was fully joined, all five of us fought against the foe.

Although we were in the end successful in defeating the spider-centaur and its underlings (allies?), there was a moment that perplexed me in the midst of combat. It appeared, from my vantage point (having been keeping distant from the fray and endeavoring to aid my companions via the arcane arts), that the spider-centaur attempted to surrender at one point; I even offered to parlay with the creature, holding my fire. However, Primno struck the thing before any conversation could be initiated, possibly sensing its evil intent (it immediately began attacking with what I can only assume were venomous fangs). Regardless, we did indeed triumph over the obstacle, and quickly ascertained that the tunnel we were in did, indeed, lead to the port that Stor had glimpsed in during his bold ascent.

We also confirmed two additional facts: one, there seems to be a seaworthy vessel remaining in a slip of some kind at the port, and two, the port seemed to be guarded by (or at least surrounded by) an unknown number of unknown individuals. Perhaps related to the spider-creatures? There was no substantive webbing in the tunnel, leading me to believe that

the creatures may have been a recent arrival, and it seems unlikely that they would have traveled on their own impetus to huddle in a random cave. We can only assume that those outside of the tunnel are therefore connected in some way to the strange and disastrous events of the past weeks, and therefore may represent an ongoing threat to us. If possible, we will hopefully try to circumvent their potential for aggression, either via stealth or bribery (we have nominated Primno the exchequer of our ragged company, and he carries a substantial sum in gold and gems), although we may indeed face another fight on the morrow, no matter what plans we lay.

It was a cold camp in the tunnel, which we cleared of arachnid corpses before bedding down for the night. A subsequent conversation with the other four fellows, exchanged over a meal of hard cheese and salted fish, regarding moral choice, race, and the rules (or lack thereof) of war was both candid and rewarding, and made me feel much more comfortable with these companions. Despite their differences in training and demeanor, they are, in their own ways, just as thoughtful and contemplative as I am, and I am glad of it.

My watch is due, and so I shall end this particular entry at this point. Should we fall tomorrow, I hope that the looter of my corpse found this document of interest.

[editor's note: Anyone who has known Magister Garrick, as I have, will be well aware of his tendency towards what one might call "foppishness;" it is perhaps of passing interest to note that he recorded the clothing that he chose for any given day, sometimes even including the reasoning behind each choice, ranging from temperature to prognostication to whim. Although his "Sartorial Notes" are a constant feature of his journals, I have excised the majority of them for the purposes of space; the following is included as an example of these notes (many of which were longer than the journal entries to which they were appended) - VC]

Sartorial Notes: One of the few benefits of the extensive search that we have performed is that I am carrying a full compliment of garb, including several changes of stockings and loincloths, neck-cloths, and the like, along with my toiletries kit, in an improvised blanket roll tied off with some spare strips of rope. As we cannot know what we are going to confront when we exit the tunnel this morning, I've chosen to dress moderately. Beginning with a fresh loincloth and stockings (both of middling quality white linen), I chose a pair of black breeches of finely

woven wool, along with a linen chemise of a dark orange hue. Over this, I've draped a sleeveless sky-blue cote of fustian, fastened at the waist with a black leather belt. As a final layer I've added a rather splendid watered silk robe with a very fine pattern of dark blue and lighter blue stripes, quilted dark blue velvet cuffs and collar, and a series of ebony toggle-buttons running down the front to just below the waist. Today's neck-cloth is a simple yellow linen affair, tied in the four-in-hand style, which compliments my cloak and the black silk gloves I've selected. Having only a single hat, a broad-brimmed gray felt article with a black band, I've of course chosen to wear that. My black woolen cloak (with silver clasp in the shape of the holy symbol of Celestian), soft black boots, and a black linen sash with a citrine-yellow pattern of embroidered astrological symbols worn around the waist completes the outfit (the sash giving me a place to store Wit's End and my spell component pouch). I feel moderately prepared for anything which may befall me or my companions.