

Dungeons and Dragons: Aegis

Cast of characters:

Character Name	Race	Class
Cricket Tealeaf	Halfling	Cleric, Grave Domain
Gideon Lakesong	Kalashtar	Druid, Circle of Dreams
Taklak Ookak	Kobold	Rogue, Swashbuckler
Churt Carnelian	Half-Orc	Barbarian, Path of the Storm Herald
Spagyric Andronicus	Half-Elf	Warlock (the Fiend)
Archwood Graves	Tiefling	Sorcerer, Draconic Bloodline

Act One

Session One: Remembrance

The school year has come to an end, and at the only school on Embra, the island's most eccentric member of its council of elders, **Alelo**, delivers a story, one based around the legend of **Mezameta**, the ancient green dragon. Alelo describes an age where dragons ruled the world, and most other races were at their mercy. One such dragon, Mezameta, tricked the rest of the world and claimed to be a god, and granted his loyal subjects his gifts of strength to use against the other dragons of the world. As the wars against the rest of the dragons came to a close, Mezameta then cunningly took his power back from his once loyal subjects, leaving them weak and unable to oppose him as he became their new master, with no powerful dragon to say otherwise. What Mezameta was unprepared for was the rebellion, and the collective strength of mankind to challenge him and defeat him in his own lair in the heart of the forest. The legend states that when he was defeated, his very soul split in two, with one body resembling the false divinity he masqueraded as, and the other a jet black creature, representing the true malice of the vile dragon. The heroes that remained were too weak and afraid that this was a trap set by Mezameta, and seeing that neither half of the ancient dragon's form would awaken, they chose to imprison both of them, separately, in parts unknown to the world, so it goes.

This particular story was a reward to the students of the school of Embra for a completed school year, which leads to the teacher of this class, **Ms. Reah**, to discuss the next matter, which is the Epoch Trials, a ceremony held during the festival of the same name to celebrate the beginning of a new age of students that are ready to take on bigger matters on the island. The trials are, in a sense, completely random and unknown to the participants until the day of, and are performed typically in groups of four. One of the groups consists of the students: **Cricket Tealeaf**, **Gideon Lakesong**, **Churt Carnelian**, and **Taklak Ookak**, the latter two being new students, hence the pairing with the former two, being two top students. Taklak around this time also takes it upon himself to seek out some of the more popular students at the school, and meets **Gorty**, who really is the gateway to **Menav**, the ostensibly most popular kid in school. The relationship between the two starts out poorly, with insults and vulgarities...

The four Embrans previously mentioned begin getting to know one another, and per some advice from Ms. Reah, head out to talk about the trials to other members of the island who have participated in them years prior. Cricket suggests talking to her grandmother, **Tova**,

and the whole of her dwarven adoptive family by extension, to which the group agrees to join her, Churt being particularly invested in the idea of seeing what it's like for family members to "engage" in conversation. Passing by the cemetery on the way to Cricket's home, the group runs into **Sylens**, a firbolg and friend to Cricket, as well as the gravekeeper. He boasts about his unique trial at the festival when he was younger, having been subjected to what he describes as a labyrinth of fog, as well as a mighty foe dubbed the "Fog Man" within it, that he apparently conquered with his teammates. Afterward, the group heads inside the **Durthane** home, where **Thorin** and **Elora** (Cricket's adoptive father and mother respectively) are in the living area. What was intended to be an informational session about trials turns into more of a family matter, when Cricket seems inclined to refer to her adoptive father and mother by their first names, causing some chagrin from Thorin. Some discussion is still had about trials, to which the group understands that the event is fairly random, and that their best hope for preparation lies in getting to know each other.

After some bonding amongst each other in the form of throwing rocks at trees in the Durthane backyard, the gang begins to head to their respective homes for the evening. Taklak takes a "detour" and heads to the residence of Menav to make amends, and even prepares a makeshift bouquet of flowers, except it's mostly weeds and one dandelion. Upon arrival, Taklak is essentially stonewalled by Menav's mother, who isn't eager to let him into her home, claiming Menav is in his room studying. Willing to wait, Taklak heads up into a tree that almost seems made for him, sleeping on a large branch accompanied by a squirrel companion. Back near her home, Cricket asks Sylens if it would be alright for her group to practice in the graveyard, Sylens being eager to lend a hand in the form of a coach (but one that doesn't have to do a lot of work). Before bed, we get a glimpse into the lives of other party members as well.

Churt lives with his parents, **Grek** and **Tesh**, who are two extremely hands-off when it comes to raising him and giving him the care he needs. His sister, **Bel**, is particularly derisive towards Churt, especially lately seeing as the latter has been placed in school, as their parents have lost interest in keeping Churt at home. One silver lining for Churt is **Cynthia**, a kind woman who has been homeschooling Churt and more or less done his parents' job for them. She is far more understanding of Churt's emotional issues, and has been his biggest supporter and source of comfort amidst a very ignorant family, more wrapped up in leisure and gloating about their accolades, the origins of which have been lost to time.

Gideon returns home as well, and is greeted by his parents **Yowen** and **Mita**, as well as his brother, **Leonwood**. There is an expectation in the air that Leonwood is the "chosen" as the family puts it, but he is nonetheless proud of young Gideon's achievements in school and is excited to see him perform in the Epoch Festival. Gideon expresses interest in his **Uncle Yule**, a member of the family who had previously been a "chosen" but after a certain age became an elder of the island, joining the Elder Council. His parents remark that Yule has been spending more time at the Etched Chambers, the location where the elders congregate and keep their history tomes on Embra and the world that once existed outside the island. After the family attempts to calm Gideon's concerns over the potential dangers of the trials in the days to come, he heads to bed as well.

In the following days, the team of youngsters begin their "training" in the graveyard, improving their communication with each other, and learning about their teammates and their abilities. During this time, Taklak also visits Menav, this time successfully delivering his bouquet and manages to make amends, the two putting the past behind them and willing to move on from their altercation the day prior. Taklak also acquires some flour, as well as four bags to place the flour in, at least, this is ostensibly the case. The outcome of this flour thing is up in the air, and has the potential to stay as such indefinitely. Why one would find long term motivation in buying two full bags of flour and then four separate bags to place it in is beyond me, and even when the pay off happens, (and it might not), we may all still have questions. But anyway, the

team continues to mentally prepare for their specific trial, having very little to anticipate, although the way Sylens is talking they're leaning towards Fog Man.

On the day of the festival, vendors have prepared their finest snacks and specials for the spectators of this coming of age event. Families and viewers take to the stands as the stage is being set, and the elders take their places, in high seats overlooking the stage. Gideon speaks with Yule, who seems very tired and hesitant about telling Gideon about what he's been learning about as a new elder. Taklak notices two very important things among the elders, one being that **Fillgr**, the eldest elder of them all looks incredibly old, and find it unreasonable that the elder dwarf is capable of virtually anything. The second thing he notices is another elder, referred to as **Havriskr**, taking his seat. Taklak recognizes this high elf as the same person who has, on a few occasions, come to the Kobold nest under Embra and forced the inhabitants to partake in a magic ritual, one with a purpose unknown to the Kobolds. After seeing other students like Menav and Gorty and **Yop** perform their trial on stage, the team is up. As they approach the stage, the elders prepare their magic for the trial, but before it can begin, a strange, spherical structure pierces the clouds over the center of the island. As it descends, huge metal chains are shot from it in all directions, striking the island in many points, one point being the stage the young Embrans were on. The world soon grows hazy... a dense fog obfuscates every corner of their minds... and the world is dark.

The heroes awaken five years later, and in a world where all seems well and good at first. However, upon their awakening, they are spoken to by a voice that Taklak recognizes as Alelo, who is pleading to them to visit her at the Etched Chamber for an explanation on what is going on. The heroes find themselves remembering the last five years, but feeling as though it was more of a dream, and the events of the attack from the mysterious sky structure are still a haze. Walking around outside, they notice for the first time that the population seems somehow lower than before, with even the occasional home looking boarded up, and eerily empty. Wanting answers, the four meet up and head to the Etched Chamber, where they have a brief discussion at the doors in which Taklak reveals he is not the child everyone knew he was in their hearts, but actually a 55 year old kobold. Heading inside, they find Alelo and Yule awaiting them at the long table at the bottom of the great cylindrical tower within. Alelo confesses first of all that Fillgr is still alive, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but might as well get that off the table as for some participants at the meeting it's of great significance. After that, Alelo also confesses that Embra has been secretly kept under a magical barrier for almost 75 years, one that not only conceals its inhabitants from anyone on the Material Plane, but also seals their memories of the world outside the barrier, hence the island teaching its youths that Embra is the only thing left in the world, everything beyond the sea being a wasteland. Alelo speaks out of shame, being the only elder opposed to hiding Embra, as the elders back then (back when Fillgr was a spry 450-ish year old man) believed the rest of the world to be unsafe, and that Embra should be hidden away, Yule and Alelo thinking it was more that it was based more off control, and wanting to distance themselves from the rulership of the nearby realms.

However, five years ago, interlopers discovered the island, and found a way to penetrate the barrier, interrupting the Epoch Festival. Alelo speaks of a masked woman named **Morsel** who wanted to take advantage of the hidden island, and exacerbate the power of the barrier. The mysterious party apparently threatened to destroy the island if the elders did not comply. More importantly, after the stage was obliterated with the four students on it, they were all on death's door, to which Alelo quickly jumped in and stabilized them. Panicking, realizing that Embra has finally been rediscovered, she took the time to secretly imbue a dormant spell unto their minds, releasing it when she felt the time was right, leading to this very day in which the heroes see the island in a different light...

Alelo then tells the more or less young folks that the source of the barrier lies in Mt. Tihi, the central mountain of Embra and right near the kobold nests, the explanation for why Havriskr was using the kobolds in the area to sustain the magic. Speaking of magic, the main magical

conduit being used was actually donated by Churt's ancestors. The Carnelians have many relics they enjoy boasting about, but one in particular was the famous "treasure" the clans stole during wartime. The elders advertised the use of the treasure which, unbeknownst to the half-orcs, contained immense arcana, a perfect conduit for the endeavor the elders were pursuing at the time...

Knowing all of this now, the heroes hesitantly agree to head to the source of the barrier, with the elders claiming to be mentally blocked from finding it, per their encounter with the interlopers five years ago. Perhaps, too, they stay behind out of shame. Nonetheless, the team heads to the caves under the island, Taklak leading the way, knowing the best routes through having lived here before. Taklak decides the fastest path is through his kobold nest, and what follows is even more of a revelation to his teammates than the staggering news that he isn't a child. Taklak touches base with a few of his pals, including **Ogre Oge**, Taklak's closest friend who looks after Taklak's daughter, **Hugs Ookak**, while he's away. During the reunion, Taklak tries to tell the others about his plan to lead them away from the island of Embra, which still provides some confusion for the Kobolds, who are all still under the effects of the barrier. Taklak notices more so than anyone else as well, that their leader, **Upi Mapi**, was oddly absent, to which Taklak puts himself in charge, telling the Kobolds to begin preparations to leave this nest, willing to explain more later.

Deeper in, the heroes find strange caverns and paths that are concealed by illusions making them appear to walk through the walls themselves, but as their true minds return to them, the hidden entrances look false and staticky. Pressing through the illusions, the team finds themselves in a mysterious lab, one that seems both fairly sleek and new, yet abandoned recently. They find faintly glowing tanks, emitting a pale green light. Having some difficulty identifying the function of the tanks, the lights suddenly come on. A disembodied voice commends the Embrans, and warns them that the last experiment for "Project E" is about to commence. The glass of the tanks shatters and while many bodies fall limp to the floor, the team now find themselves surrounded by strange beings that look devoid of emotion and prepared to kill. A battle ensues, the team utilizing their abilities together truly for the first time, as their strength had still managed to grow over their bizarre five years. During the battle, a couple of the beings are left "alive", whatever that may mean for these beings at this point, after they are defeated. After the fight, the team finally recognizes some of the creatures as familiar faces from the island: Taklak very sadly recognizes Menav, as well as **Clobbert** the shopkeep. Churt recognizes the head of the **Kanlos family**, another half-orc clan very close to the Carnelians.

Seeing other familiar faces as well from other workers and even a school teacher, a large metal door in the lab falls open, and out emerges the body of Havriskr, but is apparently under the control of another being, who does not identify themselves. The **stranger** claims that the four heroes have just contributed to what he calls the **Aegis** Project, one that, in some form or another, allows him to control the bodies of others and create a hive mind among the "Aegis-infused" individuals. He demonstrates the unique quality of an Aegis-infused by slicing his (or rather Havriskr's) own arm, ghastly green blood dripping to the floor. He makes mention of "willing vs unwilling", and that the data gathered from Embra will be of great value going forward. He claims that the island was the ideal discovery for the project, calling it his personal "petri dish" for experiments, as it was hidden from the world, and was even hiding the world from it. Taklak, lying, asks how they can help with more experimenting, to which the stranger suggests that they remain there, claiming Aegis will come to them in its complete stages eventually.

The Aegis-possessed Havriskr then slits his own throat, but not trusting that the stranger isn't somehow still listening, the group pretends to immediately take the job of maintenance workers and do some maintenance on the machine in the next room. The machine in question appears to be the source of the barrier Alelo mentioned: a large containment unit placed over

what appears to be a greatsword placed in the ground, constantly channeling magic energy inside. Fearing the effects of the aftermath, the team stands 30 feet away while Gideon smashes the single glass window of the device with several thorn whips, eventually shattering the glass as a swirling green mist erupts outward and through the caves of Embra, soon dissipating. All that remains is the greatsword that the Carnelians gave up decades ago, which Churt is handily able to pull from the ground. With the magical conduit dislodged, the barrier of the island is finally revealed to the inhabitants, and as it forms, it soon after cracks, and falls apart in the form of a magical dust over Embra. Memories are restored, which to some is a blessing, but to others, a curse, as some suddenly remember having their loved ones taken from them for the Aegis Project. Meeting back up with Alelo and Yule, the gang prepares their next move but not before witnessing the passing of Fillgr, who is lying on the ground in shock of seeing the barrier collapse, him being one of the originals who wanted it up in the first place. Taklak holds his hand as he passes, and places two coins on his eyes as he fades away, but Taklak then takes the coins back. Cricket witnesses this event and properly shuts Fillgr's eyes which were still wide open. With the barrier gone, many inhabitants are already preparing to journey across the sea, as many are indeed older than 75, and wish to revisit potential friends and family that may have thought Embra truly vanished. The heroes are concerned however, about the stranger, now being dubbed as Butt Stew, and worry that what happened to Embra may happen to other parts of the world, only worse. Alelo, now the head of the elder council, puts the decision in their hands, as there is no longer a literal barrier between them and the rest of the world. The four decide that they do indeed want to venture out, which catches the ear of fisherman **Johnny Failure**, one of many boat owners now eager to escort Embrans off the island, mostly out of willingness to help. They agree, but of course wish to see their respective families before making the trek, still bewildered by the events of this single day.

Taklak rounds up all the Kobolds from the nest for the trip, who are all eager to follow his lead. However, even after the barrier was lifted, the Kobolds are still vexed as to the whereabouts of Upi Mapi. Cricket returns to the Durthanes, who are all gathered, and very much prepared to see Cricket off, knowing full well she'd want to leave. The caring dwarves encourage her to set out to find out how she came to be on Embra in the first place, and who her real parents are. Thorin even remarks how odd he finds it that Cricket was left in the care of the Durthanes during the time the island was under the barrier, which, given what the islanders are now discovered, should have been impossible. Gideon returns home to find his brother Leonwood perturbed, as he claims that, despite his previous understanding of being the "chosen", he has been having dreams. For kalashtar like him and Gideon, this is illogical, and certainly not becoming of their god's chosen hero. Gideon, who himself has not been having dreams so much as distant cries for help in his sleep, attempts to reassure his brother, but Leonwood seems satisfied, as he expresses that perhaps something very unexpected has happened instead. After all, Gideon was part of the effort to free Embra, not Leonwood. Finally, Churt returns to his parents, wielding their infamous treasured greatsword and heroically states he is setting out to potentially save the world as we know it. However, Grek and Tesh Carnelian remain unimpressed, much to Churt's disappointment. Cynthia, on the other hand, is very excited for Churt, and despite her concerns for the dangers ahead, believes in him, seeing the makings of a true hero.

After a contemplative night, the Embrans wake up to a world of new potential. Everyone who wished to depart be them old or young set out, our heroes in particular aboard the "Failure" among a myriad of excited (albeit seasick) Kobolds. Days pass during the voyage across the open sea, far beyond the previous reaches of the barrier and well into parts unknown for the small fleet of fishing boats. On the early morning of the fourth day, land is spotted, but it is land unlike anything the islanders have seen, save for those who now remember life before the barrier. A great continent expands before them, as well as a gigantic city, one that appears almost larger than Embra itself. They are greeted with confused faces and a plethora of

creatures many young Embrans have at best only heard of in stories, from dragon-like humanoids to gigantic flying birds to people that can live in the sea itself. Arriving at the docks of what Alelo had called the Nation of Solumyr, a highly befuddled worker asks those aboard the Failure where they're from, to which Taklak responds, "Here."