

# A BIRD IN THE HAND

A MYTHRAS SCENARIO FOR MONSTER ISLAND



Mythras

THE DESIGN  
MECHANISM

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# INTRODUCTION

**A** Bird in the Hand is a scenario set on Monster Island, and possession of the *Monster Island* book is very useful, if not essential, for getting the most from this adventure. The characters become involved in a quest to assist a lizardfolk tribe, and a struggle against a malevolent evil threatening to dominate life on the island.

## OVERVIEW

At the marketplace of Port Grimsand, the characters hear rumour of Scabrous the Usurer's wondrous collection of brightly feathered birds, including a bird that can count, dance, and even draw! A desperate savage named Kaia also seeks this bird.

Through greed or mercy, the adventurers are tempted to relieve Scabrous of his prize bird, perhaps in competition with Kaia, but certainly others seek this valuable prize. With the bird in hand, it attempts to communicate to the adventurers its desperate need to leave Port Grimsand. Following the bird's directions, and possibly with Kaia's help, the adventures journey into the deadly Tane Jungle.

After a difficult journey, the adventurers reach the village of An Dan Ai. Here the spirit of Mele, an old Kahuna of the Oodaki tribe, who has been trapped in the bird, is joined once again with his body. Restored, Mele explains to the adventures that an alien spirit of great power, named Iz, nearly consumed him; forcing Mele to hide his soul in a bird that by chance was caught and taken to Port Grimsand. He beseeches the characters, now heroes of the Oodaki tribe, to seek the cliff-side ruins where an alien being has made its lair, corrupting men and beasts. The adventures explore the ruins, face the alien spirit, battle its warped reality and, with the help of the old Kahuna, bind the entity before it commits greater harm. If successful, the characters win the honour and friendship of the Oodaki and are rewarded with loot salvaged from the depths of Hina Bay.

## NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

### SCABROUS THE USURER

Proprietor of the Savage Silvers: Scabrous is a money lender of no less scruples than others in his trade. Neither kind nor cruel, his only love is his collection of brightly-plumed birds and Scabrous' latest purchase from Coynrad Lornnz is his greatest prize: a bird of exceptional cleverness that Scabrous is unaware contains the soul of Mele, a Kahuna of the Oodaki. A balding pate, pinch faced, and surprisingly pale; Scabrous sighs deeply and rolls his eyes rudely at nearly anything borrowers have to say.

### KAIA THE SAVAGE

Tall but crooked with age, the tattooed and scarred hide of this savage impresses colonists, few of whom have seen a savage up close. Warned by his ancestors that Mele's soul is trapped in bird form within Port Grimsand, Kaia will appeal to the adventurers for aid. The crocodilian features are hard to read but the dark eyes burn with intensity. When rasping words in the Colonist's tongue Kaia's head bobs forward and back like a pigeon.

### COYNRAD LORRNZ

Adventurer and bird-fancier, collector of rare eggs, taxidermist, and in all other ways a friend to avian species. Coynrad, adventuring in the jungle, by chance came across a brightly-plumed bird (a 'Greater-Crested Trill-Warbler', or so he claims) that he promptly caught, unaware it contains the soul of Mele, a savage Kahuna. He sold the clever bird to Scabrous. Only now he realises its value and his mistake; now he wants the bird back and tries to recruit the adventurers. Coynrad has no stomach for violence, possessing only a selfish will to get what he wants. Depending on the characters' actions, Coynrad may return to the jungles and falls victim to 'Iz' (see page 47). An older gentleman who impresses with a

full white beard, beak-like nose, and extravagant eyebrows, Coynrad has courteous manners, and gesticulates with his pipe to drive home arguments.

## FAT BOYD

Hired muscle that may be employed by Coynrad, Scabrous, or even the characters to apply brute force and ignorance to any problem. Fat Boyd is a cunning murderous dog but a capable leader. He keeps a gang of thugs, his 'guys and gals', to do the leg-breaking. If Fat Boyd seizes the bird first, he heads off with the bird into the jungle presuming it will lead to a fabulous treasure. Short, balding, and with a double chin and pot belly yet broad and strong; Fat Boyd has no sense of humour and is driven by selfish greed. He stares intensely, unblinking, at whoever he speaks to.

## INSPECTOR LUDSTRUD

A meticulous and unrelenting investigator of breaches of the Governor's laws, using cunning tricks, disguises, or other means to uncover the truth of a crime. Ludstrud will be called upon to solve the theft of the bird from Scabrous. He is usually accompanied by at least two White Death guardsmen. Ludstrud is tall and thin with mutton-chop sideburns, prone to raising "just one more thing" with weary witnesses.

## MELE

Kahuna of the village of An Dan Ai: the victim of Iz, trapped in the body of a brightly-plumed bird. Showing unusual intelligence, the bird attempts to recruit and lead rescuers back to his village so he can join with his body. Mele's own form is a slightly stooped and scarred Lizardman with a wrinkled snout, bearing a complex web of tattoos across his hide, and with one clawed hand maimed from an old injury.

## IZ

An alien entity, partly in the Spirit World but wholly corrupting and hungering of the lush world that Iz now inhabits. Iz cannot be seen in the material world, but the Weave of its corrupting presence is notable, distorting sounds, sight, and smell and driving away most wildlife. Iz's true form is a smoky ball of red angry light.

## TIMELINE

- 28 days ago, Iz oozed through a Smoking Mirror inhabiting the Ruin by the Falls, corrupting the area with its Weave.
- 9 days ago, Iz pursued Mele in the Spirit World, the running battle lasting three days and very nearly destroying Mele's Fetch.

- 6 days ago, Mele's soul escaped pursuit by Iz. Mele dominated a brightly-plumed bird, the nearest creature at hand, but was promptly netted by Coynrad Lornnz for his collection!
- Four days ago, Coynrad returned to Port Grimsand and sold the bird to Scabrous the Usurer. Scabrous soon discovered the unusual and clever behaviour of the bird, and it quickly became his most prized possession.
- Three days ago, Kaia received a vision from his ancestors of the bird and Port Grimsand, he set off at once.
- One day ago, Scabrous showed off the bird to Coynrad who, jealous, offered to buy it back but Scabrous refused. Kaia arrived in Port Grimsand.
- The adventure starts with the characters encountering Kaia and Coynrad, and offered the chance to recover the bird.
- The characters, or their rivals, concoct a plan to steal the bird from Scabrous and head off into the jungle with their prize.
- Journeying through the humid Tane Jungle, pursued by (or in pursuit of) Fat Boyd, the adventurers finally make it to the village of An Dai Ai, possibly as prisoners or guests of the Oodaki. Here the soul of Mele is restored.
- The characters join Mele and travel to the Ruin by the Falls to confront the alien entity known as Iz.
- A climatic binding ritual and escape from a collapsing cliff ensues, hopefully with the characters triumphant and rewarded handsomely by the Oodaki.

## IMPORTANT PLACES

### PORT GRIMSAND

The only human colony on the Island and home to looters, murderers, and desperate vagabonds cast out of the civilised parts of the world. The stench of human occupation mars the ancient stones of the cyclopean city within which the pitiful settlement crouches, ringed by the dense green jungle. Lord Greystone rules as Governor, with a small professional soldiery called the White Death distinctive for their white Smilodon cloaks. For more information on Port Grimsand, see *Monster Island*, page 57.

### SAVAGE SILVERS

The shop and home of Scabrous the Usurer, offering "fair terms for small sums". The shop is small, tucked away on Usurer Ally in Port Grimsand. The front of house, in

addition to a counter and chairs, is full of wicker bird cages, which includes Scabrous' pride and joy: a brightly-plumed bird of unusual intelligence, that he proudly claims is a Greater-Crested Trill-Warbler. Belbry (see page 39) protects the property at night with her faithful 'dog' Lavender.

### THE TANE JUNGLE

A perilous place of verdant green and a challenge to the characters' wilderness skills.

### AN DAN AI

A village of the Oodaki tribe and refuge from the jungle. It is located some five kilometres up the Gushing Crack (see page 19).

### THE RUIN BY THE FALLS

Built after the Cataclysm but before the rise of Zaruthra the god-king, the ruin lies near the great waterfall of Gushing Crack spilling into Hina Bay. Liana covered ruins litter the surface, but the main ruin is concealed in a natural shaft leading down into the cliff face (see page 21).

## BACKGROUND

In the jungles near the sea cliffs of the Oodaki tribal lands a Smoking Mirror sputtered into life. From its dark surface slipped a malign entity, old and embittered, knowing itself only as 'Iz'. Iz sought a realm of life and sunk quietly into ancient carven ruins, hungering for mortal spirits.

Mele, a Kahuna of the Oodaki, on a quest afar in the Spirit World, was seen by Iz and pursued. Fleeing, Mele was forced to possess a small bird, the nearest creature at hand, to escape Iz. By chance, the bird was promptly caught by Coynrad Lornz, adventurer and bird-fancier from Port Grimsand, and then sold to Scabrous the Usurer in Port Grimsand.

Help for Mele is coming; Kaia, an old savage but newly started on his shamanic training, sought the advice of the ancestors. Ancestor Puhi revealed the ancient ruins of Kapala, hosting the Colonist's settlement of Port Grimsand and the brightly feathered bird in which Mele's soul was trapped. As Kaia headed to Port Grimsand, Ancestor Puhi was consumed by Iz, adding to its growing malevolent strength. The alien Iz now builds its power from an old ruin in the sea cliffs above Hina Bay. If left unchallenged, Iz will weaken the Spirit World of the Oodaki, make the jungle even more dangerous and weaken the bonds that hold the Gods That Walk. Unless of course the adventurers change these events...

## ADVENTURE STYLES

This adventure consists of three distinct chapters and styles:

1. **A heist or con:** recovering the valuable bird, alive, from the shop of a money lender, avoiding rivals and entanglements with Port Grimsand's White Death guard. Planning is necessary but a sense of urgency is needed as other parties seek the bird too. Players will no doubt develop elaborate plans that have not been considered here, from which the Games Master must improvise.
2. **A jungle expedition:** a hex crawl style exploration in a sandbox setting; seeking the village of the Oodaki but facing a hostile environment and the risk of fearsome creatures, sentient plants, or spirits. The pace should slow as the wonders of Monster Island are revealed. This portion can be as protracted or direct as suits the Games Master and players' preferences. The appendix sets out guidance to running a hex crawl (see page 50).
3. **An alien haunted ruin:** delving into an ancient ruin whilst facing the horror of an alien intelligence. Adventurers face strange powers and must call on their humanity to overcome the alien Iz. This part of the adventure can emphasise the horror or focus on weird sword and sorcery.

The Games Master must consider these styles, the different pacing and nature of challenges that the characters must overcome, be prepared to improvise, and make the setting their own. The Games Master will need to make some preparation in advance, either random encounters or generating parts of the ruins.

## SCALING THE ADVENTURE FOR YOUR CHARACTERS

This is a challenging adventure with high stakes and significant risks. The Games Master should consider how well existing adventurers in their Monster Island campaign will cope, noting that it is unlikely that brand new characters will survive without serious losses. To address this, especially to give new starting characters a fighting chance, the Games Master should consider any or all of the following:

- Be generous with refreshing Luck Points and Group Luck Points, especially before key scenes or important actions planned by the adventurers. Ready availability of Luck Points gives adventurers the confidence needed for swaggering sword and sorcery heroes and rogues!
- Use the guidelines for Pulp Heroes (page 54, Mythras Companion) when creating new characters, with

potential benefits to abilities, skills, and recovery from wounds.

- If using new characters, provide a pool of skill points, 60% – 80% (or more), that may be assigned to existing skills, or used to open a new Professional Skill, mid-game, or even just before making a skill check, however, no single skill should be increased by more than 20% – 30%. This reflects the adventurer revealing an area of existing expertise or knowledge that has only just come to light and suits the challenge facing them at that moment, "of course I swim like a fish too!"
- Provide more help, either hired muscle or, later in the adventure, Oodaki warriors that stick with the adventurers as they explore the Ruin by the Falls (see page 21). Use statistics for Fat Boyd's 'Guys and Gals' (see page 41) or Tua Skirmishers (see page 46), with the Underlings rules (Mythras page 111) and Heroic Sidekicks (see page 27) to make additional numbers of NPCs more manageable. Keep in mind that hired help shouldn't carry the load of the adventure – the characters should be the heroes.
- The alien Iz has corrupted various powerful creatures, strongly armoured or with high Hit Points. If concerned with the attrition of characters' resources, or outright fatalities, consider halving the HP value for each Hit Location of Iz's creatures, or perhaps just apply this to the final confrontation, without altering any other statistics.

## GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

The adventurers start in the marketplace of Port Grimsand, perhaps restocking equipment or looking for buyers of recovered (looted) treasures. The action starts when the characters learn of a valuable prize (the bird) and must respond to an offer of employment or call for aid. Depending on events, the characters are free to adopt different roles and approach the challenges with different motivations, the most likely being:

- **White knights:** the adventurers take up Kaia's cause, actively seeking to restore Mele to his body and boldly seeking out the dark presence of Iz. In this situation the adventure is relatively linear: stealing the bird, the characters are pursued by

Scabrous, Coynrad (or more likely, Fat Boyd) to the village of An Dai Ai and then, with their new Oodaki allies, explore the ruins to defeat Iz.

- **Mercenary treasure hunters:** typical of those that come to Port Grimsand, the characters seek to exploit the valuable bird for themselves. The bird is desperate to return to the Oodaki village. Scabrous and Coynrad will be jealous rivals, seeking vengeance. Kaia seeks to win the aid of the characters, offering rare incense, idols, uncut gems, gold dust or even protection from the adventurers' rivals.
- **Dupes:** the characters are employed by Coynrad or Scabrous to capture the bird or hunt down the thieves. Coynrad promises wealth if the characters join as co-conspirators. Scabrous offers a line of credit of many thousands of silvers. Neither will reliably meet their promises. Opponents will include Fat Boyd, Kaia and the Oodaki and, ultimately, Iz.



**RESPONSE AND ACTIONS OF EACH FACTION**

The characters' actions will likely set them in opposition with Kaia, Coynrad, or Scabrous as follows.

WHO:	KAIA	COYNRAD	SCABROUS
What they want:	To retrieve Scabrous' bird alive and return quickly to his village.	To possess the bird and, intrigued, follow its directions, thinking it must lead to lost treasures!	To keep his bird (which will die if not rescued within a month).
How far they will go:	Will kill to defend the bird; but otherwise will not wish to seriously harm anyone.	Will not directly engage in violence; but will happily turn a blind eye to the actions of hired help.	Will kill to defend himself or property, but Scabrous will not leave the 'safety' of Port Grimsand. Happily allows any hired thugs to inflict suffering on others.
When and how they act:	Kaia searches for the bird, finding it on day three and will attempt a theft at dawn of day four, as Scabrous' guard leaves the Savage Silvers. Kaia may well be too late if Fat Boyd's plans fall into place.	Seeks to hire the adventurers on day one or (presuming he is unsuccessful), he employs Fat Boyd instead. Instructs his help to recover the bird, without attracting attention of Lord Greystone. Fat Boyd undertakes a theft in the early hours of day four (before Kaia's planned theft).	A victim of theft (and maybe arson), Scabrous reports the robbery prompting an investigation by Inspector Ludstrud. Not content, Scabrous seeks to hire aid (the adventurers or Fat Boyd), to return the bird, and seek vengeance.
Possible outcomes:	If possessing the bird Kaia flees into the jungle. His hurried trail is easy to follow. Kaia will pursue any party possessing the bird; using Stealth to steal the bird when rivals are in the jungle. Kaia will welcome allies that appear true-hearted (Insight) and support any reasonable plan. In the jungle, Kaia is a useful ally or deadly foe.	Fat Boyd gains the bird, betrays Coynrad, and flees into the jungle, thinking to ransom it back to Scabrous. Intrigued by the bird's behaviour, Fat Boyd and his thugs head to the Oodaki village. Fat Boyd will fall victim to the Oodaki if the adventurers do not catch him first. Coynrad, an experienced traveller, sets off in pursuit outraged at this betrayal and stumbles across Iz, becoming a vessel for its malign will.	Anyone with the bird that delays fleeing into the jungle will quickly have to deal with Inspector Ludstrud and Scabrous' hired thugs.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF THE BIRD DIES?**

*If the bird dies before joining Mele's soul to his body, Mele's soul departs and his real body dies. (If it is known that the characters took a direct hand, the Oodaki will seek vengeance.) In this case, Mele becomes a Haunt (Mythras page 150) and plagues the characters with visions of the alien Iz until they seek the Oodaki village or help from Kaia (or exorcise the spirit). A different Kahuna may then lead the expedition in Mele's place.*