

MASS TRAGEDY UNIT

5E ONE-SHOT FOR 3RD LEVEL ADVENTURERS

INTRODUCTION

You have been hired to join a **Mass Tragedy Unit**, a death squad in a major city under attack from all sides: the physical enemy is outside the walls, while a pandemic rages within. Any number of individuals and groups look to take advantage of the situation, but one Wizard Alchemist is fighting the bureaucracy to stop the pandemic and help the population: **Joth Yrakul** works tirelessly to find the cure to the magical plague that is taking more and more lives, and needs a well oiled team to support him. And bring in **more bodies**, living or not.

This adventure is primarily intended for **Clerics** and other classes and sub-classes that deal with medical emergencies or the (un)dead. Most other heroes spend a lot of their time on the city walls, defending the population from the invasion.

ADVENTURE

I have designed this adventure with group cohesion in mind: all of the adventurers might not know each other from before; they might not even care too much about the health and safety of the city and its citizens. But they are hired for a job that pays well enough to allow them **Comfortable** living (3 GP per week) in a city where most of the population is living in squalid or wretched conditions.

The adventure is separated into **2-3 hour sessions**. Make sure to read ahead because the PCs might skip way ahead unexpectedly, but also because of all the lore hidden in the pages ahead that might become useful. After the, hopefully now obligatory, **session 0** where you create the characters and discuss everything people around the (virtual) table do or do not want in their game, you can begin with the **session 1** below by introducing them to the terms of their employment.

DAILY TASKS OF THE UNIT:

These are the tasks listed in the contract the Mass Tragedy Unit (the Unit) members have signed with the **Yrakul Medical Center**. Depending on the Center's needs, they will need to do one or more of these during every working day, while some are a daily obligation.

1. Enter the more dangerous areas of the city and bring those that no longer can come by themselves to the medical staff... or the morgue. (*working day*)
2. Purify food and water at the Center. (*every morning*)
3. Destroy and cremate any undead. (*when necessary*)
4. Everyone else gets a proper burial, most likely involving cremation. (*working day*)

This means that the tasks such as the destruction of the undead might occur on the Unit's days off but are still not something that happens daily. Also, it is heavily implied that Joth Yrakul might want to take a closer look at the more **exotic** undead before they are cremated.

The adventure can be considered particularly difficult because:

1. Clerics have to prepare the 1st level spell **Purify Food and Drink** and expend that spell-slot every morning before leaving the medical center.
2. Whoever contracts **the disease** has to deal with debilitating conditions every day.
3. All party members have to be proficient in either the **Medicine** skill or the **land vehicles** (preferably both), as these are the conditions to be employed in the first place.

JOTH YRAKUL

Human, Wizard Alchemist, Lawful Good

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 54(12d6 + 4)

Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Draconic

Empowered Evocation. Add your INT modifier (+5) to one damage roll of any evocation spell you cast.

Sculpt Spells. Evocation spells affecting other creatures that you can see: choose a number of them equal to 1 + spell's level. Chosen creatures automatically succeed their saving throws, take no damage even if they normally would.

Actions

Spellcasting. *Spell Attack:* +9 to hit. *Spell DC* 17

Staff of Healing. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning

Spells

1st Level. *Cure Wounds, Protection from Evil and Good, False Life, Expeditious Retreat.*

2nd Level *Misty Step, Lesser Restoration, Levitate.*

3rd Level *Tiny Hut, Slow, Magic Circle.*

4th Level *Private Sanctum, Banish, Locate creature.*

5th Level *Geas, Passwall, Mass Cure Wounds.*

6th Level *Guards and Wards, Instant Summons, Globe of Invulnerability.*

SESSION 1

The adventurers get introduced to their tasks in the courtyard of the **Yrakul Medical Center** next to the **Death Wagon** by one of two people:

1. **Joth Yrakul** himself has taken the time to welcome them on one of the rare days when he leaves the lab and eats breakfast with the rest of the crew.
2. **Proza Tschitsch**, the caretaker and the person who usually takes Joth his breakfast into the lab.

You may choose the NPC at random, but Proza is there in any case given that Joth is very busy with his work and cannot stay longer than is required to grab his breakfast:

LOOKING AT PROZA TSCHITSCH...

You immediately see that he is very much a bookish type and random projectiles landing from the hills above are not his primary concern on a bright, sunny day. The white, parchment like skin does not betray his years as he quickly takes notes about those present.

As soon as the introductory formalities are over, Proza takes the Unit to the back of the kitchens where all the food for the Center is stored before being served and prepared.

Proza is considered the quest giver (at least until the Unit impresses Joth with particularly insightful information about the Disease) and the first chore he gives the clerics in the group is to *purify food and water* for the Center. This is something the clerics will be expected to do even on their days off: there is not exactly a weekend at the Center, but everyone gets a day off after every four days of work. Just one of many advantages in working for Yrakul.

The spell *Purify Food and Water* needs to be cast twice every day: once for the food that is being served in small trays for breakfast and lunch, and once for the food that is to be prepared in the evening for the next day. Clerics may try to *persuade* Proza that they should cast the second spell in the evening (DC 13), but if they fail it will be because Proza is tired of clerics reneging on their promises and just disappearing when he tries to get in touch with them. It has become a sought after profession in these deadly times.

THE DISEASE

The reason why all food in the Center is usually purified twice a day, and water as often as possible, is the cursed Disease pandemic tearing through the frontlines and the squalid parts of the city. But nobody is completely safe, and there should be more of a concerted effort in stopping it.

The disease is considered mechanically as a **curse**, so it can be cured completely with *Greater restoration* by higher level Clerics and only with necessary components (diamond dust worth at least **10 platinum pieces** (10 PP), which the spell consumes). The war has created a deficit of diamond dust in the city even if you can afford the exorbitant clerical prices. Spell **Protection from Evil and Good** seems to do a good job of protecting from the disease, for the brief time that it lasts. The **Remove Curse** spell doesn't release those suffering from the curse, though it might release one or more of the curse carrying microbes from it.

These are the times when you should roll to see if someone contracts the disease. Otherwise use your DM instincts:

1. When they fall to 0 HP, have them roll 1d100: if they don't fail their death saves, or get healed up, and roll **50%** or lower, they contract the disease and need to roll for a **condition** the following morning.
2. If they become bloodied during the day, have them roll 1d100 before they take a long rest: if they roll **25%** or lower, they contract the disease and need to roll for a **condition** after the long rest.

For a still unknown reason, the Disease only affects intelligent creatures of medium size or smaller. That is why the Unit may be asked to bring in any enemy combatants of larger size for Joth's closer observation.

When a PC contracts the disease, roll a **1d4** every day and they get a **condition** from the table below. They will get a condition every day until they find a cure or they die:

DISEASE CONDITIONS

Roll 1d4 or choose a condition according to the narrative.

1. Blinded
2. Deafened
3. Paralyzed
4. Poisoned

Lesser restoration will get rid of the condition, but does not prevent the PC from getting the condition the next day. If a PC rolls a condition twice without *Lesser restoration*, they instead **lower their maximum HP** by the rolled number (e.g. by 3 if they roll Paralyzed).

Extra hard setting: Roll for a new condition every time the PC goes to 0 HP or lower, not just once per long rest.

LOOKING AT THE DEATH WAGON...

You see a pitch black wagon, slightly larger than the normal wagons you see more often on the roads of the City. Two large crests of the Joth Yrakul Center have been painted in white circles with red paint on either side of the sturdy, wooden roof covering much of the wagon. Closer inspection reveals the temperature inside is dramatically lower than on the outside. Every metal part of the wagon is freezing and there is a trail of vapour disappearing in the war weather.

Proza escorts you back to the wagon after he takes breakfast to Master Yrakul and explains the Unit's next task.

Unit's first big mission will be to get to the section of the city walls where the latest nighttime incursion happened. Their task is to get there and back with a wagon full of bodies, 10 in total. An ordinary wagon was sent earlier to bring back the wounded and there are other places that serve a similar purpose around the City that prioritize the defenders and not necessarily attackers' bodies. But somebody has to stop the stench and disease no matter the allegiances.

Proza will explain any of the important bits about the Death Wagon to the Unit given that they are probably not accustomed to its purpose. If prodded for advice, he will also point out the frequency of the undead creatures occurring around the city lately.

TRAVERSING THE CITY

When the Mass Tragedy Unit get their orders and need to get across town with the **Death Wagon** to their target, one of the adventurers needs to roll a **Survival** check, DC 13. On a fail, they take a long time to get there and need to roll a 1d6 on the table below. On a critical fail, roll 1d6 twice or take the second impediment that makes narrative sense:

CITY RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Roll 1d6 or choose an encounter based on the narrative.

1. Cross a Sniper Alley twice
2. Cross a Sniper Alley once
3. A wheel breaks
4. People waiting for bread/drinking water block your way.
5. A brawl or a skirmish briefly blocks your way.
6. The trouble you were going towards comes to you.

On a success, they know exactly where they are going and what is the quickest way to get there without any problems.

Take note: Certain PC skills (such as the Urchin background **City Secrets**) allow the PCs to get across town twice as fast but do not necessarily let them avoid all the dangers within the city. The random encounters table is there to create encounters that even someone who has lived in the city their whole lives could not avoid, and you can certainly add other encounters or remove the ones mentioned above to fit your setting.

LOOKING AT THE CITY STREETS...

The abject horrors of war are difficult to ignore everywhere you go. Closer you get to the City walls, the more buildings are either completely destroyed by bombardment or show heavy, structural damage, threatening to fall over in an instant.

Therefore it is even more jarring to see little children playing in the destruction and filth. Women, children and the disabled are the only ones to be seen besides the city guards and firemen in places. Most of the doors and windows are shuttered and completely darkened: potential of getting shot by the snipers and artillery from above prevents most people from opening their abodes to the warm, morning air.

City guard superficially try to keep order in the city, while also using and abusing their power to profit from black market dealings with the local gangs that come out mostly at night to sow chaos for their own purposes. **Fire men and women**, on the other hand, mostly lug around wagons with massive water containers to the areas of the city where the water and sewage are permanently or temporarily in disrepair. The rest of the time they are supposed to work together with the city guard to distribute bread from the already understaffed and overworked city bakeries to as many households as possible.

The chaos around the city can find any number of ways to impede the Unit's travel. The above table has only a few suggestions to flavor their daily tasks with what I considered interesting parts of living in a war time city. You can extend the existing choices or replace them completely with whatever fits your campaign and the world you play in.

SNIPER ALLEY

The hills have eyes: around the city, a number of sniper nests provide excellent view of any open spaces while being too far away to hit from down below. Whether there are 4 or 5 shooters at any time, or whether they're using rapid fire projectile weapons, nobody is safe and you have to get across the Sniper Alleys as fast as you can.

When you try to cross one of the major highways through the city (wider than 20 ft), depending on how you try to cross under fire, choose one of the following ways to roll:

1. While driving the **Death Wagon** or some other vehicle, choose between **Animal Handling** (when applicable) or **Vehicle Proficiency**, AC 13: On a success, they attack at a disadvantage. On a natural 20, they attack at a disadvantage and you have half cover (+2 to your AC).
2. While running **behind a vehicle** or some other, similar obstacle that has been erected, you have $\frac{3}{4}$ cover (+5 to your AC) vs their attack.
3. While running under the cover of darkness, fog or on crossroads where **large sheets** have been spread to obstruct the view, you have half cover (+2 to your AC) vs their attack.
4. While running without any cover, roll an **Athletics** or **Acrobatic** check, AC 13: On a success, they attack at a disadvantage. On a natural 20, they attack at a disadvantage and you have half cover (+2 to your AC).

THE UNSEEN SNIPER

Humanoid, Never Seen

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 63

Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Tools Thieves' tools

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +8

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Common

Challenge 6 (2300 XP)

Quickload. These guys reload their rifled musket as a bonus action.

Dead Shot. The sniper does an extra die of damage with its rifled musket (included in its attack).

Steady Aim. Before the sniper makes a ranged attack they may take a -3 penalty to hit to gain a +6 bonus to damage.

Actions

Multiattack. The pirate makes two attacks with its rifled musket.

Rifled Musket. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning and piercing damage.

LOOKING AT A WALL INCURSION...

Body parts still hang in hard to reach places as you follow the bloodstains and signs of destruction up the tall, city walls. The stonemasons and woodworkers are supervising the rebuilding of temporary palisades in the places destroyed by artillery bombardment most likely to be used for future attacks. The brave city defenders overlook their work while trying to stay out of sight of the outside attackers.

But your task is down below, where a number of bodies lay at different stages of dismemberment and decay. A wagon with the now familiar Yrakul crest disappears with what you assume are the still living as you approach. You are left with picking up the leftovers...

If the random encounter the Unit rolled was *trouble coming to them*, you can point out now that the defenders on the walls are shooting at three shambling figures running for cover. Time to roll initiative, because good cover is behind the Death Wagon.

Otherwise, the Unit arrives in time to pack 9 dead bodies into the wagon. A successful **Medicine check** (DC 18) will show that three of the corpses are about to turn into **Ghouls** (MM pg. 148). Make sure that the player tells you why they would know to recognize that as they behead and/or tie them up for transport back to the crematorium.

MAGICAL ITEMS

DEATH WAGON

Larger magical wagon (Very Rare)

Speed: 25 ft

Size: 10x10 ft squares, 10x15 ft w/ horses

Cost: 90 PP (pulled by horses), or 150 PP (self propelled)

Magical wagon transformed by a specialized *portable hole*, permanently open and attached to the floor of the wagon. The hole is set up to keep the items inside freezing cold since those items are, usually, dead. Back of the wagon is covered to keep the prying eyes (and projectiles) away. **Ten chains** are hanging from the roof of the wagon and are used to lower and lift the body bags into the hole. There are five longer and five shorter chains with the body bags already attached.

Take note: PCs might try to ride *inside* the Death Wagon to avoid certain dangers (such as **the Sniper Alleys**). Up to **two small creatures** can easily fit in the back of a Death Wagon, but only one medium sized creature may roll *Stealth* to see if they can fit inside without falling into the hole (AC 15). If a creature decides it is safer to travel inside a very cold extra-dimensional hole that reeks of death (or holding onto the freezing chains above it) instead of staying outside, have them roll a *Constitution Saving Throw* after 5 rounds (30 seconds) of freezing cold, or suffer one level of exhaustion (AC 13). AC goes **up by two** after any additional 30 seconds creature remains in the hole.

The Ghouls that do not get tied up wake up half way through transport and start eating the other corpses inside the Death Wagon and climbing out to attack the driver. A successful **Perception check** (DC 14) by the driver or someone walking behind the wagon will tell them that the swaying of chains and chewing sounds coming from the hole are not something normal that is supposed to be happening.

SESSION END

When the Unit gets back to the Yrakul Medical Center, have them roll a **Perception check** vs. **Stealth** of the **Ghast** (MM pg. 148) hiding in the shadows nearby. If the Unit had defeated the Ghouls in the wagon and they see the Ghast, this is a perfect place to end the session as the gates into the Center courtyard open and more Ghouls emerge from the surrounding alleyways.

If this is by some chance the first encounter of your session, a total of 6 Ghouls will attack the Unit and **two gate guards** while the Ghast tries to sneak in over the low walls surrounding the Yrakul Medical Center. The session can then maybe officially end with screams from inside the Center if the Ghast succeeds and enters the mortuary.

LIFEBAG

Magical container (Evocation, Rare)

Weight: 10 pounds

Cost: 9 PP

Holds: 1 medium creature or 2 small ones

Magical bags that can be rolled up like a sleeping bag but inflate for **up to 8 hours** once a creature has been placed inside and the zipper has been closed. When inflated, a Lifebag does not permit any creature to leave it, including and especially any microbes such as the ones causing the Disease. A creature must have an **Intelligence modifier** of 0 or higher to know to operate the zipper system that closes and opens the bag.