

The Fraternity of Shadows  
Presents



Survey on the Expedition to  
The Nocturnal Sea

A Ravenloft Community Netbook



# Survey of the Nocturnal Sea

## Authors

### *The Fraternity of Shadows*

While we all heavily commented, edited, and made suggestions on each other's parts, the lead writers for particular sections were:

**David:** Liffe\*, Easan's stats & new maps

**Joël:** Introduction, Vechor (the land), Île de la Tempête\*, both Interludes, Viktor's intro for the Drowning Deep & Sea-claimed

**Nathan:** Vechor (the people), Isle of Ravens\* & Dirac's text on the Drowning Deep\*

**Sharon:** Vechor (fauna & flora, sidebars) & Nebligtode\* (Grabben and Todstein)

### *Chris Nichols*

Original concept of the Drowning Deep; plus the Somnanbulism spells, numerous ideas and suggestions throughout

\* and this domain's related material in the DM's appendix

And no, nobody wanted to convert the giant starfish from *Ship of Horror* to 3rd Edition!

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### *The Fraternity of Shadows*

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**Stephen:** The amazing PDF formatting you have in your hands

In April 2007, we held a submissions contest on the FoS forums for "sayings, rumors, adventure hooks and Dread Possibilities" of the Nocturnal Sea. The contest entries were very interesting and most were selected for this book. Bravo to the author of the winning entry, Robert "Cure" Elliott, who chose the *WotC* book *Heroes of Horror* as his prize. His winning entry can be found in the Deep's "As Heard in a Port" sidebar.

Shipwreck ideas on Île de la Tempête came from these ENWorlders: Agent Oracle; Ambros; Grymar; DJCupboard; Imagicka; ivocaliban; TheAuldGrump; Tonguez; Varianor Abroad; Whizbang Dustyboots.

Updated and "Ravenloft-ized" Mystaran monsters appear in the Appendix, courtesy of: Jamison Baty, Xavier Cattarinich, and Simone "Zendrolion" Neri. Additional source materials for Nebligtode's Mystaran connections were recommended by Geoff "Seer of Yhog" Gander and Andrew "Cthulhudrew" Thesien.

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Survey on the Expedition to the Nocturnal Sea

Oct. 1st, 2008

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Prologue

## Prologue

### *To the Revered Fathers of the Fraternity:*

I am writing this letter from the Darkonian coast, in Nevuchar Springs. Brother Viktor Hazan left this morning for the rustic island of Liffe aboard the *Black Pelican*, in the care of Captain Howe, and I'll be setting sail before dawn for the strange land of Vechor aboard Captain Arberlsson's Valiant Explorer. Hazan and I met yesterday to settle the details of our journeys. We've split the workload of this report into two equal shares, the better to finish in summer, before the southern Nocturnal Sea's colder climate can turn for the worse.

Hazan will first visit Liffe, then the Île de la Tempête (infamous for its treacherous lighthouse), and lastly, isolated Graben Island. I'll begin with the strange land known as Vechor, after which I pay my second visit to the fascinating Isle of Ravens. My own survey will conclude with freezing Todstein, from whence I will meet Hazan in the port of Graben-town, at or near September's end. At that time we will compare notes, correlate their contents, and prepare our finished report. If the winds are favorable, our respective explorations should take a little more than eight weeks.

Our journeys will be coordinated by Sending spells' messages between myself, Brother Hazan, and Father Tarnos Shadowcloak. We expect for one message to be exchanged every three days at the most. The Brother receiving a message from another will contact the third, passing on the first sender's news as well as his own. Encoding and privacy-wards will be enabled, as per usual. This method should keep us all up-to-date on each others' whereabouts, and allow for a quick response should one of us require help. Knowing that the Watchers enable some of the land-sovereigns to block access - or egress - to their territories, we want to make sure we are fully prepared to assist one another if need be.

Tonight, I take a last sip of wine from the terrace of the Riverview Rest Inn, and watch the sunset over the Mistlands' hills. Its magnificent colors will not be mirrored by the bleak eastern waves, come dawn. I've sailed on the Nocturnal Sea before, but never on a mission of such exhaustive geographic research. I knew that this was the last time I'd see the sun for weeks: violent lightning storms and gloomy, clouded skies would overshadow my whole trip. This depressing sea bears its name well. Hazan and I know that perilous shoals underlie its waters in many places, but we trust our hired captains to keep us clear of such hazards.

Professor Hazan has asked that I include a short historical recap of the Nocturnal Sea in this introduction. As most Brothers will know, this vast body of saltwater to the east of the continent did not even exist until the closing hours of Barovian year 750, at which point both the sea and its islands were set into their present place. It will be interesting to investigate the history of these isles as their residents understand it, as Fraternity records identify several as having already been in existence - isolated in the Mists - for far longer. Now, the Watchers have collected them into this single region ... for what weird and hidden purpose, I can but speculate. Perhaps our travels will uncover some common thread that links these islands, beyond their geographic connection. And what of the sea, itself? Turning to gaze across the inky waves, now that the sun has bidden me adieu behind the inland horizon, I cannot help but wonder what dark secrets they may hide.

Residents of the Darkonian town of Nevuchar Springs have been quite put out to see their sleepy village become a busy port, in the decade since the Mists first revealed the Nocturnal Sea. Before then, this corner of Darkon faced naught but a wall of vapor, and was a remote place, much to the contentment of its insular elven inhabitants. The chaos which beset this nation following the Il Aluk disaster delayed their community's growth for a time, but soon, refugees from the suffering west judged the Nocturnal Sea to be less ominous than home, by far. Some of those newcomers who took refuge here did fear this sea's appearance might constitute another manifestation of the Shrouded Years' horrors - it emerged from the Mists mere days after the City's demise - yet they found the waves navigable enough, despite perpetual darkness and foul weather.

The transition was less abrupt farther south, along the coast of Nova Vaasa. When the Nightmare Lands (assuming the elusive, legendary place ever truly existed) were blown off the Nova Vaasan coasts during the Great Upheaval of 740, the now-coastal city of Egertus found itself prematurely abutting a body of seawater. However, this nascent Nocturnal Sea tapered off into the Mists only a few miles out, leaving barely enough leeway for inshore trawling by Vaasi fishing-boats.

For the next decade, travel on this thin strip of coastline was restricted to the most courageous of captains. Most vessels that strayed too far offshore were never heard from again, but a few bold seamen did win great fortunes, driving their ships ever-deeper into the Mists to seek uncharted Mistways. A few of the islands now found in the Nocturnal Sea were actually reachable by these Vaasi explorers, although the transit-times were erratic and prolonged, and one's arrival point for such forays was very difficult to predict.

At sunset on December 31st, 750 BC, when the Mists receded further still, the ebon waters of the present Nocturnal Sea were exposed. Cautious exploration in years to follow, by both mainland navigators and natives of the "new" isles, soon mapped out this sea's land masses, and tentative trade routes have since been charted to the populated realms of Liffe, Vechor, and Graben Island. Whether still more isles lie beyond the Mists, yet to be revealed, is anyone's guess.

The Nocturnal Sea truly is a captivating and mysterious place. While our foremost objective is, of course, to seek clues to the traitor Erik van Rijn's locale and intentions, I find myself looking ahead with excitement to the many discoveries which its benighted, beckoning waves promise.

Yours in Shadow,

*Paul Dirac*

*Brother of the Fraternity of Shadows*

*July 20th, 760*



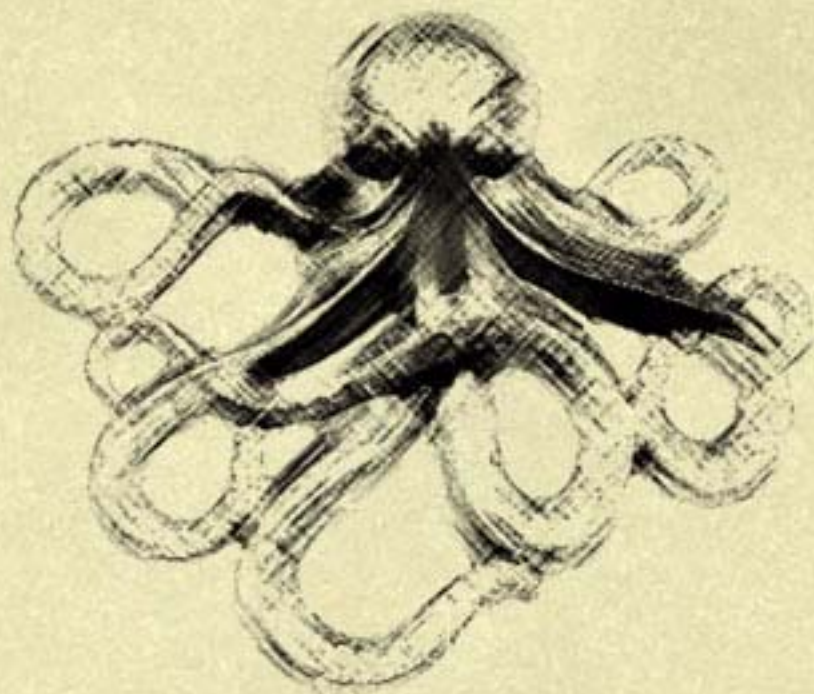
*Brother Paul Dirac*



*Brother Viktor Hazan*



# PART I



*Liffe*



*Liffe*

*By Viktor Hazan, July 27th, 760*

It was early spring when I departed from Souragne and the beginning of summer when I finally reached the Nocturnal Sea. Despite the later season the weather was much cooler and the sea breezes seemed brisk, even frigid. I had not thought my time in the swampland would acclimatize me to warmth so quickly and yet the sudden shift sent my frame into mild shock. The vessel I was aboard did not help matters.

The boat, even in the barely capable hands of her captain, easily sailed through the Sound of Liffe -the waterway separating Liffe from Darkon- and into Hordum Bay. Wrapped around a small inlet was Armeikos, my destination.

I had prepared for my arrival and sent word to the small University in the city. I knew several students in the facility and had arranged for them to begin my research. I

received their preliminary findings within hours, before I had even settled at the inn. I wasted no time tasking the students with varied assignments, all labouring under false pretences of course. With their assistance I completed my survey much faster than expected; a welcome surprise given the sheer number of lands I must investigate.

While initially trepidatious, I am now thankful for Brother Dirac's assistance on scouring these seas. Having to visit so many foreign lands would be taxing to say the least: just researching a single island, Souragne, proved to be almost maddening. Spending an entire year traversing the seas for barren rock to ignorable port would push the most stable of men into insanity.

## *Geographical Survey*

Liffe is a land of windswept plains, hills and moors surrounded by the cold Nocturnal Sea. Granite boulders and short, gnarly oaks dot the countryside. The trees grow slanted due to the pounding winds. The western and northern shores are rocky surrounded by shallows and hidden shoals, similar to much of the Nocturnal islands' coastlines. Flotsam collects along these shores (Liffe seems to attract the cast offs of other lands) and there are frequently scavengers picking off the ruins of shipwrecks. The eastern and southern shores are weatherworn from the storms spawned from the sea's eastern edge resulting in many sharp cliffs along the coast.

Strong sea currents from the southeast churn much of the surrounding waters. Whirlpools form frequently around the island and are violent enough to sink smaller

### *Liffe in Short*

**Location:** Nocturnal Sea

**Ecology:** Full Ecology

**Environment:** Temperate

**Darklord:** Baron Evensong (demilord)

**Year of formation:** 736-738 BC (as small domains), 741 BC (as single island), 750 revealed to the Core

**Cultural level:** Medieval (7)

**Population:** 11,000 (75% human, 8% Halflings, 5% half-elves, 4% elves, 3% dwarves, 3% gnomes, 2% other)

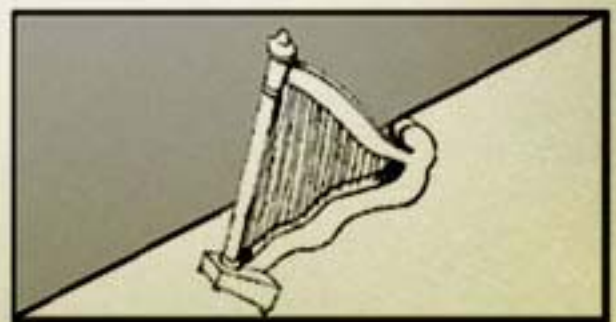
**Main settlements:** Aferdale (pop. 850), Armeikos (3,000), Claveria (400), Moondale (1,600).

**Religion:** The Thousand Gods

**Language:** Sithican\*, Darkonese, Elven, Grabenite.

**Government:** Confederation of baronies

**Money:** Typically Darkonian or Nova Vassan currency



## *Liffe*

boats. These turbulent currents, or races, make fishing a dangerous profession and shipping problematic, save through the fairly placid Sound of Liffe. Locals frequently use the expression "sound sailing" to describe a hard task going smoothly.

Liffe is hilly with large rocky outcroppings of red sandstone interrupting the yellow-green grass. The soil is a sandy loam which is quite fertile and would easily lend itself to farming if there were less cloud cover. The exposed stone of the cliffs and hills is an eye-catching variety of shades and hues. It's telling when the rocks are more vibrant than the landscape.

The island is split almost in half by the Hordum River which flows from the island's stony hills; it has cut sharp embankments into the hills making overland travel difficult. Springs and continual rains feed the river which quickly grows in size to the aggressive waterway that flows into the bay sharing its name. River traffic is sparse given the speed of the river and number of rapids.

There are few remaining forests on Liffe. The largest is in the north, sheltered from the wind by the central hills. The woods have no official name and are simply called the Moondale Wood or the Northern Wood. Despite the island's lack of timber few lumberjacks cut into the forest. It has a dark reputation as the home of werewolves, fey and other creatures. The local children live in dread of the wood and are told a number of unsuitable stories that take place in the forest. Rare youths with an adventurous streak often make it a point to venture into the wood.

There is only a single highway in Liffe. It curves along the eastern coast before arcing south connecting the two halves of the island. After the road reaches Risibilos it branches into a series of dirt trails meandering north through the hills. The road is rocky and seldom maintained save for the heavily frequented section connecting Armeikos and Claveria. Many less-frequented stretches are filled with weeds and muddy holes that can wrench the wheel of a wagon.

The northerly latitude of Liffe varies the length of the day: longer in the summer and as little as five hours in midwinter. However, the seasons have a much less radical effect on the climate. Continual sea breezes keep the temperature constant.

There's a saying on Liffe: "It doesn't always rain: sometimes it snows!" Heaviest in spring and into early summer, there's a brief dry spell in late summer and early fall (which I ever-so-conveniently left prior to), although light showers are still common. In the winter this changes to freezing-rain, sleet, hail and snow.

The sky is a perpetual slate-grey, even when not raining. On the few nights it is clear -inland of course - sky-gazers can experience a grand sight: Liffe has spectacular aurora borealis, a phenomenon both mundane and magical. Others may be able to describe it more scientifically but I feel this simply diminishes its beauty. The sky alights with flowing ribbons of colours brighter than the moon. I have heard Darkon offers similar displays, but Liffe's are truly remarkable.

## *Settlements*

Despite its small size Liffe is bustling with small villages and hamlets tucked away in dales and glens. Homes are typically built out of peat and stone with some of the newer and richer buildings erected out of brick. Architecture varies dramatically between villages, which are often designed in different or even contradictory styles.

The necessity to visit each sizable village forced me to circle the island, starting at Armeikos and then proceeding south and around with much hiking overland. The most noteworthy settlements are included below, organized alphabetically for ease of reading.

*Aferdale*

This forlorn town was once much larger than its current numbers would indicate. Once, fifteen or so years ago, the population was almost fifteen hundred souls, but the number has been steadily declining since then, and much of the village's homes and buildings have been boarded up. The village is currently trying to attract new residents with a number of promises, freely offering newcomers abandoned homes. Aferdale is quickly developing a reputation as a place to make a fresh start or escape from an old life.

Aferdale is a curious town. It is set on the crossroads of a half-dozen thoroughfares, with only one still in use. The other roads lead away from the town for a mile or two before becoming weed-infested paths that then vanish outright. The village shows signs of being a way-point between locations; however, there are no important towns nearby. For example, there were once no less than six inns and taverns in the village, although most are now closed.

**Aferdale (village):** Conventional; AL N; CL 7; 200gp limit; Assets 8500gp; Population 850; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%)

**Authority Figures:** Wellis Andreman, male human Rng10 (mayor and constable), Baron Traill Erlendsson, male human Ari2.

**Important Characters:** Marinetta Andreman, female human Exp5 (innkeeper); Abane, human Clr11 (Priest); Malisha, female "aberration" Ari4, Clr5 (Cult leader).

*Secret Society: The Beast Cult*

The Beast Cult is an offshoot of the Thousand Gods whose worshipers revere the various deities of savagery, cannibalism, brutality and beasts. They sacrifice animals, preferably fierce ones, to gain their strength and power. Followers often eat the raw flesh of animals they have killed themselves and wear clothing made from their hides.

A decade ago, the cult grew too large and depopulated the region's wildlife. They resorted to killing villagers, attracting the attention of a group of heroes. The foreign adventurers slew the cult's leader, Malisha, an aberration from Bluetspur.

Scattered, the group quickly lost power until a young priest reincarnated their leader into the body of a young girl. The reborn Malisha now works to restore the cult. They have spread out across Liffe to avoid attracting too much attention and are careful not to repeat their previous mistakes. They still hunt local animals, but have branched out to lycanthropes and other monsters. They have also started importing foreign beasts and are always looking for brave souls to capture exotic creatures.

The town is run by Wellis Andreman, the appointed mayor who doubles as the town's constable. Despite his age he is a striking figure, especially with his multiple tattoos depicting his military career. The villagers adore him for aiding a group of adventurers in freeing the town from the local Beast Cult. The cultists had over-hunted the region and begun human sacrifice. When I spoke with Andreman he voiced concerns that the cult may have returned, although I saw no signs of this.

*Dread Possibility: Malisha*

Since her resurrection Malisha has been the unquestioned leader of the Beast Cult, especially as she retained her formidable mental powers (although her clerical power was lost). Recently her body has begun to mutate, taking on her former skin-tone and other inhuman features. Malisha is torn between being restored and the desire to move unseen amongst humans. Currently she plans to recruit unsuspecting adventurers to "free her from her curse" and restore her façade.

Additionally, Malisha has never revealed her true origins for leaving Bluetspur. She claims to have been exiled for some incomprehensible breach of ethics but in reality she is still a willing minion of the God-Brain. She was sent to infiltrate foreign lands to learn of the world and its inhabitants. She allied herself with the Beast Cult in order to study anatomy and conduct unspeakable experiments on subjects both living and dead. Since her return she has resumed her experiments in manipulating flesh and bone.

**Accommodations:** Once there were four inns in Aferdale: Weppe's Inn, Adventurer's Rest, Middle Inn and Wagon's Rest. Currently only the Wagon's Rest (poor quality rooms, common quality meals) is still open. A small one-story building, the Wagon's Rest is adequately kept, although it has something of a roach infestation. When I examined the other inns I was surprised to find they were of superior quality and yet went out of business. I puzzled at this until I discovered that Marinetta, the owner of the Wagon's Rest, was married to mayor Andreman and that several of the former businesses had ties to the Beast Cult. Both coincidences, I am sure.

The town also has two taverns. The Parsed Lip (poor quality meals) is a rough alehouse run by a leg-breaking thug named Nansen. It should be avoided. The other, the Yearning Goblet (good quality meals), is the tavern of choice for much of the village. The elderly couple that runs the establishment seem to be a hub of local rumours and information, although most is mundane gossip.

*Armeikos*

Tucked around a cove on Hordum Bay, Armeikos is the principal port of the Nocturnal Islands and a bustling city continually filled with merchants, tourists and sailors on leave. Although the local census places the population around three thousand souls the number of travelers inflates that figure by half.

Armeikos is predominantly constructed out of wood, a curiosity given the barren and treeless nature of much of the island. While imported lumber can account for much the city the rest remains somewhat of a mystery. Homes of the wealthy elite and important structures, such as the constables' station and baron's manor, are stone buildings quarried from the local sandstone. The light-grey cobblestone streets are not particularly smooth so walking is more strenuous than it should be. Even in the Wealthy District carriages are unknown and horseback is the preferred method of travel.

**Armeikos (Large town):** Conventional; AL LN; CL 7; 3,000gp limit; Assets 450,000gp; Population 3,000; Isolated (human 90%, elves 4%, halflings 3%, other 3%)

**Authority Figures:** Baron Skott Troil, male human Ari5; Captain Magnus Baikie, male human Ftr6 (constable).

**Important Characters:** Jovis Blackwere, male human Ftr9 (innkeeper); Sinara Doom, female human Adp7 (Old wise woman), Blaine Graben, male human lebendtod rogue 5 / crypt raider 3 (body snatcher)

## Liffe

As the Nocturnal Sea's premier port town, Armeikos is famous for attracting all manner of foreigners and exotic people. For example, Sulo Boritsi once spent a number of months in the city to establish a branch of his family's trading company here, before his return to Borca. With the recent arrival of agents of the Carlyle Trading Company, it is possible he may have to return to fend off such off-Core competitors. When I arrived, the town was busily gossiping about a man nicknamed "the Alchemist", a title that immediately stirred my interest. I tried to arrange an interview to determine if he was related to the famed Alchemist of Mordent, or merely used the title by chance. However, the chemist spurned my advances. Rumor has it that he was on the verge of a great discovery that would change the world.

Another local of note is Quentin Blake, also known as Blake the Baker. Blake is a master confectionist gathering fame throughout the Core for his cakes and other sweets. He operates a store in front of an old riverside warehouse he uses as a baker. Secretive, Blake is well known for refusing to divulge his "secret recipes", and is forever hiring traders and even adventurers to bring him new and exotic spices and ingredients from far away lands.

The town itself is divided into a number of districts separated by the Hordum River and ancient stone walls that now barely reach mid-calf. According to local lore, the wall originally encircled the town not as a fortification, but to divide the world of men and civilization from that of nature and its spirits. Accounts are vague on whether said spirits were fey, trow, or something entirely different, though with the gradual decay of the wall, I am sceptical if the tales are true.

The central neighbourhood is the Harbour District, with the other districts fanning out from it. The spacious harbour extends along the edge of much of the cove. Like most docks the Harbour District is damp and filled with warehouses along with small shops that service the needs of seamen. The Armeikos docks are almost a cliché, filled with cheap nameless taverns and brothels that satiate the sinful urges of sailors and foreign merchants. There is a substantial

black market in this district and many stolen goods pass through its warehouses. Thankfully, large thieves guilds have yet to establish themselves in Armeikos, but it is only a matter of time. The many small bands of thieves, smugglers, and press-gang thugs battle regularly over territory, stretching the constabulary thin. I was approached a number of times during my short stay and told to ask for a man named "Blaine G." if I needed items fenced or smuggled on the Nocturnal Sea: no questions asked, even for large trunks.

### *Blake the Baker*

Quentin Blake is a genius obsessed with the creation of desserts. However, he has a dark secret: he is not human! Instead he is a boogyman<sup>DTDL</sup> preying on children, luring them into his factory. He does not kill them, but feeds off their innocence and willpower, slowly draining them of all personality.

Inside his factory are the living husks of his victims: Lost Ones<sup>RLPHB</sup> (under madness) who labor in his bakery. Blake has turned the latter into a cavernous deathtrap of fiendish devices and labyrinthine corridors only he can navigate.

While much of Blake's candy is nothing more than it seems, he occasionally adds all manner of poisons or chemicals to his sweets. He never taints enough to draw attention or cause needless deaths, but only to dispose of those who might be growing suspicious or who have learned too much. His treats can cause madness and delusions, induce bouts of forgetfulness, or force obedience to him.

## *Ejrik Spellbender*

Few people wish to die and most fight to stave off death, but rare are those who do more to defy natural law than wizards. Ejrik Spellbender, like many scholarly magicians, realized his mortality and devoted himself to fighting the inevitable. Despite his skill, Ejrik was unable to become a lich, so he decided to preserve his mind if not his body. He transferred his soul to other bodies at the expense of their rightful tenants, inviting the attention of the Dark Powers who drew him (and Armeikos) into the Mists.

Ejrik found he lacked the power to eject his new body's rightful owner, and had to settle for limited control while the host's resident slept. During this time he committed a series of murders until his last mortal remains were destroyed, seemingly vanquishing him. But Ejrik was too stubborn to simply pass on.

The former wizard now exists as a body-hopping odem (DoD), but retains his curse of being unable to control hosts while they are awake. He spends his limited time moving between sleeping hosts, searching for a way to permanently control a body or recreate his own. Recently he has heard tell of a Mordentish expatriate known only as "the Alchemist", who is rumoured to be able to create life. Ejrik believes a body without a soul of its own could be possessed with ease. Ejrik is also beginning to wonder about automatons and if a construct could be made to house him, but he is unwilling to trap himself in an unfeeling frame.

North of the docks and along the eastern edge of town is the expansive Poor District, also known as Stonefields. It spreads northwest along the coast, pinched between the outlying farms and the bay, occupying land too rocky to be tilled (hence its name). There are a number of small gulleys hidden

throughout the Stonefields, and halflings have carved hidden homes into their banks.

North of the Harbour and west of Stonefields is the Merchant District, where the craftsmen and middle class make their home. This district has been growing exponentially in recent years and has begun spreading north into the surrounding farmland, much to the chagrin of the farmers. Many are threatening to withhold food from the city unless the merchants' craving for land is restrained. The Boristi Trading Company has their local offices here, and much of the wealth flowing across the Sea passes through this district. They are perpetually hiring out ships, and mercenaries in need of employment need look no further. Where the Harbour's warehouses meet the stores is a large marketplace. Craftsmen and foreign traders sell their wares here and the city's own storehouses lie nearby.

Along the river and west of the merchants is the Wealthy District, home to the spacious estates of the well-to-do. Here the homes are spaced well apart, separated by low rock walls and tall hedges. There are a number of private parks and maintained orchards. Further south along the river are municipal buildings, including the constabulary offices and the city council.

Across the river is Armeikos College (described below), known colloquially as the "University of Liffe" due to the quality of education. It is surrounded by parklands, small scattered homes and ranches. Half a mile to the south is the stockades, a rugged cattle yard managed by rotating groups of shepherds and herdsmen

**Accommodations:** There are only two inns in Armeikos, despite the city's size, so both are frequently filled to capacity. A number of boarding houses exist in the Poor District and several warehouses operate as common rooms during the busiest trading seasons. Alas, people who make use of either often awaken bereft of valuables.

Thea's Remorse (good quality rooms and meals) is the first inn I stayed at. A large two-story building, it abuts the Marketplace. While noisy during the day, it is quite comfortable at nights. Once a home, it was



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turned into an inn after the owner, the Thea of the name, was murdered by her lover. The story is tragic and frequently told by the University bards, but the details regularly change. I am unsure if the "Ejrik" of the tale was a ghost or a madman.

The Black Werewolf (common quality rooms, good quality meals) is located in the Harbour District by the University. Its grim name is actually based on that of its owner, Jovis Blackwere. A former captain of the Constabulary, he retired ten years ago and bought the inn. He now runs the establishment with his three adult children.

## Claveria

Despite being smaller than Aferdale - barely half the size, to be truthful - Claveria is one of the most important villages on Liffe. Its importance is twofold: first, it is the seat of the island's Senate, where the barons or their representatives confer; and second, it is the site of the church of the Thousands Gods.

The Senate is housed in a large structure that was once a music hall before the barons decided they should collectively discuss matters of state. They gather four times a year to shout at each other about taxes, trade revenues and tariffs. The town becomes politically charged during these quarterly meetings, with people often dividing themselves based on their opinions about current issues. Fights are quite common, especially amongst tavern patrons. The barons themselves frequently attempt to embarrass their competitors by associating them with particularly hot-headed locals and virulent disputes.

In contrast, there is the religious side of Claveria. Several generations ago, the Allgods Temple was built in the center of town, to be the heart of the village. In the years since, Claveria has spread outward so its "heart" is off to one side, in the older and more rundown section of town. Despite this, the temple sees much traffic and all new priests must complete their education here.

Claveria itself was originally a trading post where farmers and shepherds brought their goods for sale. The streets were built wide to

accommodate flocks and wagons and the town square is an empty space for stalls and carts. Since Claveria has become the political and religious centre of Liffe, the commoners have been displaced to the outskirts of town, and the town square has become a large park that no one frequents except during political rallies and religious gatherings.

While in Claveria, I encountered Antonio Lofgren's Traveling Orchestra, well known across the island. Consisting of a core group of thirteen members, this small chamber orchestra travels between the various towns and hamlets, hiring local musicians, singers and actors to round out their complement. Lofgren, the conductor, is most famously known for his operetta *The Sea's Bargain*, recounting the beloved folktale of how heromerchant Orzech of Arme sold the corrupt sister-city of Ikos to the Sea, thus creating Hordum Bay.

ALTO is renowned for its distinctive style, mixing the traditional Liffen drum and flute music with the modern orchestra to skillfully elicit an audience's emotions. The quick crashes between emotional highs and lows leaves most people in a state of satisfied exhaustion, though occasionally some of the elderly or the infirm find the experience too potent for fragile nerves. Apparently this is a risk worth taking, as ALTO's popularity has not suffered in the least for these mishaps.

**Accommodations:** The only inn in Claveria is the Lord 'n' Master (good quality rooms, excellent quality meals), which is obscenely overpriced even for its comfortable environs and delicious food. The poor wishing to spend the night in Claveria camp in wagons or tents by marketplace outside of town, and there are always a number of merchants selling portable shelter to travelers.

**Claveria (Small Town):** Conventional; AL LE; CL 8; 1,000gp limit; Assets 66,000gp; Population 1,100; Isolated (human 99%)

**Authority Figures:** Baron Lyron Evensong, male human Brd12; James Atkine, male human Clr10 (high priest).



### *Dread Possibility: One Life's Measure*

From an early age, Lofgren was fascinated with how fictional tales and nonverbal music can affect people's emotional and physical wellbeing. He has devoted himself to the study of what he calls "Life's Measure," the exact measure, beat and rhythm of a human life as notated in emotional sharps and flats. Finding others who shared his vision, ALTO came into existence around that shared study and experimentation.

Using this mix of necromancy and bardic music, ALTO rips at the life-force of their audience, stealing precious moments from the end of their lives to extend that of each ALTO member. The stolen time is slowly corrupting Lofgren, but only one audience member has ever noticed: Andres Duval, a bardic lich who fled Darkon during Death's reign. He suspects Lofgren is transforming into a bardic lich like himself. Lofgren is unaware of the extent of his changes, being unchanged in appearance.

Recently, Baron Evensong has taken notice of ALTO and has observed Lofgren's magic, although he has not seen its effect. Evensong theorizes that such stolen time, if channelled into a physical receptacle, could be used to shorten his nightly torments.

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There are also a number of small drinking establishments in Claveria, often with whimsical, folksy names, where people go to inflict damage unto their livers and their neighbour's faces. I avoided these places.

### Goldendale

This small village is little more than a rest-stop between Claveria and Moondale: a farming community close enough to the road to earn extra coin offering refreshment at the Gathering House. A smithy and general store sell to travellers looking for cheap supplies and quick repairs. Goldendale receives mention in this report for being but a short ride from Claveria. It is an excellent place to avoid the inflated costs of the capital.

The thorp itself is a collection of homes and barns, along with the three aforementioned businesses and a recently-abandoned temple. The temple is dedicated to the Harvest Gods: the many deities of plants, harvests and farmers. It is still in

#### *Dread Possibility: God of the Land*

There were once witches in Goldendale who worshiped a powerful embodiment of nature, the Straw God. Fresh blood was sacrificed to bless the crops allowed the fields to flourish. A few years ago, a band of adventurers stopped sacrifices to the Straw God and destroyed its material form.

Recently, the Straw God has regained some of its power, whispering to the sleeping minds of Goldendale's townsfolk. Most have ignored the voice but a few have been seduced. They have begun practicing blasphemous rituals in the fields and once again turned to sacrifice. Typically they give of themselves but each spring they abduct a traveller who won't be missed. Their bodies lie in shallow graves beneath the fields.

The Straw God has yet to take a physical form, preferring to speak through willing vessels. Its cult is small but, like everything in Goldendale, is growing steadily.

**Goldendale (Thorp):** Monstrous; AL NE; CL 6; 40gp limit; Assets 140gp; Population 70; Isolated (human 99%)

**Important Characters:** Tam Belden, human male War4 (farmer, retired militia); Thordin Markel, human male Exp2 (blacksmith); Jereed Mel, human female Com7 (general merchant/town matriarch).

serviceable condition, and could easily be restored if the townsfolk can find themselves a new priest.

The fields around the town struggle as most of Liffe's farms do, but I saw signs that this year's harvest will be plentiful. Goldendale is situated far enough off the coast to avoid much of the wind while still benefiting from the rain. However, the thorp is still suffers regular cloud cover, so I wonder how the crops receive enough light to grow.

**Accommodations:** Goldendale is too small to warrant a real inn but the Gathering House offers both food and drink. If a visitor needs a roof to sleep under, cots are brought out of storage for a reasonable fee.

### Moondale

At the north edge of Liffe is Moondale, an oft-beleaguered town ignored by travellers and traders. Located beside the ominous forest that shares its name, it is unsurprising much of the town is constructed of wood, although newer buildings are built out of stone. The town is mostly populated by farmers. A few ranchers also supply the town with meat and wool, while a small number of fishermen risk the northern sea. Stern people, they often say that "a fool and his ship are soon parted." Scattered craftsmen also ply their trade, handing their skills down along familial lines.

With the bluffs and hills of Liffe to the south protecting it against the sharp winds and storms, Moondale was pleasant during my summer visit. The surrounding hills are green and fertile and the farmers produce an

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adequate crop year after year. However, I was told the winters are particularly long and stormy, with heavy snowfalls that bar all travel south.

Being frequently isolated has made Moondale largely self-sufficient: almost half the year, Moondale is its own little island. The isolation shows with a lack of stores and markets. Coins are rarely used and folk barter for goods. The sole inn is a weather-beaten husk held together by layers of whitewash. There isn't even a local temple to the Thousand Gods.

Perhaps because of this isolation, Moondale has been plagued by troubles. Predators seem drawn to the town were aid is seldom available. A little over thirty years ago -back in the 720s - the town was besieged by vampires who halved the population before knowledgeable hunters taught folk how to slay the fiends. Then, in 736 BC, a werewolf ravaged its way through the population before a passing group of adventurers finally dispatched it. Things were peaceful until 740 when a number of dhampires, spawned from the vampiric infestation a generation earlier, came of age and reduced the town to chaos. The population is still unsure if they managed to dispatch all of these half-bloods. Recently there have been increased reports of fey (called trow by the locals), and other creatures in the forest.

While my visit to Moondale was never so eventful, it proved essential to my theories on Liffe. The idea of a town being its own "island within an island" stayed with me, especially after my short visit to the neighbouring wood. I was struck by how the very atmosphere of the forest felt different from that of the adjacent countryside. As unremarkable as both regions were, there was a subtle change, akin to stepping across the border between Sithicus and Verbrek.

**Accommodations:** The Moondale Inn (common quality rooms and meals) is an aged structure that manages to keep out the wind and weather despite its frail condition. Once a passable building, it has declined since its owner, Dante Lysin, became the town's mayor ten years ago. Mayor Lysin is

**Moondale (Small Town):** Monstrous; AL NE; CL 7; 800gp limit; Assets 64,000gp; Population 1,600; Isolated (human 99%)

**Authority Figures:** Dante Lysin, human nosferatu Ftr6/Ari5 (mayor), Baron Rognavold Kolsson, male human Ari 3.

in remarkable shape for a man of almost sixty and looks almost half his age, but finds he is seldom able to give the inn the time it requires. He has been unable to find a reliable innkeeper and maintenance has been irregular at best.

## Risibilos

Almost entirely forgotten on the western edge of the island is the hamlet of Risibilos. While little over a hundred souls, there are more empty buildings than residents. It is a ghost-town, moreso than any in Liffe. Many maps used in this report omitted it entirely, and I include it only because of its curious history and the insistence of the local baron. I imagine in a generation, the town will be entirely vacant: even now it is a pale shadow of what it once was.

Risibilos is almost primitive compared to the rest of Liffe, with its stone buildings capped by thatched roofs (often moss-covered) and its streets little more than muddy paths. The town circles around the baron's "manor", an aged castle whose moss- and vine-covered walls seem barely able to withstand the rain, let alone a siege. I gather the previous baron, Doerdon, styled himself a king and acted the part, complete with crown, jester and court. To this day, Doerdon has a grim reputation for enacting whatever laws struck his fancy. The most infamous was his "laughing law", which decreed that the town's population must laugh at all times, and that every statement must be followed by "ha ha ha", with infractions punished by death. While I am sure the history has been exaggerated, the people of Risibilos firmly

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**Risibilos (Hamlet):** Conventional; AL CN; CL 6; 100gp limit; Assets 650gp; Population 130; Isolated (human 99%)

Authority Figures: Baron Julyan Linklater, male human Ari6.

**Important Characters:** Puncheron, unique male shadow (former jester).

believe the tale and remain serious and unsmiling to this day.

The town itself is otherwise unremarkable. The small, squalid merchant's quarter serves as a market town for the surrounding farms and herdsmen. While most modern conveniences are unheard of, most simpler items can be found at a reasonable price. One does have to trudge through a sea of faded tents and ancient stalls to find something of value, but the merchants typically have anything desired tucked away in a forgotten box in the back of their store.

Ironically, Risibilos is the capital of Liffe's largest barony, with Baron Linklater having nominal authority over all the lands between Risibilos and Moondale Wood. However, this is the most sparsely populated part of Liffe, and even Baron Erlendsson of Aferdale lords over more people.

**Accommodations:** The only inn Risibilos has to offer is a small single-story building named The Last Laugh (poor quality rooms and meals). I would have preferred a stay in the stable, but that was filled with quicker travelers than I.

### *Locales of Interest*

The various towns of Liffe are not the only sights the island has to offer, and may be of the least interest to our Brotherhood. I also include here a few other sites for which we may find greater use.

#### *Maiden Point*

At the southern tip of the island lies a ruggedly beautiful place called Maiden Point. Natives of Armeikos had mentioned

that it was a place of sad legends and that most sane folk avoid it completely. That being said, it is easy to find with a good horse. I decided to ride the coastal path south along the clifftops and plateaus to the notorious landmark (yes, this did make for quite a detour), and then back via an inland path. While I dreaded the prospect of having to sleep in uncomfortable stone huts, my journey offered no finer shelter: coastal hamlets on Liffe are few and far between. Nevertheless, given the lengths to which van Rijn and his followers might go to escape from prying eyes, I thought it essential to get an appreciation for the island's wilder regions and those mystical sites that might attract our Fraternity's betrayer.

On my southbound journey, companionship by and large was limited to a few curious sheep and seagulls. During those brief but treasured moments when the weather was favourable, the landscape truly was majestic. The sun would stream through the thinning wisps of fog that hugged the tenebrous sea, while the raindrops that clung to the grass on the undulating hills, which rolled away from the cliff edges, refracted the fragile light like liquid diamonds. Alas, those moments were few and far between, and I spent most of my journey drenched to the bone. The muddy trail climbed and dove and twisted and turned, treacherously. My horse and I were nearly blown off the clifftop during some of those slippery and precarious climbs due to unexpected wind gusts.

It took me the better part of two days to reach Maiden Point. Waves unlike any I have seen before, monstrous in proportion, battered the exposed rock from both east and west, meeting in a furious thunderclap. Take note: the winds were particularly fierce here, constantly pelting me with sea spray.

To my surprise, I was joined by an old shepherd in this most inhospitable of places. His torn clothes reeked of fish, and he had a wild, unkempt look and shifty eyes that I liked not one bit. My horse also became nervous at his approach, and instinct led me to place my hand discretely on the hilt of the dagger that lay tucked within my damp

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cloak. I still know not where he came from; he just seemed to appear from behind a sheet of rain. Pointing through the drizzle, he indicated something that yet had escaped my notice: a crude, life-sized rock sculpture that vaguely resembled a woman, partially concealed by a low knoll that obscured the Point's rim. Given how exposed she was to the wind and blasts from the colossal waves, I wondered aloud how long she had been there, and what she represented. Who made her? Why? How much longer would she stand?

The old shepherd's darting eyes fixed me momentarily and, in a fashion, he responded to my questions. "That's the maiden," he mumbled gruffly, showing fast-failing teeth. Despite his frightful demeanour, there was something in his voice that compelled me to listen to him attentively. "Have you lost a loved one?" he continued. "Though she can never be reunited with her own sweet captain, the Maiden can reunite you with your dearly departed." (Tales I'd heard in Armeikos had hinted that those who prayed to the Maiden invariably gave themselves to the sea, their ultimate fate unguessed.)

The man coughed violently and I nearly wretched as he spat a green wad of phlegm, presumably unintentionally, upon my chest. He continued, apparently oblivious or unconcerned about what he had just done. "Kneel and touch her as you sing the nameless song, and your prayers'll be answered. But mind what you wish for..."

He then broke unexpectedly into a dreamy, whispered song, every word of which I nonetheless heard clearly over the din of storm and sea:

*I have seen the verdant leaves  
Take the hue of rusted gold  
A thousand times beheld the scene  
Where the sky grows old*

*I have seen the birth of mountains  
Then watched them fall beneath the sea  
I've watched the desert claim the world  
With dust its only legacy*

*And though I see all one day  
Wither and decay away  
Your eyes and face remain  
Untouched by the mark of age*

*I break myself upon your shore  
The wave that shatters on the rocks  
That's the way we've always been  
And will be 'til the end of time*

*And though I see all one day  
Wither and decay away  
Your eyes and face remain  
Untouched by the mark of age*

*You are light and I am shadow  
And between us all is grey  
You hold me close, but never kiss  
Forever do I wait*

*And though I see all one day  
Wither and decay away  
Your eyes and face remain  
Untouched by the mark of age*

As he sang, I could not help but think back on... things that I have no wish to disclose publicly.

I know not how long my mind wandered so, but I emerged from this reverie to find the reeking man gone without a trace. But the bitter wind continued to carry his song, and I wished only to kneel and touch the Maiden... for indeed, this sacred place has spoken to me in a way I cannot express... and one day I shall return...



### *Dread Possibility: The Strange Powers of the Point*

A powerful, long-lived saltwater variety of kelpie (see the Fiend Folio) is using its detect thoughts, charm person, and other spell-like abilities to lure individuals who have experienced personal tragedy to their doom. Its victims typically sense the presence of their deceased loved ones, and grow so overwhelmed by a mixture of grief and longing that they come to believe they will be reunited with them if they throw themselves from the cliffs.

The kelpie sometimes approaches potential victims on land in the guise of a ragged shepherd, trying to entice them to approach the rocky outcrop whereon stands the Maiden. It is possible that this creature has been cursed in such a way that it cannot physically attack its victims on land or even stray too far from its cave, so must entice them closer to its lair in the cliff-face below Maiden Point.

The Maiden's sculpture itself is a possible Sinkhole of Evil that has been enhanced by the kelpie's cruel method of repeatedly preying on bereaved individuals, and might be magnifying the creature's powers. If so, the kelpie might possess additional spell-like abilities or supernatural powers.

## *Neverwere Manor*

Located due west of Claveria atop a small hill is the manor house of the local baron. Standing at the end of a winding cobblestone road kept in passable condition, it is surrounded by a black ironwork fence adorned with small fey figurines in assorted graceful poses. A wrought-iron gate opens to the mansion itself, an imposing blue-grey building of stone and plaster.

The manor is comprised of a large central structure with several smaller wings branching off. The two smallest wings are hidden behind the main body, while a third awkwardly curves out towards the fence like a flailing limb. This wing ends in a massive second-story balcony overlooking the street. The Baron is known to stand at the balcony and "perform" to passers-by. This public display varies from a heated oration to a mournful serenade.

Having forged a dinner invitation, I lied my way past the staff into the home. The foyer was impressive with a large sculpted ceiling and deep crimson carpeting opening onto an arching stairway. One of the serving girls offered me a tour of the building and I quickly accepted. She showed me the magnificent banquet hall and a number of sitting rooms. Though nigh-identical and a bit monotonous, each of the lesser chambers



had its designated title and function: study, parlour, reading room, smoking room, den, etc. Each room was lavishly decorated with paintings and sculptures, many of them with a musical motif. Several of the rooms held sizeable musical instruments, including fine stationary harps, strange foreign drums, and even a harpsichord.

Under the guise of curiosity, I interrogated the serving staff to find any hint of van Rijn. I believe I was making progress when the master of the house returned, forcing me to make mindlessly-polite conversation over dinner. At first, I feared my ruse would get me tossed out on my ear, but surprisingly, he took it in stride that he had forgotten ever inviting me. (It seems that Claveria's Baron hosts many callers upon first acquaintance.)

Baron Lyron Evensong proved to be a man of varied interests, although he himself was quite superficial and insipid. He was curious about a number of topics and questioned me as thoroughly as I had the staff, yet he quickly tired of each subject and moved on to another. The baron has a rudimentary understanding of a plethora of topics and schools of thought, yet his focus was broad and sporadic. He would surprise me with a sudden creative burst, discussing poetry and iambic pentameter, then abruptly began to lecture me on the finer points of biology. I learned to feign interest and politely decline to correct his many omissions and gaffes: he always grew quite upset whenever I pointed out mistakes.





Thankfully, dinner was short, and the staff hurried me out the door. They themselves did not stay the night and roomed in separate buildings on the grounds. They told me that no one was allowed in the manor in the evening except personal guests of the baron.

In exiting, I perceived someone entering through the main doors: a cloaked figure, barely visible in the light of the dying sun. The hairs prickled on the back of my neck as I sensed a malign aura of necromancy in the air. Recalling my mission, I returned to the red-hued entryway, only to find the doors firmly sealed. I attempted to slip in via the servant's quarters, but found them equally impassable. A quick magical probe proved ineffectual, and I was forced to let the matter remain a mystery.

Now, thinking back on this near-encounter, I am still convinced the figure I saw was a possible envoy of van Rijn! We are on the right track, Brothers; I strongly recommend that the Baron's house be watched.

### *Standing Monoliths*

Scattered across Liffe's hills and valleys are several aged standing stones. Some are simply upright slabs of rock in otherwise flat sections of land while others are arranged in circles, sometimes twinned with a mate, and occasionally capped by a third stone laid overtop. Most stand upwards of fifteen feet tall and are at least eight feet across the base.

Legends surround these ancient monoliths as none of the Liffen truly know their origins. Some claim they were built by the fey as homes centuries ago and still act as a doorway to Faerie. If this is true, the stone circles might act as a Mistway, perhaps to Sithicus or lost Arak, but I have no concrete proof of this. Other tales claim the stones are witches and giants transformed by the sun or forgotten spells. These legends claim that once a year, typically on the eve of the New Year, stone become flesh and they walk to the nearest pool or stream for a drink.

Regardless of their origins, the stones attract those fascinated by the occult. I, myself, felt the magic clinging to the nearby land, and my spells flowed with ease near the

### *Dread Possibility: Walking Stones*

Their true origins may be shrouded in the Mists, but there is one truth to the myths: once each year the stones move!

The stones do not all spring to life in a single night; rather, all the circles follows a different and complicated astrological cycle, with only a handful "awaking" at a time. A few rare stones can be partially roused even when it is not their time. This involves the completion of rituals specific to the stone, often involving blood sacrifice.

Some remain as solid rock, simply sliding across the earth towards nearby streams and rivers or - if close enough - the sea. These elementals seldom trouble passer-bys, but can be bound by spellcasters of sufficient skill (as per the *summon monster* spell, but with a duration lasting until dawn).

Other stones become gravel-skinned ogres, trolls, or other giant-type creatures. They spend their one night engaged in whatever impulsive (seldom pleasant) activity they think of first. They try to compress a full year's worth of living into a single night. If approached carefully, they may speak of being cursed and of things they have seen. People often speak freely around the stones, thinking themselves alone, and these giants know many secrets and forgotten events.

Some giants seek to break their curse, by abducting spellcasters or people of power. Others promise hidden treasure and secrets in exchange for service during the rest of the year, if somehow freed from stone.

stones. A number of fallen druids and black wizards practice their craft among the moss-coated monoliths. There are persistent rumours of cults operated near the larger circles and few people venture near the stones at night.

## *The University of Liffe*

On the banks of the peat-stained waters of the Hordum River, the College of Liffe is the pre-eminent center of learning on the island, if not the eastern Core. Often referred to as "the University of Liffe", originally it was a monastery, and it has long attracted seekers of knowledge. Realizing that their lives of quiet could not be sustained, the brothers founded the College in 697 BC. Centered around its chapel-cum-library, the College offers degrees in Sciences, History and the Humanities, especially in music.

Second only to Harmonic Hall in Kartakass, its music programs are sought out by bards and composers from throughout the Core. Particularly famous for training keyboard or string musicians, along with an occasional flautist, the College lacks the close harmony choirs and other singing specialties famous in Kartakass; rhetoric, oratory, and dramatic recitation of epic poetry are more revered as vocal arts, here. Acting is not fostered, apart from techniques to embellish a speech or poetics. Dancing, acrobatics or tumbling are considered to promote licentiousness and are frowned on by the college authorities, while comedic performances are considered to be crass and vulgar.

The College's history is surprisingly short for such a well-rounded facility. It was when the Mists rolled back, revealing fringes of the nascent Nocturnal Sea, that the College first broadened its courses, offering minor lessens in Sciences to meet the need for

navigational skills and for ship construction. Following a first tentative cross-Mist contact with the Darkonian coast in 743, Business Studies began in anticipation of trade.

When the Nocturnal Sea was revealed to the Core, Borcan merchant Sulo Boritsi of the Boritsi Trading Company quickly opened a local branch office in Armeikos. Needing educated workers to staff his holdings, but unimpressed with the school's offerings, he poured in financial resources, and in 752 the Klaus Boritsi School of Business began to offer professional degrees. Sulo received its first honorary degree, before returning to Levkarest at the behest of Ivana Boritsi. It is a Liffen graduate of the business school who runs the Trading Company's Egertus offices for Sulo, while he divides his time between there and Borca. Ironically, the rival Carlyle Trading Company is now recruiting its own staff from a school which bears its primary competitor's name!

The University's growth was aided by the arrival of Professors Eugenia Kael (Science) and Ewart Candida (Business), once of the University of Il Aluk, fleeing its destruction and the then-crumbling Darkonian state. The two took a hand in bringing the college up to modern standards, heading up the School of Business and School of Physical Sciences (est. 753). The pair also introduced a fair measure of controversy, fighting to allow the admission of female students (as of 753) and non-humans (from 756 on, though much prejudice remains).

Currently, the College of Liffe is a modern and flourishing institution, drawing students from Liffe, Graben Island, Nova Vaasa and Darkon. This hodgepodge of cultures creates a cosmopolitan atmosphere for the students, as fits the pro-trade stance of the college's officials. Instructors emphasize realism and stoicism as a way of life; most hold a very pessimistic, melancholy outlook on life that is instilled into their students. As a result of this world-wise, yet bleak outlook, potential dirgists are often drawn to the college, and many graduates take up this musical style in later life.



*Dread Possibility: Fishy Lucre*

When they fled Il Aluk, Professors Kael and Candida and Dean Arroyoch brought with them a number of historical artifacts from their former University. These include such oddities as a crystalline skull, a cracked glass rod, a strange dagger with a large ruby in its hilt and, most notably, a set of five coins of undetermined origin, all packed separately. These coins are remarkable for being possessed by a monstrous power.

During the break-in during the 756 riots, one of the four students attempted to steal one of these coins and, to his horror, watched his coin purse explode in a cyclone of gold that crushed him and his fellows. Campus security soon discovered the bodies, but was unable to identify an assailant and has since downplayed the incident.

As with any college, radical sentiments are common among educated young hot-heads, and politically-motivated clashes between students and officials are not unknown. In one tragic incident, the College was the site of four Vaasi students' deaths, after they broke into the financial office to steal back their tuition in protest of non-humans' 756 enrollments. The circumstances were hushed up to protect the school's reputation, but are still being discreetly investigated.

The library is found in the central structure, a former chapel with a great spire tower, and has seven floors of carefully catalogued books available to the students and faculty. I spent several weeks poring over the collection myself. There are also rumors of secret stacks in the basement that contain treatise on the arcane arts. Given the Liffen fondness for talespinning, there might be nothing to this, but what passes for "history" in these parts suggests the land was once a fantastic place: a hidden collection of

arcane lore might prove or refute this. In any case, the idea of surviving tomes of magic and lore from a forgotten age is tantalizing. My personal inquiries led to nothing, but I was distracted by other concerns.

There are a number of residences on the University grounds and most students prefer to live on the campus, as do most professors and a few alumni. The buildings are universally drafty and cold, with dampness a common problem. Mildew is a constant menace to the library's resources. However, for most students, the convenience of living on campus far outweighs the problems. The institution is open to students for only eight months out of the year, from September to April, but professors and alumni are free to use its facilities year-round. Thankfully, I was given full access to the facilities, owing to my status as a "visiting scholar", now on sabbatical from my post at the University of Richemulot.

Potential applicants must submit a non-refundable 300 gp application fee, and a written essay on a suitable academic topic. If the quality of the applicant's writing attracts the admissions board's interest, the applicant is then invited to an interview. Here, the would-be student is tested for knowledge of history and basic academic skills, potential performance talent, and character. Those who are admitted receive a certificate of enrollment and a hooded silk academic gown (its 75 gp cost being included in the application fee). The gown must be worn during meals, academic and administrative meetings, lectures, and within the library. These gowns are of masterwork quality, and are often enchanted by their wearers. Senior faculty members often have gowns that give protection, ward off the elements or enhance their charismatic and leadership powers.

Graduates are awarded a matching hood symbolic of their accomplishment, and lined with colours denoting the graduates' degree: green for biology, gold for business, blue for literature, etc. The trim of the hood is further coloured to reflect status: those with a Bachelor's degree have a hood trimmed with scarlet; a Master's degree, with yellow; and a Doctorate, with white silk. Professors have a hood lined with white ermine, while the

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College dean's hood is further adorned with gold highlights.

Before students receive a degree, they must pass a series of examinations that take one week for a Bachelor's, two for a Master's, or four for a Doctorate. Exams always include oral questions on history, and either artistic performance or the submission of a musical or poetic composition, in addition to direct questions about the student's field of study. The actual examination procedure includes attempts to distract examinees with sudden strange comments or noises or even minor spells. The non-refundable examination fees are 75gp for Bachelor, 150gp for Master's and 300gp for a Doctorate.

### *Affiliation*

Affiliation Criterion*	Score Modifier
Expertise and general knowledge:	+ ½ Level
Character has the bardic knowledge ability or equivalent:	+2
Ranks in Performance (keyboard, stringed, oratory or poetry)	+1 per 4 ranks
Ranks in Performance (dancing, comedy or buffoonery)	+1 per 8 ranks
Ranks in Knowledge	+1 per 4 ranks
Ranks in Concentration	+1 per 6 ranks
Dirgist PrC	+2
Scholar PrC	+2
Virtuoso PrC	+2
Jaded feat	+1
Attending classes	+1/ month
Famously endured a great personal tragedy or defeat	+2
Bachelor's Degree	+1
Master's Degree	+2
Doctorate	+4
Composes a performance or writes a treatise critical of college	-10
Member of any other college or university	-2/ affiliation
Observed being un-stoic in the face of adversity	-2

\*see the *Player's Handbook II* for more information on affiliations

**Undergraduate:** (affiliation score 5 or higher and successful application and interview)

- Gain access to the main library and facilities of the college.
- Rental accommodation available on campus with meals provided for 5sp/day.
- Able to purchase masterwork musical instruments produced by college's artisans.
- Presented with a masterwork scholar's gown upon being accepted.

**Bachelor:** (affiliation score 10 or higher and passed the Bachelor's examination)

- Masterwork instruments produced by the college can be purchased at a 10% discount.
- +2 circumstance bonus to Charisma checks with the inhabitants of Liffe.
- +1 competency bonus to bardic knowledge checks and the skills Concentration and Perform.
- Awarded hood for their academic gown. Of masterwork quality, it occupies the head slot and can be enchanted separately from the gown.

**Master:** (affiliation score 15 or higher and passed the Master's examination)

- Use of college accommodations and meals free of charge and secure storage space in the college vaults.
- Services of a scribe/assistant (Exp1) while on campus.
- Masterwork instruments produced by the college can be purchased at a 20% discount.
- Access to the reserved stacks for magical research (equivalent to sharing spellbooks).
- Competency bonuses gained by the Bachelor increased to +2.

**Doctor:** (affiliation score 20 or higher and passed the Doctoral examination)

- Masterwork instruments produced by the college can be purchased at a 30% discount.
- Attracts student to aid with research and even accompany them on travels (treat as Leadership feat, but only NPC classes are available).
- Able to borrow a single reusable magic item (of a value of up to 20,000 gp) for a period of not more than a month from the college's vault.

**Professor:** (affiliation score 25 or higher and see below)

- Use of faculty accommodations and meals free of charge.
- Biannual stipend of 100 gp paid in April and December.
- Charisma check bonus (see Bachelor) increased by +1.
- Considered to have great renown and a base of operations for Leadership feat.
- During the eight months the University is open, must spend 1day/ week teaching. Failure to do so reduces affiliation rating by 1/ month.
- Must also spend one month each year engaged in administrative duties (including examination boards). Failure to do so reduces affiliation rating by 2.
- Must recruit at least one new student to the college per year or reduce affiliation rating by 1.

**Dean:** (affiliation score 30 or higher and see below)

- Biannual stipend of 300 gold paid in April and December.
- Charisma check bonus (see Bachelor) increased by +1.
- During the eight months the University is open, must spend 1 week/month engaged in administrative duties (including examination boards). Failure to do so reduces affiliation rating by 4.
- Must recruit at least three new students to the college/ year or reduce affiliation rating by 1.

## Flora and Fauna

Liffe is a wind-swept rock where plants and crops have to struggle to survive. What little that manages to endure the weather must yet withstand grazing sheep that will consume anything. Much of the vegetation is hardy grasses, tough shrubs, mosses and the various lichens that adorn the coast's rocks. Larger vegetation, such as trees, is sparse, occurring only in small copses.

Typical plants are mostly yellow and brown, straining to find sun in the overcast skies. The colours of the island occasionally burst into golds and purples with the flowering of gorse and heather respectively and, between the hills, patches of other wildflowers can be found. The strong sea winds are often blamed for the lack of plant life larger than shrubs and thistles, but the peat moss in the moors suggests there were forests culled for lumber generations ago.

Local fauna is mostly animals raised by the herdsman: mostly sheep and goats, with occasional cattle or pigs. Trained sheepdogs are used for herding and guarding flocks and there are few shepherds without a brace of hearty canines. These are typically collies, shelties, or similar dutiful breeds. The Liffen Sheepdog, an intelligent long-haired breed with a pronounced snout, is a favourite and is gaining popularity across the Nocturnal Sea. Cats are far less popular companions, but not unknown; pet cats are typically kept inside, denied the free reign of dogs, lest the island's sea-eagles carry them off. Barn cats are used to control vermin, but are near-feral and never allowed in homes, so must avoid the birds by their own wits.

Fairly recent arrivals on Liffe are horses (from Nova Vaasa) and ponies (from Graben Island). While horses are only affordable by the richest barons, ponies have become quite popular and a number of commoners have become breeders. Liffen ponies are sturdy beasts, and are often used as pack animals or even for pulling plows.

Wild animals are not as rare as trees, but still seldom seen. Most predators have long since been hunted to extinction, with but a handful of wolves and black bears

remaining. Foxes are common in the hills, as are occasional feral dogs; the latter are subject to bounty in most baronies, as known sheep-killers. Feral cats are more widespread than their canine counterparts. A small number of deer yet roam the hills, but are in decline. There are also the typical hedgerow animals of the countryside including hares, badgers, weasels, moles and rodents.

The dominant wildlife on Liffe is its birds. Seagulls are an everyday nuisance, as is the abundance of feral pigeons in the cities. Swallows, gannets, wrens, petrels, finches, sparrows and robins are also common, and a few ponds are frequented by swans. In the northerly coves, there are colonies of storm petrels and other species adapted to the cold. Predatory birds are also common, including sea-eagles (some quite large) and ospreys by day and barn-roosting owls by night.

### Encounters in Liffe: Wildlife

**CR 1/10:** Bat <sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 1/8:** Rat <sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 1/6:** Raven <sup>MM1</sup>

**CR ¼:** Albatross <sup>STO</sup>; Cat <sup>MM1</sup>; Fox <sup>Fro</sup>; Owl <sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 1/3:** Dire rat <sup>MM1</sup>

**CR ½:** Badger <sup>MM1</sup>; Eagle <sup>MM1</sup>; Silver fox (elven fox) <sup>Gal</sup>

**CR 1:** Dire raven <sup>Gal</sup>; Elven hound (cooshee) <sup>RWi p189</sup>; Moose <sup>Dra#327 p 87</sup>; Razorback <sup>DoD</sup>

**CR 2:** Boar <sup>MM1</sup>; Brown Bear <sup>MM1</sup>; Dire hawk <sup>MM2, RWi</sup>; Dire weasel <sup>MM1</sup>; Raven, giant <sup>Fro</sup>

**CR 3:** Dire eagle <sup>RSt</sup>; Giant eagle <sup>MM1</sup>; Giant owl <sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 4:** Dire boar <sup>MM1</sup>; Dire wolverine <sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 7:** Dire bear <sup>MM1</sup>; Dire elk <sup>MM2</sup>

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### Encounters in Liffe: Monsters

- CR ½:** Bloodrose <sup>DoD</sup>; Centipede, monstrous <sup>MM1</sup>
- CR1:** Gnome, forest <sup>MM1, RSt</sup>; Fearweed <sup>DoD</sup>; Selkie, dread <sup>FiF</sup>
- CR 2:** Arak, portune <sup>VRGSF</sup>; Assassin bug, giant <sup>DoD</sup>; Crawling ivy <sup>DoD</sup>; Hag, Bog <sup>OrA</sup>; Red Carp <sup>MM3</sup>; Spriggan <sup>FiF</sup>
- CR 3:** Allip <sup>MM1</sup>; Arak, teg <sup>VRGSF</sup>; Assassin Vine <sup>MM1</sup>; Baobhan sith (Black Sprite) <sup>DoD</sup>; Bloodroot <sup>DoD</sup>; Boowray <sup>DoD</sup>; Cockatrice <sup>MM1</sup>; Doppelganger, dread <sup>DoD</sup>; Drownling <sup>DoD</sup>; Dryad <sup>MM1</sup>; Ettercap <sup>MM1, Dra#343</sup>; Unicorn, dappled <sup>MM1</sup>; Ghost brute <sup>LiM</sup>; Lycanthrope, werewolf <sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 4:** Arak, powrie <sup>VRGSF</sup>; Bruja <sup>DoD</sup>; Carrion crawler <sup>MM1</sup>; Lashweed <sup>DoD</sup>; Spectral lyrist <sup>LiM</sup>; Troll, dread, forest <sup>MM3</sup>
- CR 5:** Arak, brag (Whitfolk) <sup>VRGSF</sup>; Arak, fir <sup>VRGSF</sup>; Bone tree <sup>DragC</sup>; Snowflake Ooze <sup>MM3</sup>; Taunting Haunt <sup>MM5</sup>
- CR 6:** Chelicera <sup>MM3</sup>; Chrall <sup>MM3</sup>; Dread Blossom Swarm <sup>MM3</sup>; Glaistig <sup>MM3</sup>; Vehrteig <sup>DTD</sup>
- CR 7:** Crypt chanter <sup>LiM</sup>; Haunt, Bridge <sup>MM5</sup>
- CR 8:** Banshrae <sup>MM5</sup>; Burrow Root <sup>MM5</sup>; Stakewood tree <sup>JWM's</sup>; Treant <sup>MM1</sup>; Treant, warped <sup>MM1, DoD</sup>
- CR 10:** Greenvise <sup>MM2, Dra#292</sup>; Haunt, Forest <sup>MM5</sup>
- CR 12:** Night twist <sup>MM3</sup>
- CR 13:** Charnel Hound <sup>MM3</sup>; Cinder Swarm <sup>MM3</sup>
- CR varies:** Albesadow (see vampire, elven) <sup>DoD</sup>; Bogyman <sup>DTD</sup>; Geist <sup>DoD</sup>; Ghost <sup>MM1, DoD</sup>; Half-fey <sup>FiF, VRGSF</sup>; Feytouched <sup>FiF, VRGSF p 108</sup>; Living Spell <sup>MM3</sup>

### People

The island's human natives are the Liffen, a people as diverse as any I have seen. There seems to be no uniformity in shade of hair or eyes, and even skin ranges from a pale white to a dark tan colour. Communities' residents are similar to each other, suggesting limited intermarriage between settlements, such that folk of Moondale to the North frequently having red hair and pale freckled skin, while folk of Risibilos have darker skin and hair.

One might almost think the island was populated by peoples from a number of different lands - much like the Core - and yet there are no borders dividing the land, no dialects dividing people, and no divergent histories suggesting multiple origins.

### Daily Life

The Liffen are a simple folk, predominantly rural with a few small towns. There is a small aristocracy comprised of barons and their extended families, but the majority of the population is of humble birth. After the Mists revealed the island, a number of traders and craftsmen came into wealth and a new social class formed. The aristocracy had a fondness for goods from the Core and so pay merchants handsomely to bring them in. Liffe's artisans, seizing an opportunity, began to imitate other lands' handiworks as cheap (and sometimes fraudulently-labeled) alternatives.

The mercantile middle-class is growing fast, and may soon subsume the aristocracy or even depose the isle's barons outright. The

## Liffe

### *The Liffen Hero*

**Races:** The clear majority of the Liffen are humans of any conceivable size, build and coloration. Hidden communities of all other *PHB* races can also be found in the hills or woods. This is especially true in areas where magic runs strong and the fantastic still has power. There are a small number of caliban and half-Vistani among the humans, with fewer of the latter, as not many Vistani yet see fit to Mist-travel to Liffe. Cosmopolitan Armeikos and the College have the greatest visible numbers of non-humans.

**Classes:** Those classes at home in the wilds are most common in Liffe. Rangers, druids, and even barbarians have little trouble with the ranchers and rugged hills. Magic is tolerated on Liffe, so wizards and sorcerers are seldom persecuted. Bards can find a ready home in Liffe, with its many stories and songs, and are welcomed warmly in most inns and towns.

**Recommended Skills:** Appraise, Bluff, Craft (blacksmith, carpentry, leatherwork), Gather Information, Handle Animal, Knowledge (any), Listen, Perform (any), Profession (herder, fisher, sailor, tanner, weaver), Survival, Swim, Use Rope.

**Recommended Feats:** Animal Affinity, Deft Hands, Diligent, Endurance, Leadership, Negotiator, Persuasive, Self-Sufficient, Skill Focus (Perform, Survival), Weapon Focus (flail, scythe, short sword, sickle, spear).

**Liffe Male Names:** Androw, Antoun, Burray, Graemsay, Harie, Lowrence, Patrik, Richert, Rondaldsay, Sandwick, Symond.

**Liffe Female Names:** Breta, Bryd, Eday, Ellissetter, Elspet, Lillies, Mareoun, Merjorie, Ollaw, Sanday, Sinnie.

labourers seldom concern themselves with the forthcoming power struggle and carry on with their lives much as they have done for centuries. Such rustics concern themselves with their herds and flocks or their farms.

Fashion in Liffe is simple and functional. Sturdy breaches and rugged boots are paired with thick woolen shirts and the occasional dark outer coat. Even the aristocrats dress plainly, to keep out the damp and the cold. Traders from the Core often try to sell high fashions from Dementlieu or Borca here, but all have failed, as the local weather promptly spoils the fabrics or proves unsuitable for the temperature. At most, a wealthy Liffen might add a bit of trim or feather to his basic utilitarian garb.

Warm, thick wool, spun and woven into a nigh-waterproof cloth, drives this country's primary industry: sheep. Their wool is often knitted into thick, cozy pullovers which are a fashion staple of the Liffen. Such warm garments are particularly sought after in the colder, more mountainous parts of Darkon, where miners are often sighted wrapped in bulky Liffen sweaters to keep out the mine's subterranean chill.

Wool is not the sole product of the hills. The shepherds' flocks also provide mutton and cheeses, and numerous small farms dot the island. Crops revolve around root vegetables grown in small plots fertilized with seaweed and ground fish meal, although barley and oats are also grown. These cereals are used to produce unappetizing gruels or consumed by the isle's breweries. Liffen beer is dark and slightly bitter, with a distinctive taste. Beer is also distilled to form strong amber-coloured liquor that locals refer to as "water of Liffe". (I surmise that after a few glasses of it, one ceases to mind bad puns.)

Being an island, resources gathered from the sea are also an important source of food. A variety of fish are harvested including cod, herring, mackerel, and shellfish such as clams, mussels, scallops, shrimp and lobster. Local delicacies produced from this catch include a variety of pickled fish dishes, and shrimp marinated in the "water of Liffe". Seaweeds are also gathered and used in a variety of dishes including salads.



Games and leisure activities are rare, but not unknown in Liffe. There are a few rowdy activities played with a leather ball, often by drunken locals. Other activities remind me of the sports engaged in by the goblins of Forlorn: log throwing, stone tossing and the like. However, Liffe is principally a musical island and song is its predominant source of entertainment. People sing drinking songs accompanied by improvised instruments, or celebrate with lively jigs and folk dances. While the people of Kartakass have superior singing voices, the Liffen are quick to pluck out a tune or whistle a catchy theme. A set of spoons and a few pots and pans suffice as a full band.

Stories are also a common entertainment and a way of passing the long winters. As I visited the towns, I heard many fireside tales and was amazed by the imagination of the storytellers. There were wild accounts of the unbelievable and fantastic, oft reminiscent of the tales of Mist-led outlanders ... only the folk of Liffe insist it was their ancestors involved in the tales! One family in Aferdale told of slaying giants and of dragons whose wings spanned the sky, while a storyteller in Moondale spoke of great kings with armies numbering in the millions (!), fending off endless hordes of mounted barbarians. As wild as the stories were, the locals believed them central to their heritage, so I tried not to scoff, despite the wildly-divergent details and contradictory elements.

*"It's war, I tells ya! The Darkonians are planning to invade. Azalin Rex wants to expand his empire and has set his sights on us. Ignore me if you want, but Darkon's army will soon be on our shores, and then what will you do?"*

- An old man, with unkempt hair and a milk-white eye, sits in the Armeikan town square and repeats this to all who speak to him.

*"The Nova Vaasans are coming! They're coming to conquer Liffe! Prince Othmar has gathered a mercenary army of thousands. He has a demonical desire for wealth, and he is coming here to plunder the wealth of*



*Armeikos and all of Liffe. We are doomed! There is no way to stand before the massive horde that is gathering on the Nova Vaasan coast. Ha, you don't believe, eh? When you see the black sails on the horizon, enough sails to blot out the setting sun, then you'll know. Ha!"*

- One week later, the same old man.

## *Language*

The language of Liffe is a curious dialect nearly identical to Sithican in structure, but its accent and vocabulary varies sharply, so even those familiar with Sithicus's speech may require some help translating. Though I am no linguist, I had the assistance of one - our own Brother Lochspeare, who lent me his notes - and I am assured that Liffen-Sithican has been influenced by the grammar and pronunciation of at least half a dozen other tongues.

Declension in the Liffen dialect is irregular, and unlike elven texts that rely on rhythm and suffix to structure their sentences, the Liffen use similar punctuation to Darkonese. The grammar shows hints of Falkovnian at times, while some words and tenses mirror those of Vaasi.

Such pidgin leanings might be expected in a trading hub, yet Liffe's language does not appear to have changed over the centuries, and is remarkably consistent, as if the island had been influenced by a myriad of different

## Liffe

### *Liffen-Sithican Phrasebook*

Ainm	No
Anghenfil	Monster
Bad	Boat
Ceathach	Mist
Cerdd	Music
Clegar	Rock
Conreeaght	Werewolf
Curlaw	Rain
Deamhan	Demon
Diolch i ti	Thank you
Eadh	Yes
Ersooyl lhiat	Go away!
Fòir	Help!
Genwair	Fish
Hoi	Hello
Maen	Standing stone
Pren	Tree
Siabhrach	Spirit/fey
Sooder folley	Vampire
Slane	Goodbye
Tablen	Beer

lands centuries ago. While odd, this supports a hypothesis I have about the land...

### *Outlook and Worldview*

Long, dark, miserable winters have marked the inhabitants of Liffe: they are often morose and depressive, but still determined and stoic about adversity. During the winter, music and fireside tales help lift spirits, and an appreciation of these skills is what ultimately led to the foundation of the isle's College. The odd dram of the "water of Liffe", no doubt, also helps pass those glum months of winter.

Come the few bright days of summer, Liffe springs into merriment, with many parties and festivities. Some of these are rumoured to be quite salacious, with tales of dancing naked around the numerous standing stones and strange orgiastic rituals, rumours which are often dismissed laughingly. Who could imagine the normally stoic, slightly dour,

religiously-conservative folk of Liffe being involved in such hedonistic activities?

The above is an excellent example of what defines the Liffen: they seem common and simple, but are often anything but. Similar in appearance and temperament, it is a surprise to find the shepherd who can play a fife like a maestro, or the humble farmer who quietly

### *Dread Possibility: The Trow*

"Trow" is the universal Liffen term for dark or malicious fey. The term is used broadly, referring to creatures both large and small, and it does not distinguish between fey who dislike humanity, play cruel jokes, or actively harm people. All faerie folk that are not helpful are labelled trow, a fact that can confuse foreigners ... especially Grabenites, in whose tongue "trow" refers to sentient sea monsters, such as sahuagin, not fey!

The majority of Liffe's "trow" are simply Arak: shadow fey who have journeyed from the Rift or been brought by the Mists. The forbidden forests and stone circles seem to draw the Arak to Liffe, both willingly and not. Some have even been called by humans through rituals and magic, but these are rare and seldom pleased. A number of Arak lurk in the Moondale Woods for some unknown reason, either hiding or acting as guards over something inside.

There are also a number of elven calibans in the hills of Liffe, known by a related name: drow. Most hide away in lonely glens, rock caves, or ruins. These dark-skinned outcasts are fiercely distrusted by their fair brethren, and most are simply trying to survive. They are nocturnal in habit and most avoid human settlements, but a few have blended in with Liffen society, often masquerading as exotic foreigners from Sri Raji.

## *Liffe*

follows an old faith and spends the equinox at a stone circle.

Liffen beliefs, despite the local homogeneity of culture, are quite varied, with a common tendency towards the fantastic. The reality of magic is never questioned here, despite how mundane the island seems and how few people display any form of arcane talent. There is also a strong belief in all manner of strange creatures and monsters that haunt the wilds or forsaken places. Such beings are blamed for all but the most common of misfortunes, and all bad luck, mysteries, and unlikely events are attributed to them.

The most common of these evil beasts is the trow. Their descriptions vary from village to village, but "trow" are typically described as dark fey creatures that live in the dark and shadows, and cannot stand the light of the sun. Some tales describe them as similar to elves, but with ebon skin, while others claim they are smaller and more savage. While it is possible that "trow" is just another name for creatures of Arak, it seems unlikely, as they have other dissimilarities.

## *Religions*

There is no single faith on the island and yet, paradoxically, every Liffen is a member of the same church. The people of Liffe don't believe in a single deity, or even a pantheon; instead, they worship all gods and believe that every aspect of existence is governed by multiple divine powers. Individuals pick a particular series of gods as patrons, ones that hold domain over a specific philosophy, activity or way of life. I have already mentioned the Beast Cult as a once-common group, but other common factions include Shepherds, Sun, Weather, Family or Health, while smaller cults worship dark sets such as Death, Darkness, Sickness, War, etc.

The Thousand Gods (the true number of deities is unknown, so "thousand" is used to mean many) have little personality, but each is named, and these names are recorded in the Manifold Record, a sacred book kept in Allgods Temple in Claveria.

The primary worship hall of Allgods Temple is ringed with row upon row of foot-tall statues, each representing (often rather vaguely) one of the Thousand Gods. Here there are statues of Hala and Ezra, the Lawgiver and the Overseer, Wotan and Athena, Belenus and Osiris, Gond and Lendor, the Many-headed Serpent and Adamantine Wyrn, Pelor and Kelemvor, and many, many more.

The church often sends its most devout followers to "learn the names", shipping priests across the sea so they can return with more deities to add to the Manifold Record. Such quests were rare until the Nocturnal Sea revealed itself, but have now grown in frequency. Liffens have visited every major temple in the eastern Core, and now plan their expeditions to the West and distant realms within the Mists. Unlike other faiths, adherents of the Thousand Gods who travel abroad are not missionaries: they need not convert others, as they feel everyone already follows their own faith in some respect.

There is little by way of history for the faith. Followers claim that once there were many separate faiths, until the clergy wearied of arguing and became one. This "epiphany" is historically vague and no one - not even the high priest of the Allgods Temple - could tell me when it happened, just that it did. An interesting situation, mirrored by the realm's political (lack of) history.

There are few established holy days for the Thousand Gods. The usual celestial and/or earthly events are revered by various divine sets' followers: solstices, equinoxes, full and new moons, harvests, and so forth. Clergy have no fixed time for prayer, with equal numbers choosing dawn, noon, or sunset. There are equally few set taboos or religious laws. Disparaging faiths different from your own is a cardinal sin. Others include taking a life or forcing your beliefs on others.

*The Thousand Gods*

**Symbol:** A disc with several interlocking rings in a circle.

**Alignment:** Any and all.

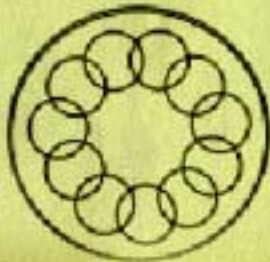
**Portfolio:** Any and all.

**Domains:** Any. Worshipers chose an aspect or ideology, then pick related domains. DMs must approve domain selections, and may veto contradictory pairs or other abuses.

**Favoured Weapons:** Any one.

The Thousand Gods has a limited hierarchy, based on activities within the church proper and greater community. Those clergy who prove themselves to be trusted members of the church as well as devout followers of the faith are chosen for advancement within the hierarchy. The church's structure is loose, with a single high priest whose duty is to mediate subsets' disputes, spread the faith, and learn of new names of the divine.

**Dogma:** The faith of the Thousand Gods is a one of balance and equality where the many become one. However, do not seek to drown out other voices so much as add them to the many; strive to be a chorus, all singing the same song. All have a place within the Thousand and all are equal and contribute, even if it is not always apparent. Favouring a single god above all others is a sin and shows bias and even corruption.



Liffen craftsmanship is a rapidly-growing industry, fuelled by trade with the Core and a yen for foreign goods. Unable to sell their works for what they were, Liffen artisans have become masters of mimicry, making their goods appear to be of Darkonian or Nova Vassan origin. Now, Liffen goods can be found across the Core, albeit with false origins and of inferior quality. These are purchased by those feigning wealth, and by fools unable to tell the difference between Liffen forgeries and genuine wares.

When they were producing their own crafts, these folk had precious little style, creating blocky, simple furnishings and functionally-bland tools. The Liffen, while imaginative storytellers, never seemed able to channel their creativity into handicrafts. Likewise, what little art they produced was amateurish, seldom more than the idlings of lone, bored farmers.

Occasionally, works of art surface in Liffe: pieces of beauty crafted by people unknown, and simply passed along familial lines or discovered in forgotten places. These are often attributed to fantastic sources or given dramatic, but fictitious origins, such as long-forgotten eras of greatness, or ingenious fey. Fanciful nonsense, but there is no denying their quality. One such piece was a pendant I came upon in a back-alley antique shop: a many-faceted opal set into a base of white gold, with matching chain. The necklace on its own was passable, but the opal had been cut and carved by a master. It was clearly an inspired work, but hardly a lost relic from a fallen age or the handiwork of a magical people! I had not brought enough funds to purchase the item, so I returned later, only to learn that it has been sold in my absence.

## Liffe

### *Dread Possibility: Circle of Blood*

Nightblood was a powerful lich, one with the potential to challenge even such potent wizards as Azalin or Meredoth. Drawn into the Mists, his small lair was discovered by adventurers and, caught out in a moment of weakness, his body was slain. The victors revelled in their triumph and, ignorant of the ways of liches, claimed his phylactery as a trophy. Before Nightblood could fully regain his power, they took it to a jeweller, who quartered the precious circlet.

Once a silver headband with four equally-spaced opals, now it is four stones, each set into its own piece. These include a pendant, a brooch, a ring and a bracelet, each holding a fraction of the lich's power and essence.

Originally a 20th level wizard, Nightblood has now been split into four 5th level beings. One stone possesses his knowledge, and the wearer of its piece has access to his many Int-based skills and is able to use them as their own. Another stone is able to generate a physical body, animating a nearby corpse. The third holds Nightblood's magical might, granting the bearer the ability to cast spells or amplifying their existing power. The final contains the lich's personality and force of will, and can take possession of the unwary, imposing his traits on them.

Nightblood is desperately working to reunite his essence, thus restoring himself so he can seek revenge upon his assailants. He tries to push people who discover one of his stones to seek the others through haunting dreams or false emotions. When possible, he avoids associating himself with the item to avert its destruction, instead preferring to be thought of as a ghost or other phantom. For all his knowledge, Nightblood is unsure what will happen to a fragment of his essence if its opal is broken. He might lose that part of his power forever, or the power might be divided among the opal's surviving pieces. It is a theory he is unwilling to test.

Trade is a growing business in Liffe, as its own merchants and foreign ships bring in increasing quantities of exotic goods. With few natural resources to offer and precious little gold to spend overseas, traders must be creative in bartering. Many Liffen offer their skills as navigators and guides, while others sell fish and wool to the mainland. There is a growing worry that the barons are spending more wealth than they are making and the entire land is sinking into poverty and debt. Young Liffen frequently venture overseas to make their fortune, or follow legends in search of forgotten treasure, their minds fill with thoughts of saving their town or family. Such are the victims of the wild imaginations of Liffen storytellers.

Many Liffen have profited from the increase in trade with the mainland; yet the influx of migrants and their acquisition of local lands has stirred resentment among the natives. In recent years, an underground network of "freedom fighters" known as the Patriots of Liffe has emerged, to defend the island's heritage from "external threats." Sympathy for the Patriots of Liffe has grown steadily among certain segments of the population, including the farmers who toil harder to feed the isle's rising population, the constabulary who must deal with criminal elements in the bustling ports and the increasing tensions overall, and xenophobes from all walks of life. This public sympathy is largely due to the Patriots' vigorous stigmatizing of settlers as a threat to Liffe's

culture, economic well-being, and political sovereignty.

Attacks upon immigrants have increased in both frequency and brutality over the past few months, suggesting that the Patriots may feel that their messages have not been taken seriously by either foreigners or sympathetic barons. It also may be a sign that they are becoming more desperate, feeling that they are not sufficiently deterring the influx. The Patriots of Liffe are renowned for inscribing their slogans and symbols upon walls and buildings, and for leaving warning messages at scenes of killings, beatings, vandalism, and sabotage. Their victims are arranged in a grisly fashion for dramatic effect... when they are found at all.

### *Secret Society: The Patriots of Liffe*

A significant proportion of Liffe's nobles fear that they will lose control if the middle class should continue to profit from stronger ties with the mainland. Paradoxically, they also wish to claim the credit for enhancing the quality of life on the island. This state of affairs has led to the birth of a society named the Patriots of Liffe, under the secret leadership of Baron Stelvin Hawke and an inner circle of like-minded (and often opportunistic) lesser nobles. The society, established in 757, currently has fewer than two dozen members, including a score of "agents" in the external circle who execute orders on behalf of their unknown masters.

While Baron Hawke is pleased to see public sympathy for his movement increase, he wishes to limit membership, to keep a close watch on its current operatives and minimize infiltration. Noble members of the Patriots either publicly welcome newcomers or feign neutrality. In this way, they can continue to benefit from dealings with mainlanders and gain their trust. Behind closed doors, they order the strategic abduction or assassination of wealthy foreign merchants who have been unwilling or unable to provide them with "favours."

The Patriots of Liffe likewise expose native merchants who have engaged in "unpatriotic acts" or who "threaten" Liffe's heritage and security, usually through allegedly-corrupt or exploitative trading practices, such as granting "preferential treatment" to foreigners. In truth, local merchants become targets for the Patriots when their wealth and influence grow to the extent that they pose a potential threat to the nobility, or when they refuse to pay the vigilantes "protection" money. Bodies of victims are weighted with rocks and dumped into the sea, or arranged to be found in sensationalistic fashion.

Beneath these true members of the Patriots, a widening circle of non-nobles who think of themselves as "Patriots of Liffe" are used as cheap muscle by the group's inner circle. Most are simple brutes and racists, who use their "patriotic mission" as an excuse to lash out at foreigners and "culture traitors".

**Member alignments:** LE, N, NE

**Typical members:** Rogues, warriors, bards, aristocrats, experts, commoners (many multi-classed)

**Symbol:** Crossed swords superimposed over the flag of Liffe

Baron Stelvin Hawke (NE male human Ari6 /Brd8), a 58-year-old widower with many children from former unions, legitimate and otherwise, is one of the most influential nobles on Liffe. He is a talented poet and charismatic orator, and owns a vast estate south of Moondale along the road to Claveria. Although he is a selfish man and a demanding landlord, he is eager to maintain an upright image among the wider populace (if only for vanity's sake). Privately, the baron takes every opportunity to profit by trade with the mainland, and curses fate for granting him lands on the island's north end, far from the deep harbours of Armeikos.



### *Dread Possibility: The Land Remembers*

Liffe is built from a dozen different lands, each from a fantastic world. The common folk barely remember their former glory, recalling the past only through exaggerated and distorted stories. However, the land itself remembers what it once was, and what it once held within its boundaries.

The effects of this "land memory" are varied and almost random, with the most common being increases in an area's Magic Rating. Spells suddenly come easier, and might be spontaneously modified by metamagic feats, with no increase of level or casting time.

Monsters may spring from the soil to ravage an area, before they are slain or disappear into the Mists. Strange artifacts of power or history are unearthed in a farmer's fields or in the back of a merchant's store. Forgotten tombs are unearthed and ancient ruins found in overlooked places. Witnesses to these occurrences are often dismissed as mad or drunkards, and few believe the wild tales.

A recent example is the Lord's Barrow, the tomb of a long-forgotten king, which was unearthed in the hills northeast of Aferdale. This extensive crypt contained the preserved remains of an ancient king so old, even his legends have been forgotten. Another is the legendary Dragon of Risibilos: a notorious serpent that prowls the lands around a small lake. Those who have survived its attacks have never been coherent enough to provide a clear description, but it is known to be a reptile of some kind.

Things become more coherent after this event - whatever it was - as more villages were discovered when the Mists slowly retreated. Not every village was revealed at once; the island did not emerge as a single whole. It took some years before Liffe could be fully mapped. Local historians place this date as a full decade prior to the Nocturnal Sea's own emergence. While the exact date cannot be pinpointed with certainty, I would estimate it to be sometime in 740 or 741.

Once the island was whole, it was not long before sailors took to the Mist-shrouded waters and returned with tales of other lands. Explorers, through chance or skill, stumbled upon now-familiar places such as Graben Island and Vechor ... or even lands such as "Moridana", whose names were unfamiliar even to me. Through regular contact - or as regular as the Mists would allow - rough trade with such distant realms began, and the University of Liffe set out to attract students from foreign lands.

Such tentative contact became a flood, when the Core itself was revealed and the Mists partially lifted over the Nocturnal Sea. No longer did the vagaries of Mist-travel limit the island's commerce. This has caused a slow-building upheaval, most evident in the rising middle class and in tensions between them and the nobles. The united barons are squabbling more than ever, and the common folk are being pulled in multiple directions dividing whole families and towns.

Liffe is on the verge of a dramatic change, and one I hope I am far away from. It is as if the entire island is bracing for an upheaval - an inevitable transformation and rebirth - but is unsure when it will occur or what the outcome might be.

## *History*

What little history Liffe has experienced has been forgotten. Unlike other lands where the past has been lost to time or magically obfuscated, the folk of Liffe simply chose to ignore the truth in favour of fairy tales and fantasies. As mundane as the reality may be, it would be vastly superior to the hogwash of giants, dragons, trolls and ogres that spills from the mouths of Liffen. It was frustrating teased fragmentary remains of the past from the fog of legend, and my efforts did little to create a cohesive narrative. Accounts from each region or village contradict every other fragment!

From what I can gather, as recently as thirty years ago, the land was a far more fantastic place. It's commonly believed that "in my grandfather's day" monsters lurked in the hills and stole babies, while brave warriors in shining armor rode white steeds on quests for valour and glory. There was not a single consistent time when the Mists were first mentioned, or even an agreeable description of their onset. Some speak of a great gale that crashed across the sea, washing away whole villages, and leaving behind an eerie, perpetual fog. Others claim the Mists rose up silently in the night, stealing away the neighboring (and nameless) towns.

## *Government*

Liffe is ruled by a dozen local barons, whose lands vary in size from a single town to several small hamlets and the connecting countryside. Fully half of these baronies are forgettable, populated entirely by farmers and ruled by a former herdsman or retired fisherman. Six of the barons are more influential, governing key towns and ports, or controlling larger stretches of arable land and thus, the food supply.

Liffe's nobles used to be feuding families, forever quarrelling over land and resources, or forming alliances of convenience through trade and marriage. According to the local "histories", the baronies had been kingdoms then: realms of significantly larger size, and

with massive armies. When Liffe was fully revealed, these several rulers stood poised to resume conflict with their half-remembered neighbours, but instead chose to unite as a single nation. I could not find records of this unification movement's leader, or even its recorded impetus, beyond mutual isolation in the Mists. Quite simply put, it appears as if the barons just woke up one day and chose to rule one land instead of many.

The barons rule from Claveria, where they established the Senate. Like many decisions, it was a compromise; indeed, Claveria was chosen because it was the least-offensive proposed location. Each baron usually sends a representative to speak for his barony and represent its interests. A few barons choose to go themselves, either being unable to find a suitable representative, or simply looking for an excuse to be away from home. Occasionally all the barons meet in person, but normally only those closest to Claveria will attend. Baron Evensong makes regular visits to speak with the Senate, and often has private meetings with the representatives.

I met a number of the more notable barons during my trip. Skott Troil of Armeikos was the first, a naïve youth who recently took the position after his father's untimely death. (Baron Evensong has taken the liberty of 'educating' Troil in the ways of politics, an act of patronage several other barons find suspect.) I also met briefly with Traill Erlendsson of Aferdale, an elderly man who now spends ten months of the year in Armeikos, and Stelvin Hawke from the rural barony between Moondale and Claveria. Hawke struck me as an impassioned man, but I was never sure exactly what the object of his passion was. Rognavold Kolsson of Moondale stuck me as insufferably weary, despite being barely middle-aged, but his young wife, Liae Kolsson, was a cheerful breath of fresh air. (Most likely, her being a Darkon expatriate instead of native Liffen had much to do with this.) Julyan Linklater of Risibilos seemed particularly dour and lifeless, even for his sleepy, forgotten town. And then there was Lyron Evensong of Claveria, of whom I have already written.



## Conclusions

I am not one to speculate without evidence or draw a conclusion before careful study of the case. As such, I have waited until now to discuss my theory on Liffe, until after you had perused my observations. Brethren, I believe this land is not just a single land, such as Richemulot or Mordent. But neither is it many, like Zherisia or the Shadowlands! It is a single land composed of many. As Barovia has subsumed fractured Gundarak, so did Liffe absorb the dying scraps of other lands: many such insignificant, forgotten, or even unnoticed realms, joined into a whole. The evidence is obvious in the religion, the ruling body, the language and even the very appearance of the Liffen, to say nothing of the lack of a distinct seminal event or single appearance of the Mists.

I theorise that Liffe is a flotsam land, either with a single dread lord or many lesser. It is doubtful that a single powerful figure pulled together these lands: such a figure would have set its mark upon them all, not left such an ill-meshed collage as this. More likely, several weak or dying lords found their respective territories suddenly enlarged and strengthened by their mergence into one.

I wonder how many of these former lords yet continue to exist, managing fragmented existences and trying to regain what they have lost; I wonder, too, about the strongest of these lords, who must hold the position of master of this land by default more than by strength. (Too, I marvel at how pathetic of a figure might need the will of others to hold fast to such an insignificant land as Liffe.) It is evident that some of these... sub-lords are stationary, affecting only the portions of the island nearest to them. Places such as the Moondale Wood, or plagued towns such as Aferdale, are likely homes to such malign figures, though I am unsure who or what they might be.

As I write these closing thoughts, I am back at the docks, preparing to board the Black Pelican. While I well enjoy the challenge of casting a line from a moving vessel, part of me is reluctant to resume my travels: no land I am scheduled to visit will have academic colleagues with whom to consult, nor even such modest civilized trappings as Liffe has to offer.

But there are isles still to see - and a former friend, turned traitor, yet to catch - so I must continue...

## Dread Possibility: Refugee

The new wife of Rognavold Kolsson has a fairly large secret. Her name is not Liae Tva Kolsson but Tavelia: a vampire and former member of the Kargat who fled to Liffe after Azalin's return. She has hidden herself in Liffe to remain close enough to Darkon to employ her contacts and maintain ties with those Kargat still loyal to her. Her plan had been to outlast Azalin's immediate fury until he distracted himself in his next grandiose plan and then consider returning to Darkon. However, she has encountered a problem.

To better hide, she attached herself to the first local baron whom she could tolerate, Rognavold Kolsson. This gave her a place of power and security from which to direct her schemes and possibly influence local affairs. Yet immediately following the wedding, she found herself acting the part of the doting wife, whether she wished to or not!

Tavelia has become ensnared by the Mists and has become a demilord of Liffe. Cursed, she becomes the stereotypical obedient wife if in the presence of her husband, or anyone who knows she is the baron's spouse. Her mind fogs and the simpering words of a loving, dutiful trophy-bride spill from her lips. Only if she is alone or with those who do not know her cover-identity can Tavelia conspire to usurp her unwanted husband's barony or free herself from this trap. And she knows that somewhere, all too close, Azalin's burning eye searches for his betrayer.

Local barons have control over their lands and are able to pass small decrees and levy taxes, but anything that affects the whole isle must be approved by the Senate. Local laws can be overturned by the united barons if they are deemed to be harmful to trade or the good of Liffe. This, however, is a rare occurrence and the baronies typically mind their own lands.

## *Demilords of Liffe*

Liffe is a composite domain: a piecemeal land made up of a half-dozen smaller domains that have merged together into a single island. Liffe has no one world of origin, being instead composed of elements from multiple worlds, nations and cultures, all retroactively mingled together. It is unknown exactly how many small islands and pockets were united as Liffe, or how many petty darklords lost their power in the process.

Most of the domains that formed Liffe were dying lands whose darklords fell in battle: victims of pride or their own machinations. Some continue to survive as demilords, individuals blessed with power but equally cursed. Other present demilords found power through killing a demilord, or simply by being a strong force for darkness.

Demilords have no direct influence over the land: they cannot open or close borders. However, all demilords are still bound to the domain and cannot leave it. The lairs or areas around demilords are often subject to their influence, more strongly reflecting their personality or embodying their curse. These are often areas where normal natural laws are bent or suspended, and frequently gain ill reputations. Demilords can come into contact with each other and even slay one another, with the victor likely gaining the loser's strength and power, but also the defeated one's curse.

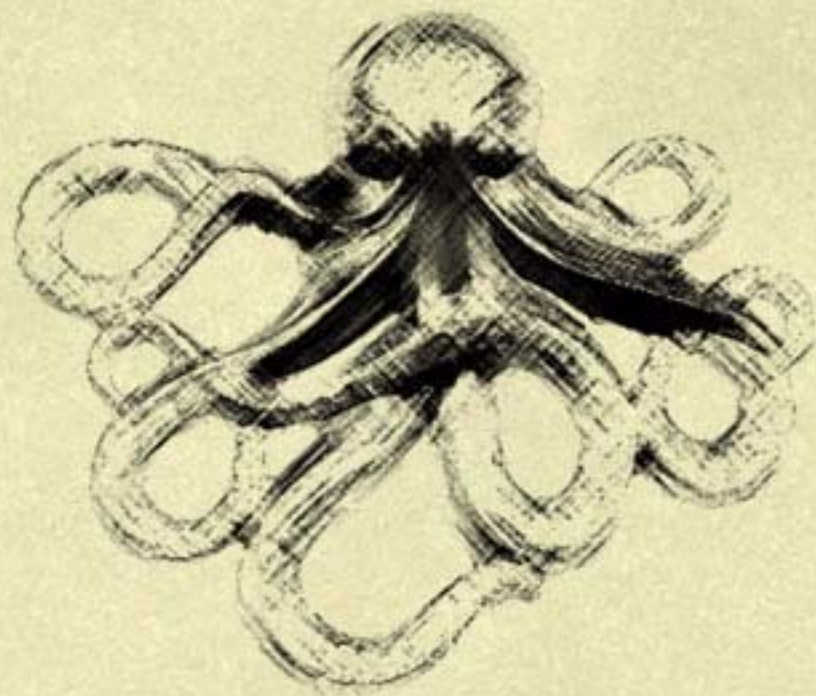
If a single demilord were to gain enough power, that figure would become Liffe's sole darklord, and the land would subtly reshape itself around them. Whether achieving this would entail the deaths of all other demilords, a truly horrific evil act, or simply a gradual accumulation of the majority of power is unknown. Some of the better-informed demilords theorize that if a single darklord were to emerge, their own curses would be lifted and they would be free to leave.

DMs could also choose that not all demilords are sensing their links to the land, and have some of them more or less ignorant of their status, like Drakov.

Known demilords include:

- Ejrik Spellbender
- Baron Lyron Evensong
- The Kelpie
- Malisha
- Nightblood
- Puncheron
- Tavelia

# PART II



*Vechor*

# Vechor



*By Paul Dirac, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 760*

As I write this, it's been a few days already since I have started my field investigations in Vechor. But even after giving the matter long thoughts, I can't think of a more fitting introduction than state candidly that this land is truly the strangest place I've ever had the pleasure to visit. While nothing seems threatening at first, the first impression I had of Vechor is of a creepy weirdness, where things never stay the same for long, but for no commonsensical reason. Really, there are simply no logical reasons for these strange and unpredictable changes. Rocks and trees change shape or color when you are not looking, birds appear in your room and sing a military march, even my *inn* changed place yesterday and I lost nearly an hour finding it last night. Here, and as I write this I'm not sure my readers will believe me or think I became drunken mad during this voyage, but even the *sky color do change frequently!*

While the Vechorites seem uncaring of all this eeriness, and at first glance even joyful people, which is rare in our bleak lands as you surely agree, I know now that their calm and heedless shrugs is hiding a latent fear for their King's insanity. So I was looking forward to my meeting later this week with Father Shadowcloak of the Fraternity of Shadows, a long time resident of Vechor. I really wanted to ask him why he preferred this strange land to other more sophisticated places where the Fraternity is located.

Know that I had taken both his travel advices seriously. First, I said to my guide that I was a sorcerer of minor powers, just in case I needed to cast spells in the outside. I also had my traveling spellbook well concealed in a locked trunk, and all the time I was in Vechor, I got up very early to study it quietly, alone. Second, I also heed his advice not to write in public. I'm passing as some kind of artist, and I often stop to draw people and things. I use this excuse to graphically code my traveling notes, which are completed when I'm back in my room. I noticed the annoyed glances of Vechorites at this stranger, some even angry by the way, when I draw my sketch pad from my back



pack, until they notice I am in fact drawing, and *not* writing.

As many people of my generation, when I was young I had read the fictitious tale *My Travel in the Land of the Mad*, a book that had my imagination sparkled for Vechor. Later in life, I found out that many things written about Vechor were false and wildly exaggerated. It seems the inherent strangeness of the land has been multiplied by a thousand fold in people's imagination. I hope this report will set things straight. It is a strange land, but thousands people live here without much problems with it.

The travel from Nevuchar Spring was short and quiet. When I debarked Captain Arberlsson's *Valiant Explorer* ship in Abdok, my guide was already waiting for me. I hope my surprise glance went unnoticed by my lovely guide, and she ignored the machistic whistles of the ship's crew that Aberlsson thankfully silenced quickly. As a gentleman, without giving away too many details, let's just say her long pastel blue tunic was opened in a way to let anyone have an ample view on her assets. I later learned with surprise all vechorite women dress that way (Father Shadowcloak didn't mention this subject in his letter).

Her name is Drakaina, and she is going to help me as translator during my short stay. She was recommended to me by Father Shadowcloak, who often uses her service as his agent in Abdok. And to add to her charm, she displayed sorcery powers of great skills. I haven't asked her yet where she learned to speak Mordentish this well.

## Vechor in Short

**Location:** North Eastern corner of the Nocturnal Sea

**Ecology:** Full Ecology (swamp, and hilly tropical forest)

**Environment:** Very warm

**Darklord:** King Easan the Mad

**Year of formation:** 600 BC (as an island in the mist), disappeared and thought lost in 740, but after a decade revealed in its current place on the Nocturnal Sea in 750.

**Cultural level:** Classical (4)

**Population:** 15,900 (99% human, 1% other)

**Main settlements:** Abdok (pop. 8,000), and the large farming area surrounding this city (additional pop. 5,000)

**Religion:** The Mad King

**Language:** Vechorite\*

**Government:** Ochlocratic despotism (mobocracy)

**Money:** Wildcrown (gp), wildorb (sp), wildpenny (cp)

## Vechor's Perpetual Change

Before covering the details about Vechor's topology, I feel urged to describe the eerie land changes that happen in the land of Easan. There have been so many exaggerations on this topic, even in the intellectual circles of the core, so I feel it is important to put things straight.

Yes, many things in this land changes, always unpredictably, but not everything changes. The general shape of the island does not change, as never changes the existence or location of the city of Abdok, and the general configuration of the land: marshes in the south, the three main rivers of Vechor, the cliffs of Vesanis in the northeast, and forest elsewhere. All the maps I've seen

have these landmarks unchanged, even very old ones. Elder vechorites I spoke to (with the help of Drakaina) have as well assured me these geographical landmarks never changed place.

Also, importantly, the changes mostly never affect vechorites directly, physically or mentally. The only exception to this I could find was a few years ago, when all people aged 20 years or more couldn't speak anymore – only nonsense gibberish exited from their mouth for a day. But mostly, vechorites are not affected by the changes affecting the land and that probably explains their nonchalance toward all these changes.

Before I get into what *does* change, I feel it is interesting to point out that vechorites clearly identify their mad King, Easan, as the god-like agent causing these changes. They believe every change is made by Easan's will, and that it reflects his need to "improve" the life of his subjects. Should these sayings be founded, I think I'm not making a wild guess, if you allow me the vechorite turn of phrase, when I think it is quick to identify who the land keep as a prisoner in here in Vechor, no?

Drakaina also assured me that some of these land changes also occur near people struck with insanity. But I haven't been able to confirm this bizarre piece of information.

From my observations and discussions with Drakaina and Father Shadowcloak, I was able to classify Vechor's alterations into three rough types of changes:

**Cosmetic changes:** Those are very minor changes, like sudden changes to the color of leaves in one specific tree (or animal), or one type of tree all over the place, hue of the sky, size of the celestial objects (sun, moon and the stars), dust suddenly glitters, minor sudden weather change, color of buildings, bird songs, sudden sugary or spicy odors in the wind, etc. These changes turn out quite often in a day.

**Minor changes:** For example, those changes include the types and size of tree foliage (I even saw a maple tree with cactus spines on its branches!); the location of paths in the forest (moved a hundred feet from their

## Vechor

usual location); rock shapes; marsh water that suddenly becomes deeper or shallower; heat or cold wave; statues or rocks that bleed; a rain that starts on the ground and elevate to the sky, leaving the ground dried; all sticks on the ground turn to be aligned toward the location of Easan's Manor; etc. These changes happen a few times per week, and are usually benign (unless you were actually seating on the maple tree).

Also, and I'm not sure if it is an effect willed by Easan, or a reflection of the inconsistent feel of this strange place, but the island is often experiencing minor tremors, like if it was built on jelly. These take place very often during the day, sometimes once every two hours. I do not know for sure the source of this, as nearby Liffe do not experience this.

Sudden and violent electric storms are also common near the Vesanis Cliffs.

**Major shifts:** About once or twice a month, the land is changed in a major way, and these changes often occur around sunset. These major changes usually affect one thing only, but multiple effects have been seen too.

Drakaina and Father Shadowcloak have seen these *major* alterations over the years: change in the number of suns or moons in the sky, major architecture change in the city of Abdok (all buildings turn to rock or wood, suddenly have a cave, very high spires, or a second floor), location of buildings and landmarks within the city (like my inn the other day), forest trails completely change direction, apparition or disappearance of fauna or flora, toys become animated and begin moving away from people, a river looses its natural curves and become straight as a ruler, addition of new landmarks that seems to have been there forever, trees align themselves into neat rows, size of insects increase, day becomes night, new hills sprout, large meteorites fall from the sky, radically changing weather (from sunny sky to hail in less than ten minutes, or a freakish rain of gold fish; plus any type of mists, smoke or fog suddenly appearing), or the

### *Mistways of Vechor*

#### *The Road of the Lost*

Vechor's northernmost Misty Border is home to a mistway called the Road of the Lost. This rarely travelled route connects Vechor to a lesser known cluster of domains called Duskreach, including Daglan, Estrangia, Kislova, and Donskyar. Travelers from Vechor arrive at the western border of Daglan. The Road of the Lost is a two-way Mistway of Moderate reliability.

#### *The Somnambulist's Path*

The southernmost Vechor's misty border forms an unusual mistway, one rarely used and highly obscure. Connecting Vechor to the Forest of Everchange in the Nightmare Lands, this Mistway only works for those who are asleep while crossing into the Mists. Thus, spells such as *Sleep*, *Deep Slumber*, *Somnambulism* and *Directed Somnambulism* can be very useful in entering this Mistway. Groups of mixed sleepers and waking creatures are swiftly separated - sleepers hauled in carts vanish when not watched, and sleepers carried by waking companions grow increasingly insubstantial before fading entirely into the Mists and reappearing somewhere in the Forest of Everchange. For sleepers, the

major reshaping of fauna (like those parrots that became carrion eaters), etc.

While the land is organized more or less the same way, I've been told the shore line have often moved thousands of feet toward the sea or toward the land. A lone hunter living near the Fratellu river told me the marches often grow at the expanse of the forest, and then the forest "grow" back after a month or two.

One of the most dramatic effect of this phenomenon occurred six years ago: the dead rose from the cemeteries, to get back to their families and resume their "life" for a week before they went back to their grave. That the dead came back to their loved ones led to many ghastly scenes, locals recall.



Vechorite often mention when the trails to a northern logging village vanished, forcing rangers to bring the workers back to Abdok. This event happened more than once.

Other types of temporary changes affect spells, like doubling the area of effects of all spells, or just those fire-based, making all spells effects include bird or carnival noises, or include pink colored clouds, etc.

As you can see, the range of possible changes seems to be endless, like the legendary unbounded imagination of Easan's! I think there is probably a reason for each of these changes, but it is located deep in Easan's barmy brain, so it probably defies mortal attempts to understand any of it...

Some places have strange characteristics, where things never change or always occur the same way. In an Abdok's inn, nobody play dices there because rolled dices always come up four! I've seen this phenomenon, rolling a bone dice on the table twenty times, and the number four always came up, while the patrons smirked at my astonishment. Patrons of this inn play cards instead.

Drakaina showed me a place near Abdok where it is always rainy. This thirty yard

circle always has rain falling from the sky, even when there are no clouds in the sky.

Another good example of this phenomenon is the location of Father Shadowcloak's manor. Don't worry, dear Father, I'm not going to reveal here the location of your manor. But its characteristics are very interesting and worth mentioning here: it is always autumn in these acres of land around your manor. Leaves always seem to fall on the ground and remain there, permanently.

## *Geographical Survey*

### *Climate*

Similar to the Fraternity home in Souragne, Vechor's climate is always hot and very humid, especially in the marshes and the forest. Even at night it stays warm and humid.

Abdok is blessed by winds from the Cliffs of Vesanis that makes it more liveable. Elsewhere, simply walking will make you sweat and a good advice is to regularly drink water. When it is sunny, one should also cover his head from the sunrays.

The wet season (usually April to June, but that period sometimes change as well with the rest) is extremely rainy. During this period, it is *always* raining, and often it is pouring. There isn't even a short break during the day, and the rivers sometimes become dangerous torrents. Most road travel is slowed by the muddy terrain and common landslides.

During the rest of the year, the winds often swiftly carry storm clouds in the area, and sometimes, even deadly cyclones appear within minutes. Those storms are often violent and chaotic, changing from heavy





## Vechor

### Weather

For Vechor's erratic weather, check every 1d12 hours on the "temperate climate" of table 3-23 (*DMG* p. 94), adding +10% to your % roll before checking the table (101 % or more are treated as a "100 %" result). If the result is "precipitation", again add 10% to your roll when checking the precipitation result.

A character in Vechor needs to drink two gallons of water (or other thirst quencher fluid) per day, or suffer from thirst and become fatigued (see *DMG* p. 304). Also, the heat can become a major problem for heroes (see *DMG* p. 303, for "very hot conditions").

rain to sunny periods, to rain again, or hail and even thick snow! This melts quickly after the storm, of course.

A climatic exception is of course Father Shadowcloak's Manor, where autumn always reigns!

### Wilderness

The island of Vechor is roughly divided in three main regions: very hot swamp lands in the south west, then a large tropical forest in the north, where the city of Abdok is located, and then the enigmatic cliffs of Vesanis and the forbidden plateau beyond it in the north east.

When traveling by boat, the traveler will notice a sharp raise of the temperature on the cold Nocturnal Sea when arriving in Vechor. The traveler will then see the lush marshes from the distance. It will not be very long before he notices coastal birds hunting colorful fishes, and then the wind will bring exotic spices scent in the air, as well as the usual nasty swarms of hungry swamp mosquitoes.

The morass of Vechor and the rivers are often covered with lazy fogs tendrils, drifting slowly among the short mangroves multiple

roots and tall grasses. Away from the coast, the water is brackish. Although it looks somewhat firm, the soil of this wetland is swampy at best, and usually cannot hold a man's weight except in a few places. Vechorites travel this area with thin rowboats.

Many nasty creatures are said to dwell in this sunken part of land, as well as strange and exotic ones. The mosquitoes are extremely large and agile, making them difficult to swap. Thin herbivores with eerie colours, large water rats with long ears, and tremendously large butterflies with slit eyes like that of a snake came to look at our boat as we entered the Nostru river estuary.

In the water, I've seen large colorful fishes, Viktor, that you would have seen as many challenges. But I'll get more on fauna later.

The odor in this area isn't exactly pleasant, as things in decomposition processes produce stinking marsh gas, which can be seen at night as flickering lights (For the moment I do not have any proof that there are actual unpleasantly deadly Will-o'-the-wisps in this area).

Few vechorites live in this inhospitable area, but Drakaina told me of a few recluse vechorite that were banned from Abdok and now live in this unpleasant marsh from fishing and hunting. She said one of these recluse can be hired as a guide through the marshes. His name is Stamatios.

The Nostru river takes its source beyond the Cliffs of Vesanis and drop the cliffs in a magnificent fall. It then drifts lazily toward the Nocturnal Sea, except during the rain season where it often becomes a torrent. This muddy river is very large, often nearly two hundred feet. In the swamp, its banks are covered by mangroves.

The buzzing noise of vampire insects is really unpleasant and creepy. I'm glad I brought the nets we wear in Souragne. But twice one of these nasty mosquitoes was able to pass its dart through my nets. The bruise of these "bites" quickly got reddish and I feared for swamp disease before they eventually disappeared. When I look at the other sailors, whose skin is filled with insect bruises, I recommend those nets.



*Crude nature is no match for  
old fashion book knowledge!*

*Human blood?*

*Mandibles missing?  
Proboscis?*

The Nostru river is also the source of two smaller rivers that also join the sea through the marshes: the Fratellu and the Grupul rivers. I haven't visited these in person, but Drakaina tells me they are much narrower than the Nostru, and even more infested with these blood sucking insects. Since she assured me nothing important was to be seen there, I refrained from exploring these insect plagued areas. All three form a kind of delta in the marshes that frequently overflow over the swampy ground during the wet season.

Since the usual landmarks (or the sun) can shift places or disappear altogether, I'd say when going in marsh, take all precautions in case you get lost. Bring a lot of water skins – there are very few trustable sources of fresh water in the marshes. When in doubt, make it boil like we do in Souragne.

Also, don't think you'll get a sense of direction from lodestones! Captain Aberlsson showed me his boating lodestone when we arrived in Vechor: it turned on itself wildly, not pinpointing the north. Sometimes, it stopped and then started turning in the other direction. Completely useless here!

This Vechorite marsh is an extremely interesting place, from a flora and fauna point of view. They pulse with the cycle of life and death. But I fear it may hide creatures not as nice and cute as those butterflies.

The rest of Vechor Island is occupied by tropical forests. These verdant places are filled with streams and water sources. A lot of fruits and easy game can be found in them, so vechorites about never face starvation or thirst. The forested area is hilly,

like if it was a large green curtain dropped unceremoniously on the floor.

Like the marshes, the forest are home to dangerous wild animals (tigers, anyone?) as well as strange native species never seen elsewhere, even in the jungles of Sri Raji or the Wildlands.

In the forest, I've seen many pits or cracks in the ground with steam surging, deep inside the jungle, and even some pits had traces of lava overflowing. This could be the answer to the shaky ground problem of Vechor. One night, we made our camp near one of these pit, but other than the occasional steam whistle, I didn't see anything out of the ordinary.

Speaking of the camp, my guide surprised me that night by setting only one tent for the both of us. To clear any misconception related to my dandy reputation, this isn't something I suggested. I'll write more about their attitude toward life and relationships later in this report. But the closeness we shared until the end of my stay in Abdok was solely used to go further into their interesting customs, to make sure I didn't forget anything crucial for this report.

The last day in the forest, we found a large statue of a head covered with deep green ivy. Its size was huge, nearly thirty feet high! We hacked the ivy to see better, and from what I could guess, it's a very ancient bust of a demonic ape-like creature. I asked Drakaina what it was, or who in Vechor's history could have erected it, but she didn't know of any ancient monument building tribe or civilisation. She told me the forest had many of these strange ruins, and that some of them simply vanishes after a time.

Another well known land mark is the Dreamstone crater, located a few miles south west of Abdok. I understand a large meteorite





fell there long ago. This is a place of ill repute because locals believe anybody going there will get deadly sickness and die horribly within hours. Drakaina didn't want to lead me there so I can just report this few about the place. But this place is quite intriguing.

### *Settlements*

There are many small settlements deep in the forest. Most are workers extracting exotic wood that will fetch a high price in the core markets, or colorful pelt hunters. I've been told these forest villages are often rough places, where the strong bullies the weak.

Drakaina also told me about a whole village of Abdok expatriates, that fled the urban life of Abdok for reasons they keep for themselves. She said not all villagers there are Vechor native. A quick investigation shown no sign of Van Rijn in this nameless forlorn village.

Note that there are very few human settlements near the Cliffs of Vesanis, especially near the Nostru River and Easan's Manor. But I'll get to this area later in the report.

When I felt I had enough information on the wilderness of Vechor, we came back to study the city of Abdok. After a few days in



the wild, nothing important had changed in this great city, now to my mild disappointment I should say.

### *Abdok (city)*

The crumbling city of Abdok is surrounded by very ancient masonry walls, thick and high as about twice a man's height. But their original purpose is mysterious, as no invasion (or threat of) is remembered by anybody.

For the record, twelve years ago, these fortification walls around Abdok turned to rosy flesh for a few days, transforming back to solid stone when they started to stink of decay!

Because of the perpetual changes affecting the city as well, it is nearly impossible to map the city. A few large streets, with strange monuments in the middle of it, and the rest is a maze of crumbling buildings of all colors, one or two floors, narrow alleys filled with people, and the odor of sweat, domestic animal urine, and refuse (no sewer system here! It is generally believed bad luck to dig the ground in Vechor). The refuse are swept away in the Nostru once a week.

In some places, the stone or bronze monuments seem to have sprouted from the ground and sometimes they are embedded into a house. They represent mostly trees, but also weird animal forms. There is often something strange in their features, like a

tree with human features, cyclops, a fiendish monkey head way too large, or a dog with six legs.

Given vechorites' usual nonchalance, and added to the fact you can come back one day to see your house replaced by a park, or moved to another place if you're lucky, it is easy to understand why the buildings are not well maintained. Oddly, they never seem to crumble completely. To recognize its house, and invite friends, Vechorite draw something on the stone front using coloured chalk. Sometimes, the chalk drawing is large and elaborate, especially if the building also houses a shop. Inside, the houses themselves are kept clean.

Easan's palace is located on a hill and its numerous high spires overhang anything else in the city. Surrounded by high brick walls, this massive single-building of grey marble property look deserted. The palace and the gardens around it appear well maintained, even if nobody is ever seen inside the estate walls. In fact, nobody is ever hired for any maintenance task inside. The palace is the official seat of Easan's power in Abdok, but the mad King himself is never seen there. No light at night at its windows, or any sign of presence at all. Vechorites assume Easan is living in his Manor on the cliffs of Vesanis instead, and spends all of his regal time there. However, vechorites often look at the palace with question marks in their eyes, as if asking "what next?"

**Abdok (Small City):** Nonstandard; AL CG; CL 4; 600 gp limit; Assets 3 600 000 gp; Population 8,000 in the city itself, plus 5,000 in the farming land surrounding it; Humans 100%.

**Authority Figures:** None.

**Important figures:** Drakaina, female human Sor6 CN(G); Leonidas, male human (tavernowner and information trader) Com4/Rog2 LN; Rodrigo Stoyista, male human (Borca, political activist in exile) Cle5/Ari3 LE; Gavril d'Abdok male human Ran7 (CG), Zampano, male human Bard8 LN(G)



Drakaina once whispered that Vechorites often imagine Easan in his Manor on top of the cliffs, alone and cackling madly over a gruesome experiment, or nurturing the same mad thoughts all over again. When I asked her to tell me more, she shrugged and changed subject.

There are many luxurious parks inside Vechor, and vechorites seem to love spending time there at all time of day – sleeping, bathing, playing with their children, listen to bards or practicing their bowmanship. Large fields of grass are sprinkled here and there with orchard trees trimmed often into the shape of animals, as well as other strange bronze monuments.

Also, military drills are usually occurring in these green fields, especially near the first Monday of the month, the vechorite Militia Day. Their skill at the bow is truly remarkable. I've seen a man of straw transformed into a porcupine of arrows in seconds, while the persons holding the bows were all adolescents!

These parks often have small amphitheatres made of bricks, where vechorites meet to enjoy plays, or bard music; and also for public discussions. I can testify these unconventional bards are very talented. Their music is often sad, but it is always inventive and different from

## Vechor

Kartakans' – for example, they often use staccato effects, or use their guitars normally while using it like percussions at the same time for the beat or a punch. One of these bards is very well known, Zampano. His excellent viola was crafted by Turgorov. Some say he could even charm the water to rise out of the sea.

Abdok's important port is located in a wider portion of the Nostru river. When we arrived, I counted the flags of sixteen foreign merchant boats plus at least double this amount of local ships, a scene which would make most ports on the core seem quiet. These were mostly cargo getting filled with Vechor's exotic goods – wood, spice, coffee, etc. From their flags, I could notice they come from all the main trading ports of the core and the islands of the Nocturnal Sea. Each dock belongs to a different company, and are often specialized in handling one type of goods.

Large warehouses can be seen along the port, busy the activity of filling these, or moving goods to a ship. These buildings are generally well maintained and guarded.

There are many eateries in Vechor, often brewing their own ale or berry wine. The food is simple but fresh and healthy. The best known of these is a large tavern by the city walls, named *The Stuttering Flesh* (it opened when the dead came back for a week). Opened day and night, its "Studded Transcolor" beer is a once in a lifetime experience. Other well known inns near the shop district include the *Mushroom stuffed Balrogi* (poor quality meals but well kept rooms), the *Wise Spider Alehouse* (located in an ancient large warehouse; poor quality meals, but entertainment is always good, no room), the *Funny Princess* as well as the *Toothless Ape* (good quality meal and rooms), the *Emperor and the Green Unicorn* (excellent in all aspects, expansive). Given the large size of the town, these are just a handful over a very large number of inns, alehouses and taverns.

Many shops are located near the port, and traders of all kind can be found in this busy district: antique, wood carvings, cosmetics, clothing, jewelers, illuminators, bow makers

### Spellbook hunters

An order of Occult Slayers<sup>CWa</sup> watches for wizards and tries to destroy them when they can, or at least their spellbooks. While many of them are sorcerers, they firmly believe that magic learned from an arcane book is surely evil and dangerous, thus their moral obligation to destroy those "irresponsible" arcane casters before they wreak havoc. They believe themselves the striking arm of Easan's edict against spell casters.

They keep an eye on foreigners disembarking in Abdok, and often assassinate their victims with poisoned kukri. Sometimes, priests of foreign fate that are too eager to convert vechorite are also slain.

This extremely secret society is led by the charismatic Hypatia (CG female human, Ftr5/Sor1/OccSla2).

and toy makers are the most common, after the numerous food kiosks in the street. There are very few furniture makers.

By the way, to contradict what foreigners think of the loose vechorites morals, there are absolutely no brothels in Abdok. Many inns and taverns near the port, all lively places, but no places where lust is something you can get by paying for, no matter the amount of wildcrowns given. Those things are meant to be freely shared; Drakaina simply said when I asked her about it..

Also, nowhere in the streets I've seen temple or any religious building whatsoever. This people seem to have a very discreet faith, if any at all? I will ask Shadowcloak on the matter later. There are no libraries as well, but that was to be expected

Very large farmlands dot the countryside around Abdok, to feed the city and for export as well. They are usually specialized into one type of crop (coffee, exotic fruit, rice, etc.).

To my surprise, I've found these large farms are not owned by anybody, like we can see in Souragne. Can you believe nobody is a land owner here! I was expecting successful

planters living in large mansions in this fertile land, but no. The farms are organized into cooperative organizations, where profits are shared with those who work at the farm. I believe this business model is also used in many places in the city too, at the port in particular. Between themselves, they elect a leader for a period of three months, for day to day administration, but important decisions are always made by vote. Interesting concept, I thought, that would spell revolution in Paridon!

## *Places of interest*

### *Cliffs of Vesanis*

The northwestern side of Vechor is limited by the infamous cliffs of Vesanis. This strange rock formation is nearly vertical, and represents an impassable wall. They are extremely high, more than three thousand feet, making them a landmark seen even from Abdok. I've been told they are nearly impossible to climb, even with proper climbing attire, as the surface is friable. Indeed, large chunks fallen from the cliffs can be seen at the bottom.

Vechorite would not dare try climbing it, and one of the reasons is the near certainty of dying while trying.

Vechorite assume that a narrow plateau is found on its top. Easan's manor on this plateau, near the edge, can be seen from the forest. Little else than the location of Easan's Manor is known about this forbidding place.

Vechorite say that those that somehow climbed the cliffs, or flown to get there, never came back to tell what they saw. Since Father Shadowcloak said he would assist me in this part of the report, I didn't insist on risking my life.

The source of the Nostru river is somewhere on this plateau. It falls the cliff façade gracefully, in a myriad of rainbow colors when reflected by the sun.

Few vechorites come near the cliffs, as the whole area has a very bad reputation. First, it is located near Easan's Manor and Easan's subjects seem to prefer staying away from their King. Then it is also said mazes of caverns do reach the plateau, after *days* of underground travel, but one easily can become lost and starve, or worst become prey of unthinkable angry monsters: the barmy results of King Easan's experiments.

Sometimes, these fiendish monsters exit the cave and roam in the forest. One persistent rumor concerns a man of steel living in a cave near the Nostru fall. A ranger in the closest logging camp to the fall said he once saw this extremely dangerous killing machine, which was destroying all that crossed its path... I guess it's the first of King Easan's dangerous guardians?

### *The Plateau of Vesanis*

The following section was graciously written by Father Shadowcloak:

The climate of the plateau at the top of the Cliffs of Vesanis is quite different from that of lower elevations and more nearly approximates the temperate climate of the lands across the sea; the summer is mild, the winter rainy and cool, and the temperature change between summer and winter is sufficient to cause deciduous trees to shed their leaves in fall. The terrain is, even by the standards of the Changing Land, highly mutable, but also more richly endowed with those static spots in which one element of the landscape is held constant. The northernmost part of the plateau is dominated by the Wandering Stones, stones varying in size from rocks small enough to be held in the hand to boulders the size of ships, which move in elliptical orbits, up to several miles along their major elliptical axis, around a central spire of stone several hundred feet in height. All of my attempts to scry on this spire have failed entirely, and I have not yet had time or inclination for further exploration of the territory. This terrain is almost devoid of plant life, for the simple reason it would be mowed down





by the motion of the stones; however, some of the larger rocks are sufficiently large to have acquired a patina of vegetation. Only the most desperate and dangerous of creatures enter here.

The extreme southern end of the plateau is referred to as the Vale of Stars by the Erl-King. He refuses to go there, for reasons he would not explain. Here the line between animal, vegetable and mineral appears to have been almost entirely effaced; « trees » of crystal, « birds » of water, stones which grow in a day and wilt away to nothing can all be found here. The place takes its name from the unusual configuration and brilliance of the night stars, unlike that seen anywhere else in the Core. These stars have been known to leave their spheres and travel through the vale in human form, or the form of great white beetles, or the form of soft green stones.

The central plateau boasts of no such dramatic manifestations of the overthrow of the natural order of things; the Erl-King's home abuts the Nostru Falls (sometimes being found at the base of the cliff, sometimes at the top), while my own abode lies some miles to the north and east. Here the plateau rises and falls gently; the vegetation is

limited to tall grasses and low shrubs, with occasional trees rising near watering-holes, running some ten miles eastward until all is lost in the Mists. The Nostru River itself flows directly from the Mists, entering the Changing Land at a point a few miles south of my abode and a few miles east of the Erl-King's manor. The vicious beasts so notable in the jungles at the cliff's foot are less in evidence here, although such as do appear are deadly. There are, for example, a variety of serpents, green, black, brown and gold, all of which are common and all of which are deadly in the extreme, and burrowing creatures such as the aurumvorax, ankheg and bulette, which are highly territorial and quite capable of killing all but the best-equipped and most experienced of travelers. Unless one comes invited by the Erl-King or by myself virtually the only two inhabitants of this territory one is likely to experience considerable difficulty merely to stay alive.

I am a fairly regular visitor to the Erl-King's home, which lies at the foot of the Cliffs of Vesanis near the river, and suppose myself more qualified than any other to describe its situation and appointments; since I consider it inadvisable for Brother Dirac to visit the manor, I will write a few lines on it myself. The central structure is surrounded by a rather ill-kept series of hedge mazes occupied by any number of perilous by-products of the King's experimentation, the grounds covering something like half a square mile. The manor itself sprawls over an acre or two and is a curiously florid structure, made of shell-pink and bone-white stone; the stones show no evidence of having been touched by hammer and chisel, and I must suppose its master caused it to grow from the underlying stone (a feat which he is well able to accomplish, as even a brief stay in his dominion will reveal). True to its origins, it is a curiously organic structure, resembling a garden of sea-shells and corals more than a building of the ordinary kind. To my mind it is literally overwrought, with complication for the sake of complication evident throughout the construction; but it cannot be denied that it holds a great deal of geometric and topographic interest, and at certain times and places achieves architectural effects of delicate beauty or degenerate madness which a more static building could never produce. Its layout and even its composition are not constant; at times Easan desires that it be an edifice of living wood, bone, rotting flesh, wicker, or some other material, and so it becomes. The transformations, when they occur, take place over a time-span of dozens of minutes or hours.

I do not advise uninvited visits to the manor; the house is designed, in part, to draw unwanted visitors into rooms or corridors where they can be incapacitated and incarcerated for later study. Even invited guests must be careful; in many places the house moves, transporting the visitor along a hallway even as he stands still or moving to replace one room behind a given door with another.



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It is not common for living, human or humanoid servants to be at home, although servants of other kinds are very much in evidence. The Mad King has a mechanical bent of mind, and many of his servitors are constructed of metal or other durable materials; others are biological or biomechanical creations. Let it not be thought, however, that Easan works only in gross matter at the expense of higher studies; his principle occupation is in determining the nature of intelligence and of the soul, and I have had a number of interesting and instructive conversations with him on this and other arcane topics.

These experiments and their results can be found throughout the manor, housed in individual apartments or wandering the halls, depending on their nature. They have relatively little to unify them thematically, although in gross outline they reflect their creator's interest in the nature of the mind and the soul. (He also evinces an unusual and

marked interest in demonic possession, and shows some interest in the creation and elaboration of non-arcanic avenues toward analyzing his interests.) To mention only a few curiosities, I have observed the following on past visits:

1. In one chamber sat a man whose brain has been removed and replaced with a complex calculating engine that filled most of the room; his counterpart was a brain housed in a boxy shell that rolls about the manor on uneven wheels. Four thin metal arms projected from the top of the box, allowing the subject to manipulate objects. This was described to me as attempt to determine whether the soul resides within the body or the brain.
2. The soul of a young girl had been placed in a mechanical body built to resemble an angel with a porcelain face and wings made of blades. No

### *The House of Fallen Leaves*

Tarnos Shadowcloak's manor is built on one of the largest static spots in Vechor, covering about three acres; its peculiarity is to be fixed in late autumn. The sky is always overcast, the trees always bare; occasionally the overcast intensifies slightly and there is rain, but apart from this there is never any change in the season or the weather.

The House is surrounded by a stone wall some eight to ten feet in height and topped in broken glass; there is no apparent gate. (One five-foot section of the wall is a permanent illusion.) The wall is merely symbolic of a desire not to receive visitors; it is not intended as a serious deterrent to a determined trespasser.

The grounds have a number of trees (all bare, of course) and their fallen leaves (which never grow any fewer, despite never being replenished by spring growth) congregate and disperse at random across the grounds. There is no grass; the grounds are covered in thumb-sized gray-white stones to a depth of two or three inches. Between the overcast and the gray stone of the grounds and house, the House and everything on the grounds seem to cast no shadow. The House has no windows; the Shadowcloak needs no light to see, and does not receive visitors who cannot provide their own illumination by magical means if they want it.

The House itself is a sprawling single-story building of five wings radiating from a central point, built to accommodate the contours of the hillside on which it is set. Most of the House is given over to laboratory space, although what experiment is being conducted is not always clear.

There are two doors in the House of particular note; one leads into the Umbral Curtain (the space bordering Ravenloft proper and the Plane of Shadow). The Shadowcloak often leaves this door ajar, and creatures from the Plane of Shadow often enter the House and wander about for a time before leaving again.

The other leads into the Nightmare Lands, opening into the basement of a tower in the City of Nod. This Mistway, called the **Sleep of Reason**, is a two-way mistway of excellent reliability. The Shadowcloak did not intend to have such a passageway in his home, and he generally keeps this door closed.

explanation was given for this bizarre conceit; due to some defect in lubrication tears of clear liquid ran continually from the construct's eyes.

3. A large glass tube full of vapor connected to an array of wires and tubes. Within, an incorporeal spirit was subjected to various stimuli such as electricity, holy water, fire, acid, and other necromantic and arcane stimuli. (The Mad King has offered to convey his findings to me at a later date, which we may hope will be useful in our present tactical situation.) A ring of metal columns, about four feet tall. On top of each column sat a severed head, all of them identical. As we entered the room, the heads opened their eyes and began to pleading, begging, cajoling, or threatening us; this was described to me as an attempt to split a single soul into multiple facets, each with one dominant emotional attitude.
4. A huge organ-like growth filled much of another chamber, clinging at points to the walls and ceiling. It was obviously alive, somewhat resembling the stomach of a mammal as observed through a fistula. The Mad King told me that he can introduce several living things into this organ's orifices, after which they are broken down and recombined into a single composite creature, which is then extruded.
5. The Mad King was particularly proud of the device situated in a central courtyard, to visual

appearance a mere hollow toroid of metal roughly twenty feet in diameter and displaying considerable arcane and ethereal resonance. The Erl-King calls this device a soul splitter, and uses it to rupture captured souls into component pieces or to meld two souls together. Interestingly, the device has become vaguely aware due to the spiritual residue left from the intense energies created by this destruction or alteration of souls. We speculate that it may soon achieve full sentience. Souls for this endeavor are obtained by use of the soul-stripper, a magical device capable of capturing one soul from a person somewhere within the Land of Mists. (Verifying the provenance of any given soul is extremely difficult, of course; it is at least theoretically possible that they are drawn from other places entirely.) What happens to the body in such a case is not clear, but the most probable result is coma and death.

These devices are largely powered by lightning; lightning rods stand on all the manor's various towers, and the inflow of electrical energy during storms is directed into arcane capacitors for storage and gradual release. (Given the Mad King's control of all meteorological phenomena in his land, he can renew this resource at will.)

This list, admittedly cursory, is intended to give the reader some idea of the depth and scope of the Mad King's arcane pursuits. Of course, not all of these projects are useful or even interesting, but



cultivation of our collaboration has certainly proved fruitful heretofore, and I will certainly continue it.

### *Flora and Fauna*

How to describe the character of Vechor's indigenous species? Perhaps an anecdote will do.

I am sure all our Brothers are familiar with von Scheiller's philosophic treatises on the virtues of rational thought, and his sound condemnations of base superstition. Who can forget the egregious examples of fallacious thinking he relates, that unschooled minds' fancies have dreamt up in their ignorance: the vegetable lamb, the Arden Bay serpent, the barnacle goose? Just think of the last of these, Brothers: archaic bestiarists' accounts of long-stemmed barnacles, found on tide-swept rocks along Mordent's coast, that allegedly sprout wings and take flight in the form of geese each season! A laughable story concocted by uneducated yokels, based upon a superficial resemblance between waterfowls' head-markings and these crustaceans' shell-plated surface.

On Vechor's shoreline, I have heard such barnacles *honking*, as they test their new-formed lungs' strength in preparation for flight.

Such biological anomalies – bizarre twists on Nature's plan, that seem more fable than flesh – are scarce in Abdok itself, and in the farmlands and forests immediately surrounding the city. Once I ventured beyond that bastion of order (or what passes for it among Vechorites), the native animal and plant life became ever-more-outlandish: distorted and disturbing, to a degree that stretched not only the bounds of credibility, but those of the imagination, as well. Distinctions between predator and prey, flesh and foliage, organic and artificial soon broke down, spawning fantastical and aberrant forms that made Markovia's infamous "broken ones" seem mundane as milk cows!

To the limited degree that Vechor *has* a fixed natural history, its wildlife and flora most resemble those of the exotic kingdom

of Sri Raji: lush tropical forests and marshes, teeming with skittering insects, venomous frogs and snakes, shrieking monkeys and prowling felines. Inland, dipterocarp trees and durians tower over a dense carpet of decomposing leaves, feathery mosses, and squat, stiff-fronded cycads. Lianas and vines drape the boughs of lofty figs and kapoks; strangler-figs wind parasitically round the trunks of trees, and epiphytic orchids' and ferns' tendrils hang down from on high. In the marshes, mangroves choke the waterline, overshadowed by the tremendous, gnarled bulks of tualangs up to ninety yards in height.

Silver-pelted gibbons and variegated monkeys feed in the canopy, as stocky tapirs and wild swine root for fungi and tubers between the buttresses and stilt-roots of overshadowing forest giants. Brilliant-plumed parrots and raucous hornbills carpet the vine-draped boughs from dawn to dusk; after dark, great fruit bats with foxish faces throng in still-greater numbers. Though seldom seen, stealthy tigers prowl the jungle trails by night, their dominion over the forest floor disputed only by the rare, irritable Vechorian rhino, as svelte clouded leopards and crafty pythons stalk simians in the treetops. Crocodiles, monitor lizards, and huge, snaggle-toothed pike ambush muntjac and marsh deer that drink from forest streams or wade into the bogs in search of foliage.

Closer to settlements, savory tropical fruit and nut trees predominate – bananas, mangos, guava, coconuts, pineapples, avocados, papayas – sown by generations of Vechorites' discarded pits and seeds. The sheer variety of such edibles is so extensive, I suspect many to be rogue products of this land's ever-shifting nature, gleaned from the wild as they appear, and haphazardly cultivated by such idle castoffs. Valuable hardwoods such as mahogany, ebony, and teak also grow near the communities, providing profitable harvests of timber for export and raw materials for carvings, or for furnishings of a finer grade than the usual palm-leaf wickerwork and bamboo.

## Goose Barnacles



*I found clumps of them to be quite common around Vechor's shoreline*

## Barnacle Goose



*On occasion, the goose would emerge malformed*

## Vegetable Lamb



*Outwardly appears identical to cotton*

Plants with medicinal, culinary, and even psychoactive properties are also harvested regularly by Vechorite foresters. In fact, Vechor is an herbalists' paradise; so many botanical species flourish here, I am told, that the locals don't bother to name a shrub unless it is either useful or harmful, else

they'd fast run out of words! Alas, gleaning such vegetative bounty can be perilous, as monkeys also covet the fruits that thrive near the villages, and those predators that follow seldom distinguish one type of primate prey from another. Every rural Vechorite settlement I visited had its homegrown tale of man-eating tigers, snakes, or even fish to

recount to travelers. (I am unsure how many such accounts were true, but *Drakaina* clearly believes in such perils, for she refused to venture into these untamed hinterlands without a trained woodsman to lead the way.)

Moving deeper into the forest, the quality of the wilderness changes, progressively shifting from the exotic-yet-familiar to the aberrant, and eventually to the preposterous. As my newly-hired escort, Gavril d'Abdok, a trusty ranger of Drakaina's acquaintance (but lacking in her charms, more's the pity), led us inland from his home village, the ecological transition was shocking: each hour's sights were more bizarre than the last. Our guide refused to take us all the way to the cliffs or to the Misty border – travel *too* far, he warned, and the landscape might grow too warped to ever make our way back again – but I gather that this strangeness continues to increase, the deeper one ventures into the hinterlands.

Leaving the vicinity of the villages, organic life became queerly distorted, first anatomically, then in behavior, and lastly in more supernatural ways. On our first day's foray into the wilds, I spied a grayish swine in the forest with tusks that sprouted *upward* from the roof of its snout, and a crocodile-like beast, basking on a wetland log, with a long, toothy jaw no broader than my thumb. At dusk, big-eyed lemurs with skin-flaps between their limbs glided like living kites over our camp. The first site we chose to



pitch tents had to be abandoned when the winds shifted, and the rancid stench of rotting flesh was carried towards us... a stink which, on investigation, turned out to issue from a tremendous, ground-hugging *flower* more than a yard across! Clearly, the usual laws of Nature were no longer in operation, to have birthed such ungainly monstrosities.

The second day out revealed still more physical distortions, most of which smacked more of the *ridiculous* than the grotesque. Earlier, the treetops' screeching monkeys boasted pelts of brown, russet, silver-gray, yellow, and black; now, this spectrum of hues expanded to include turquoise, lavender, tangerine and emerald. Lizards with leaf-like protrusions along their spines skittered up and down the trees' trunks, then froze into camouflaged immobility at the approach of a distorted feline, its furry legs sprawling and suction-toed like a tree frog's.

A foraging squirrel, alarmed by our approach, curled its bushy tail up over its back, the underside bristling with barbed, defensive spines. A wild ox plated with a turtle's shell lumbered heedlessly through the forest, fearing no beast, only to meet its end in the thorn-lined, camouflaged sinkhole at the base of a carnivorous tree. Even as it breathed its last, swarms of animated creepers skittered to the trap's edge, slender leaves rippling across the ground like a centipede's legs, to dangle thirsty vines in its blood.





In the marsh, mosquitoes as long as my hand dodged dragonflies larger still, with hooked hawks' beaks. A long-necked, striped mammal waded, heron-like, in a quiet pool, snapping up perch in its elongated, toothy jaws. Keeping their distance, globular fishes crept from the pool on two spindly legs, to gulp down snails along the water's edge. Hidden in thick rushes, a furry beast propped itself upside-down on its snout as it trolled for minnows with its thread-like tail, the tip of which mimicked a fisherman's lure in every detail. When I drew near, it "walked" away using the quartet of muscular trunks on its snout, its body and atrophied legs still inverted.

Bizarre as these prodigies were, tracks in the mud suggested still-greater anomalies

### *Dungeon Master's Tips: Snouters in Wondersland*

While not a standard part of the Gothic tradition, lands where Nature is distorted and nightmarish have been a staple of fiction since the days of *Gulliver's Travels*. Rather than relying purely on a single DM's imagination to concoct bizarre organisms for Vecnor, non-Ravenloft references can provide plenty of ideas for use in-game, be it as components of the domain's weird ecology, or as deliberate creations by Easan or other deranged life-manipulators. Depending on how "odd" an oddity is desired, DMs can draw upon "alternate evolution" works such as Dougal Dixon's *After Man* (not real, but biologically plausible); science fiction novels set on untamed alien planets, such as Alan Dean Foster's *Midworld* (radically unlikely, yet not magical); or lighter fantasy fare, like Piers Anthony's Xanth series (both magical and bizarre).

Of course, players may well identify the fictional species from such outside references: there's simply no disguising Cheshire cats, thestrals, or jhereg from well-read gamers. While avoiding use of such recognizable beasts is certainly an option, a canny DM can cosmetically mask these creatures (e.g. a "Cheshire weasel") ... or even use their undisguised presence to chastise players who have a bad habit of metagaming ("Oh, don't worry about *those* things: everyone knows that tribbles only eat grai—*aaugh!*").

Statistically, most bizarre life forms of Vecnor may be treated as cosmetically-altered versions of existing D&D monsters: giant mosquitoes as stirges, slithering predatory fungi as oozes, etc. For others, changes to natural armor and weapons, the addition of a minor spell-like ability or two, or application of a new template or subtype can generate unique statistics quickly. Adjustments to a creature's speed or skill ranks can illustrate an altered habitat or way of living. Any such changes should be ones which PCs can readily notice (e.g. hurling *Magic Missiles* is visible, a save bonus is not), so players will realize they're facing something bizarre and unpredictable.

frequented the area. (Myself, I found the sight of *elephants'* minute footprints, gaily disporting themselves in the ankle-deep, rainwater-filled tracks of a mouse, oddly appealing.) By the end of that day, even distinctions between animal and vegetable were breaking down: I saw a stag with flowering cacti for antlers, and a herd of oversized wild hogs, their flanks draped with wild vines that sprouted from their bristled shoulders. Once, when Drakaina paused to examine a mass of oozing fungus draped over a low branch, our forest-savvy escort pulled her back just in the nick of time: the loathsome growth was both animate and predatory, dripping with toxins that would've paralyzed my lovely traveling-companion for slow dissolution and absorption.

The *behaviors* of organic life, too, began deviating from the norm, on our second day. In a forest glen, our approach startled a flock of parrots into flight, interrupting their nibbling ... on the sundered carcass of an unsightly, crab-like behemoth. (I do not believe they'd actually *killed* it, but I wouldn't care to stake my fortunes on that fact!) Later, our trail dipped down into a flooded valley, and the roaring of great beasts heralded a battle of titans: a squat, long-necked reptile like a wingless dragon out of legend, surrounded and harried by a pride of leonine hunters, their hind feet webbed for swimming, their sodden manes green with algae. Less spectacular, yet also more disturbing, were the altered activities of Vechor's *crawling* denizens. By our third day, we beheld cockroaches living in vast mounds of rotting leaf-litter, communal as ants, and brilliant vermilion slugs no longer than an eyelash, that twittered and sang in tiny, piping voices. Nor was aerial life exempt from rampant strangeness. In an ancient fig tree, weaver-birds had woven a straw nest of prodigious size: a feat that would have impressed me, even *without* the train of smoke that ushered from its chimney. A pity the entrance was too small for me to inspect its hearth's design.

From the third day to the fourth, the jungle's oddities ceased to be constrained even by the laws of mundane nature, such that nearly every animal that we witnessed was possessed of some magic power or otherworldly property. Monkeys with grotesque, pendulous noses drew fruits to their waiting grasp telekinetically, and bombarded us with filth in like manner when we came too near. Butterflies of extraordinary size drifted on the breeze, their wings patterned with moving colors in the form of faces, landscapes, or written gibberish. I accidentally stumbled upon a slender-bodied civet, whilst answering Nature's call, and it emitted a cloud of pink vapor that left me bedazzled and euphoric for the better part of an hour, to Drakaina's considerable amusement. Our ranger later pointed out the fringed and barbel-faced silhouette of the most ugly fish I'd ever seen, that lurked beneath a murky pool's surface: a creature he swore slew other fish with jolts of lightning. As the terrain grew rougher, protruding roots amidst the leaf-litter began *speaking* to us, parroting back our every word or labored breath, in our own voices. When I marveled at this phenomenon, our guide replied that the roots were less ill-mannered than the *rocks*, farther inland.

On that fourth and final night, eerie shadows of beasts danced round our campfire: shadows that moved and prowled and hunted one another, though no fleshly forms were present to cast them. Between the trees, specks of haunting pastel light drifted like pollen-motes, bursting and spiraling round one another. The crackling of our campfire took on distinct overtones of speech in some unknown – perhaps unearthly – language. Withdrawing to my





tent, I watched insects crawling on the outside of its thin canvas, silhouetted by the firelight ... moving, then aligning and amassing together, their silhouettes merging into that of a large lizard. It skittered off as sleep claimed me.

Initially, I'll admit, I had planned to travel one day farther into the jungle: our escort had spoken of how, still farther in, earth and water grew as unpredictably-animate as the organic life we'd so far encountered. However, come daybreak, our circumstances argued against it. Drakaina roused me with frantic cries of intense distress. Peering out from my tent, I found that the surrounding jungle had fallen silent, its colors, faded to gray. Our wilderness-guide did not answer our calls. Investigating, I was shocked to discover the nearby trees, the underbrush, and even the insects, birds and monkeys

which inhabited them, had been transformed into cold, lifeless stone! This frightening petrification encircled our tiny camp at a distance of five paces, extending for nearly a hundred yards all around us. Our tents lay at the eye of a storm, spared for reasons neither of us could guess or fathom.

Afraid our woodsman guide had fallen afoul of the dreadful transition, we checked his tent. The ranger lay curled up, mute with anguish, left hand clutched tight to his chest. The petrifying effect had overlapped the corner of the unlucky man's tent, and had claimed two of his fingers. The fleshy roots of both digits were swollen with sepsis.

Coaxed to speak, he stammered that his whole hand was sure to be lost, if we waited for the forest's transformation to reverse itself. Regretfully, we complied with his pain-dulled wishes; Drakaina bound the



digits' fleshy stubs tightly with cord, and I cleanly severed the useless stone with an ember-heated knife. It was a grim and grisly example of how Vechor's weird plasticity should never be taken lightly: a few feet to one side or another, and none of our party would have awakened from stone-bound sleep, at all!

A dose of curative potion eased our escort's pain and soothed his fever, but he was clearly in no state to explore further. We decamped in haste from the area of petrification, abandoning much of our equipment, then bivouacked another two days just outside the eerily-silent stone forest, until he was fit for the trek back to his village. I do not know if the petrified jungle ever did revert to its normal state, or if it remains frozen to this day: I broke free a stone orchid from a low branch, before we returned to the villages, and it yet feels hard and brittle in my pocket.

Having witnessed such living oddities, I must confess that I felt relieved by the sight of common farmyard animals, on reaching the nearest settlement. Not that even domestic livestock of Vechor were entirely familiar, mind you – in this climate, water buffalo take the place of ordinary oxen, while showy-tailed peafowl are as abundant as hens in the local poultry-coops – but at least these possessed the usual bodily appendages, in their conventional proportions and numbers! (A relief, indeed: after our narrow escape from petrification, I'll admit that the notion of an involuntary transformation from one's proper state has held a measure of creeping horror for me.) Drakaina, too, was visibly relieved to be back to "civilization"; a city lass, the wilds of the back country had lain well outside her comfort-zone as well as her experience. Even Vechorites, it seems, can find some environments too erratic for their tastes.

Still, even on the well-tamed outskirts of Abdok, the residents' wariness of the jungle's freakish wildlife wasn't wholly absent. When I asked him if the stout palisades of the city's stockyards were a barricade against tigers, a Vechorite farmer hesitantly admitted that yes, the great cats' appetites could be a problem for livestock

### Encounters in Vechor: Wildlife

Given the ever changing nature of Vechor as per Easan's whim, and the Mad King's creative mind, it should be noted that DMs can add nearly anything they want into Vechor. Here's the 'default' selection of life forms for Vechor.

- CR 1/10:** Bat<sup>MM1</sup>; Frog/toad<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 1/8:** Rat<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 1/6:** Lizard<sup>MM1</sup>; Monkey<sup>MM1</sup>; Parrot (as raven<sup>MM1</sup>)
- CR ¼:** Albatross<sup>Sto</sup>; Cat<sup>MM1</sup>; Mongoose (as weasel<sup>MM1</sup>); Otter<sup>Sto</sup>; Owl<sup>MM1</sup>; Spiny gecko (as horned lizard<sup>San</sup>)
- CR 1/3:** Dire rat<sup>MM1</sup>; Hawk<sup>MM1</sup>; Snake, Tiny viper<sup>MM1</sup>; Vulture<sup>San</sup>
- CR ½:** Baboon<sup>MM1</sup>; Eagle<sup>MM1</sup>; Pike (as barracuda<sup>Sto</sup>); Snake, Small viper<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 1:** Dire raven<sup>Gal</sup>; Snake, Medium viper<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 2:** Ape<sup>MM1</sup>; Bat swarm<sup>MM1</sup>; Bear, black<sup>MM1</sup>; Boar<sup>MM1</sup>; Crocodile<sup>MM1</sup>; Dire bat<sup>MM1</sup>; Dire hawk<sup>MM2, RWi</sup>; Dire mongoose (as dire weasel<sup>MM1</sup>); Leopard<sup>MM1</sup>; Lizard, monitor<sup>MM1</sup>; Rat swarm<sup>MM1</sup>; Snake, constrictor<sup>MM1</sup>; Snake, Large viper<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 3:** Dire ape<sup>MM1</sup>; Dire eagle<sup>RSt</sup>; Dire frog/toad<sup>MM2</sup>; Lion<sup>MM1</sup>; Snake, Huge viper<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 4:** Crocodile, giant<sup>MM1</sup>; Dire boar<sup>MM1</sup>; Rhinoceros<sup>MM1</sup>; Tiger<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 5:** Dire snake<sup>MM2</sup>; Snake, giant constrictor<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 6:** Needletooth swarm<sup>MM3</sup>
- CR 7:** Elephant<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 8:** Dire tiger<sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 10:** Dire elephant<sup>MM2</sup>

"as well". Pressed for details, he informed me that the barriers were most valued during the buffalo-cows' breeding season ... less for fear of newborn calves devoured, than to ensure that unnatural things could not trespass therein, in a state of rut, to sire their unspeakable offspring among the she-cattle...

## Encounters in Vechor: Monsters \*

- CR ¼:** Maddening flea <sup>RMCIII</sup>; Moonrat <sup>MM2</sup>
- CR 1/3:** Crawling claw <sup>FRMF</sup>; Goblin <sup>MM1</sup>; Gremishka <sup>DoD</sup>
- CR ½:** Goblin, forestkith <sup>MM3</sup>; Hobgoblin <sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 1:** Carrionette <sup>DoD, Dra#339</sup>; Fungus, shrieker <sup>MM1</sup>; Ghoul <sup>MM1</sup>; Golem, lesser, paper <sup>Dra#341</sup>; Homunculus <sup>MM1</sup>; Puppeteer <sup>EPH</sup>; Quevari <sup>DoD</sup>; Tentacle rat <sup>DoD</sup>
- CR 2:** Aquatic ooze, flotsam ooze <sup>FiF</sup>; Assassin bug, giant <sup>DoD</sup>; Bakhna rakhna <sup>DoD</sup>; Bugbear <sup>MM1</sup>; Carrion stalker <sup>DoD</sup>; Choker <sup>MM1</sup>; Ghoul <sup>MM1</sup>; Goblin <sup>DoD, Dra#339</sup>; Iron cobra <sup>FiF</sup>; Puppeteer, flesh harrower <sup>EPH</sup>
- CR 3:** Automaton <sup>MM2</sup>; Assassin vine <sup>MM1</sup>; Bone rat swarm <sup>LiM</sup>; Broken one <sup>DoD</sup>; Deathlock <sup>LiM</sup>; Fihyr <sup>MM2</sup>; Fungus, violet <sup>MM1</sup>; Ghast <sup>MM1</sup>; Golem, lesser, tin <sup>Dra#341</sup>; Golem, lesser, wood <sup>Dra#341</sup>; Head hunter <sup>DoD</sup>; Murk <sup>LiM</sup>; Scarecrow, dread <sup>DoD</sup>; Swarm, cat <sup>JWM's</sup>; Swarm, viper <sup>FiF</sup>
- CR 4:** Aranea <sup>MM1</sup>; Backward man <sup>DoD</sup>; Carrion crawler <sup>MM1</sup>; Elementite swarm (any) <sup>PH</sup>; Gargoyle <sup>MM1</sup>; Golem, lesser, fungus <sup>Dra#341</sup>; Leucrotta <sup>FRMF</sup>; Meazel <sup>FRMF</sup>; Vine horror <sup>FiF</sup>
- CR 5:** Cloaker <sup>MM1</sup>; Cloaker, dread, resplendent <sup>DoD</sup>; Cloaker, dread, shadow <sup>DoD</sup>; Gibbering moulder <sup>LoM</sup>; Golem, chain <sup>MM2 p44</sup>; Golem, lesser, junk <sup>Dra#341</sup>; Golem, stained glass <sup>MM2</sup>; Paka <sup>DoD</sup>; the Shadow Serpent <sup>BoSouls/Keepers of the Coil</sup>
- CR 6:** Alchemical undead <sup>Dra#350</sup>; Bastellus <sup>DoD</sup>; Belker <sup>MM1</sup>; Bloodmote cloud <sup>LiM</sup>; Bonedrinker <sup>MM3</sup>; Foresaken shell <sup>LiM</sup>; Golem, wax <sup>DoD</sup>; Grim <sup>DoD</sup>; Will-o'-wisp <sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 7:** Aboleth <sup>MM1</sup>; Giant, hill <sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 8:** Golem, doll <sup>DoD</sup>; Golem, glass <sup>DoD</sup>; Gorgon <sup>MM1</sup>; Living wall <sup>DoD</sup>
- CR 9:** Blood amniote <sup>LiM</sup>; Caller in darkness <sup>EPH</sup>; Death's head tree <sup>DoD, Dra#339</sup>
- CR 10:** Bronze serpent <sup>MM2</sup>; Golem, bone <sup>DoD</sup>; Golem, brass <sup>MM2</sup>; Golem, clay <sup>MM1</sup>; Golem, gargoyle <sup>DoD</sup>;
- CR 11:** Golem, alchemical <sup>MM3, Dra#302</sup>; Golem, mechanical <sup>DoD</sup>; Golem, stone <sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 12:** Casurua <sup>DragC</sup>
- CR 13:** Golem, hangman (rope golem) <sup>MM3, Dra#302</sup>; Golem, iron <sup>MM1</sup>; Grisgol <sup>MM3</sup>
- CR varies:** Alchemical child <sup>VRA</sup>; Animator <sup>DoD</sup>; Astral construct <sup>EPH</sup>; Boneless <sup>DoD</sup>; Cerebral symbiont <sup>FiF</sup>; Centipede, monstrous <sup>MM1</sup>; Created Beast <sup>FoSNS</sup>; Corrupted creature <sup>BVD, Dra#350</sup>; Elemental, corrupted <sup>JWM's</sup>; Fiendish creature <sup>MM1</sup>; Fiendish symbiont (fiendish familiar, gutworm, soul tick) <sup>FiF</sup>; Figurine (any) <sup>DoD</sup>; Ghost <sup>MM1, DoD</sup>; Goblin beast <sup>Ga5</sup>; Half-farspawn <sup>LoM</sup>; Half-fiend <sup>MM1</sup>; Half-golem (brass, clay, iron, stained glass, stone) <sup>MM2 & WE</sup>; Lycanthrope (wereboar) <sup>MM1</sup>; Lycanthrope (wereape, werehyena, werelion) <sup>JWM's</sup>; Psicrystal <sup>EPH</sup>; Spellstitched <sup>CAr, MM2</sup>; Topiary guardian <sup>MM3</sup>; Virus, Phagian - combustion, petrification, phobia <sup>RMCII</sup>

\* Easan is fond of building golems and other animated mechanical objects to study the addition of souls and spirits to them. He usually prefers making these new "toys" out of inanimate matter, rather than once-living remains. Easan's constructions always look ramshackle and improvised, with superfluous appendages or features and creative variations in design. Easan is probably not the only mage to have ever built golems in Vechor, but others' handiworks tend to share a similar appearance to those created by the demented elf darklord.

## People

Vechorites are a handsome people, generally slender and athletic; their skin color ranges from deep bronze to a light olive, and their hair from black to an unusual dark blonde. Men and women alike wear their hair in many tight braids; men often wear small, neat mustaches, but usually have no other facial hair.

Their truly identifying characteristic is, of course, the tattoo of the “ε” - the mark that identifies them as servants of King Easan. This mark is apparently produced by the king’s arcane power; it appears (usually on the forehead) soon after the birth of any child born in Vechor. Occasional unfortunates receive multiple marks—generally considered a sign that the child’s mother was unhappy or in ill health during the pregnancy.

Because of the climate Vechorites wear relatively little clothing—usually only a long tunic secured over one shoulder (referred to as a chlamys) which leaves the other breast bare, and sandals. (The baring of one’s breasts is not considered immodest among Vechorite women—doubtless a contributing factor to their reputation for easy virtue.) Men prefer drab or white for their clothing, but women prefer pastels; both sexes wear a great deal of jewelry of various kinds, favoring necklaces and bracelets of shell, bone, wood, or precious metals and stones.



## The Vechorite Hero

**Races:** Nearly all Vechorites are humans (99+ %). All have the tattoo of the “ε” (usually on the forehead).

**Classes:** Vechorites are people close to nature, even those living in Abdok (rangers, druids). Most men and women are able to fight in a way or another (barbarians, fighters). Also, many of them show sorcery skills (Sorcerers – see “Divine Sorcerers” sidebar below) as well as fighting skills. Bards can find a safe haven in Vechor, as their performance is well hailed anywhere, anytime. Paladins do not acclimatize well to the chaos of perpetual changes. Sorcery magic is well seen on Vechor, but not wizards using spellbooks – see “Attitude versus magic” section – who are persecuted or shunned. Flamboyant and zealous priests are mistrusted and avoided. Rogues are not well accepted either in Vechor.

**Recommended Skills:** Balance, Bluff, Climb, Craft (bowmaking, pottery, stonemasonry, weaving), Handle Animal, Intimidate, Knowledge (arcane, nature), Perform (any but Comedy or Keyboards instruments), Profession (farmer, herder, fisher, minor, tanner, weaver), Search, Survival, Swim, Use Rope.

**Recommended Feats:** Agile, Athletic, Back to the Wall, Brawler, Courage, Diligent, Dodge (plus derivatives), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Open Mind, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon focus (bow, kukri).

**Vechor Male Names:** Akakios, Alexandre, Angelos, Anikevos, Apostolos, Demetros, Demisroussos, Dimitri, Easanos, Elpidios, Emmanuel, Gavriil, Gregory, Iason, Iosif, Leonidas, Mathias, Nikolas, Nomiki, Pavlos, Spyros, Stamatios, Stelios, Theodoros, Tryphon, Vasilios

**Vechor Female Names:** Agape, Agatha, Aikaterine, Anastasia, Chara, Dareia, Drakaina, Efrosyni, Eleni, Evdokia, Ioanna, Mariamne, Marina, Nana, Natasa, Pantheras, Petra, Philippa, Sara, Selene, Sibylla, Theodora, Teophania, Xene, Xenia, Zinovia, Zoe.

## Vechor

### *Divine Sorcerers!*

Some sorcerers are truly blessed in Vechor. Given the unique relation Vechorites have with their God / King Easan, a number of Vechor-born sorcerers can add some cleric domain spells to their known spell list, in addition to the arcane spells available to a sorcerer of their level. There are no changes on number of spell per day they can cast, and the DC of these divine spell is the same as the arcane ones. This also only works while the sorcerer is in Vechor.

Such an Easan blessed Sorcerer can choose two clerical domains among the following list: air, animal, earth, fire, healing, luck, plant, strength, sun, water. He adds the domain spells according to his available arcane levels. Example: with the "air" domain chosen (*PHB* p 185), a Sorcerer fourth level could add Obscuring Mists and Wind Wall to his known spell list (he can have arcane spells level one and two).

These sorcerers are so convinced of Easan's genuine "godness" that Easan rewards them by letting their sorcery magic shift to conform to their divine spellcasting attempts. Easan can negate any or all such "divine" spells instantly, if he so wishes, and keep them from being invoked by any "divine" sorcerer whom he feels annoyed at.

However, these faithful "divine" sorcerers always have a latent streak of faith illumination in them. Their behavior is sometimes erratic: DC 12 Will when casting a divine spell. If missed, they fail to cast the spell and instead stop all activities for one round for crying over their "god's" greatness or similar faith worship-related or manifestation act (in battle, treat as a Dazed condition for one round).

### *Language*

Vechorite is really more a dozen mutually intelligible dialects than it is a single tongue. Local variations in phrasing, tempo, and pronunciation are so wide as to make Vechorite sound entirely different when spoken by a highlander from the Misty Border that it does in the mouth of a dockworker in Abdok. Interestingly, Vechorites themselves seem to have little or no difficulty in understanding one another, no matter what the disparity in their basic form of speech; Life fact, over the course of a long conversation each speaker will gravitate toward the others' mode of speech. In Abdok this produces a sort of artificial synthesis which is as close as anything to the "true" Vechorite language.

### *Outlook and worldview*

We who hail from the western Core are inclined to think of Vechor as a realm of smiling, idle half-dressed semi-savages living in communal marriage or worse, largely due to the influence of scandal-mongering novels detailing the purported libertinage and the general weirdness of Vechorite life. Having now spent some weeks in Vechor, and having conversed at length with Master Shadowcloak, who has made his home here for the last decade, I look back on my own ignorant opinions on the Vechorite society with a mixture of amusement and chagrin.

Each of the supposed features of Vechorites mentioned above has some root in sober fact, but the overall impression could hardly be more mistaken. Abdok is a large city, home to some ten thousand souls, and carries on a volume of trade that puts any port of the Sea of Sorrows save Martira Bay and Port-a-Lucine to shame. In fact, more than half of the population of the country is located in Abdok, making it considerably more urban in character than Dementlieu. It is, of course, much more insular than cosmopolitan, and the famed Dementlieuse high culture is almost entirely absent, but there are many excellent craftsmen and builders, and the city itself is,

if anything, rather more handsome than Port-a-Lucine, with buildings and towers of cream-colored brick set around the Nostru River. One of the main reasons Vechorites have commonly been taken for savages is the fact that literacy is not common here; I can count on one hand those whom I have met who could read. Vechorite hardly exists as a written language; apart from inscriptions cut into monuments in public places I found nothing written in Vechorite at all, although I am told that such manuscripts do exist. (Most are apparently in the possession of Easan himself.) Vechorites are deeply suspicious of the act of writing, which they consider an inherently unnatural activity, binding words and gestures, which are inherently powerful, into an artificial and corrupted form. They are usually not so set in this belief as to prevent foreigners from writing, but for safety's sake I have compiled my notes only after the fact, when alone or in the presence only of other foreigners, and I have not revealed my notebooks to anyone. I believe it is this, more than anything else, which has produced their reputation for barbarism, and I would say this is the closest to the truth of any of the aforementioned half-truths.

The education of Vechorite men was described to me as follows: "A young man of Vechor is taught to follow his father's trade, to shoot the bow, and to speak the truth." If such is the measure of the man, their education succeeds admirably; every Vechorite man I met, and not a few of the women, seemed deadly with the bow and the hunting spear, and they are an uncommonly honest (if not terribly forthright) people. The women's upbringing has no such pith aphorism, but they are likewise employed in a traditional trade (often the making of pottery or clothing) as well as performing all but the heaviest agricultural labor and most of the child-rearing.

Their reputation for idleness, on the other hand, is simply incorrect. The intense heat which is the most common feature of the weather there drives every rational soul indoors during the heat of the day, and the Vechorite custom of sleeping for two or three hours at midday is the probable cause

of the idea that they are a lazy people. Having endured a summer in Abdok, I feel I can say with confidence that this is merely an intelligent concession to local conditions. Certainly, when they are engaged in labor the Vechorites labor as diligently as any Dementlieuse peasant or tradesman (and considerably more diligently than the average house-servant!). The great abundance of foodstuffs in Vechor also means that even a very indifferent husbandman can feed himself and his family, meaning that even in poverty there is at least no danger of starvation.

This last has sometimes been advanced as the reason for the famously cheerful outlook ascribed to natives of Vechor; some scholars have held that knowing that putting food on the table and a roof over one's head is merely a matter of shaking a tree or two produces so great a relief of the anxieties of life that the natural result is a contented and indolent populace. This relief from some of the central anxieties of life probably plays some role in the perceived happiness of the Vechorian society, but even after only a few weeks I have begun to feel this contentment is more feigned than actual. There is something uncanny in the continual smiles, and something more than uncanny—eerie, or even sinister—in the way that even when in pain or deep emotional distress the Vechorites seem never to indulge in curses, lamentations, or complaints.

On my second or third night in Abdok I saw a young woman break down into tears in the marketplace; to my astonishment the much older woman immediately struck her on both cheeks and waved an admonitory finger, apparently chastising this display of emotion. When I asked my escort what had occurred, she was unwilling to speak of it; later she confided that the young woman had lost a child to fever earlier that week, and was in "a dangerous state". I asked him to explain what was "dangerous" about bereavement; shaking his head, he replied, "Grief is very bad. Tears are bad. Life is hard enough without evil thoughts; therefore think well. Life is hard enough to meet with a frown; meet it with a smile." The aphorism, "Think well", or "Think good

thoughts", is extremely common, and often seems to serve as a kind of warning to someone who the speaker thinks is in danger of committing "evilthought". The Vechorites believe very strongly in a principle of attraction: to think unhappy thoughts brings misfortune, while to be tranquil ensures further tranquility. Although in some ways this must be considered a very positive philosophy of life, it produces a weird flatness of emotion; both great grief and great joy seem to be largely absent from in the Vechorite range of experience.

When strong emotions do show themselves, it is often in an exaggerated and even pathological form. When pushed beyond endurance, the Vechorite may enter the state of amok—a frenzy in which they attempt to destroy anything and everything in their surroundings with whatever comes to hand. (They usually, but not always, refrain from attacking other people, although animals and crops are often favored targets for destruction.) This was explained to me as the result of resentment of or anger toward "the spirit of things". Vechorians believe that all things have spirit and will; when ill fortune presents itself consistently, they feel that it is because the mundane objects around them have suddenly become inimical (an exaggeration, I suppose, of the idea Monsieur Lacomte refers to as "the perversity of inanimate objects"). When pushed beyond the limits of endurance by the vicissitudes of life they therefore react with a burst of destructive activity directed at everything around them.

This belief in the "spirit" of inanimate object has another interesting cultural result, which is that theft is virtually unknown in Vechor. If one takes a neighbor's walking stick, the neighbor may not know of it—but the walking stick does, and will almost certainly become restive and unreliable in the hands of someone who is not its rightful owner. Anything made by human hands is assumed to belong to the creator in perpetuity; he or she may make a present of it to someone else, but the item knows its maker and prefers that person to all others. Boats, bows and other tools or weapons considered to have particularly strong

personalities are often ceremonially destroyed at the death of their maker, as it is assumed that they will be intractable in the hands of a new owner from that time forward.

Vechorites take great pride in their craftsmanship, and skilled craftsmen acquire wide reputations and great wealth. A master craftsman will always set a highly visible and idiosyncratic mark on his creations to announce their provenance to the world; if these marks are effaced or altered the made thing is said to have lost its spirit and must be treated as a dead thing and burned.

Touching on the final point of the Vechorite stereotype, there is nothing so infamous in the Core as Vechor marital customs, which are generally described in popular literature as polyamorous or even looser. I was surprised and greatly interested to know that nothing could be further from the truth. Vechorites take the marital bond more seriously than any other people I have seen or heard of. Marriage is the one thing which has a truly sacred character among Vechorites; all other social institutions pale in comparison. (Certainly there is no class structure of comparable importance.) Marriages are generally love matches; although not conventionally "romantic", in the sense that word is used in novels, it is considered the fundamental relationship of one's life and a sacred commitment. Adultery is punished by stoning to death. (Imagine the effect on the population of Port-a-Lucine if this custom were imported! The salons would stand vacant.) Even more strikingly, widows and widowers never remarry; the marital bond is presumed to last beyond the bonds of death. Social requirements of the unmarried, on the other hand, are virtually non-existent; unmarried youths conduct themselves as they see fit, which, combined with the relaxed standards of modesty which the climate demands, form the probable cause of the Vechorite reputation for promiscuity.

## *Attitudes toward Magic*

Vechorites are (unsurprisingly) blasé about displays of magical power; seeing someone become invisible or produce a ball of flame is not overly impressive when compared with seeing an entire forest uproot itself and go on the march, or seeing the sun rise in the south. A person of sorcerous talents is rather more encouraged than discouraged to develop such abilities.

Wizardry, on the other hand, is feared and abominated. This feeling is apparently so deep-seated that it was difficult to get any explanation of it; to the Vechorite mind the evil of wizardly magic is so obvious that most have never examined the belief closely, and have no desire to do so. The most obvious explanation for this feeling is the fact that King Easan has forbidden the practice of wizardry within his dominion, and his subjects are, in this as in everything, quick to obey him; but a deeper philosophical bias is probably also at work.

In our discussion of this subject Father Shadowcloak pointed out that the vital energies—that mysterious *élan vital* or “life force” which animates all living things—and “magic” in the broader sense are largely indistinguishable in the Vechorite experience. To allow the flow of this life force through oneself is natural and proper; to “trap” it in books is deeply unnatural and causes it to stagnate and become corrupt, just as standing water breeds pestilence while flowing water remains pure.

Father Shadowcloak informed me that he received permission to practice wizardry after a personal interview with King Easan, and said that anyone who wishes to do likewise may try his luck. From his smile as he said it, I would be inclined to interpret this as more a warning than an invitation.

## *Religion*

The people of Vechor are either entirely non-religious, or their life is permeated, even dominated, by religion; either viewpoint would seem to be valid, depending on one's criteria of judgment. They frankly

## *Perilous use of a spellbook*

Sorcerous talent is extremely common in Vechor—so much so as to be a common feature of life there. Easan finds such talents too random to be exploited profitably. Wizards, on the other hand, generally have spellbooks and arcane educations, both of which are highly useful sources of information for the Wizard-King. Any wizard who enters Vechor and is willing to brazen out a meeting with Easan may possibly leave with permission to practice wizardry, if he can convince Easan that he will be more useful as a collaborator than as a spellbook and raw materials. If a wizard visiting Vechor can successfully pretend to be a sorcerer he or she will have no difficulty, but if Easan or any of his subjects learns a wizard has entered his domain that person will be immediately summoned to his manor for an involuntary interview. Such unfortunates are almost never seen again.

acknowledge their king to be a god; they also acknowledge him to be mad, and the source of the weird mutability for which their homeland is so famous. However, they do not worship him in any way which would be intelligible to a foreigner more accustomed to the organized religions of the Core; there is no scripture, no creed, no catechism, no cathedral, chapel or clergy.

This is not to say, however, that some of the most important elements of religion are absent from Vechorian society. A close observer will note that Vechorian daily life is permeated with simple rituals—brief, near-reflexive actions with a spiritual, or at least a superstitious, import. These rituals vary from place to place and from family to family; as best I could discover they are a random accretion of actions which were once found to be “effective” in a particular moment and

which are now repeated in the hope that they may actually have some power. I advance this hypothesis after discussing these actions with as many Vechorians as I could get to talk about the subject as possible; most were either unwilling to discuss the subject or dismissed the actions as habits (although they were surprised, even shocked, when I asked why they did not simply discontinue them). Those who were willing to offer a justification generally responded that it was intended to ensure a favorable outcome for their actions; only rarely did they give any symbolic meaning to their gestures. (For example, one man I became acquainted with routinely raised both hands toward the sun whenever leaving a building; he did not claim that this was to greet or honor the sun, as I expected, but rather that it brought good fortune.)

It seems to me that these random and idiosyncratic rituals are a product of the instability of their homeland; the Vechorians endeavor to control their environment by a constant stream of ritual and propitiation in the hope of influencing the random flow of events around them in their favor. Despite the fact that these rituals vary so widely, they are recognized and respected by other Vechorians immediately; virtually any eccentric act which does not impinge on the comfort of others will go unremarked by other Vechorians.

Another aspect of Vechorian "religious" belief which outlanders find bizarre in the extreme is their habit of ascribing volition to inanimate objects; Vechorians speak to trees, roads, buildings, the sun and moon, and tools in much the same way they would to one another. They do not converse with such things, of course; they do not expect answers if they address something incapable of speech. They do, however, believe that such things have feelings and perceptions and can be put into a helpful (or unhelpful) mood by the way in which they are addressed and used. This animism has certain religious features, and is often important in the rituals mentioned previously; such rituals can be seen as a way of remaining in tune with the world around them, or asking that he world be in tune with them. It is not very much of

an exaggeration to say that Vechorians perceive everything in their surroundings to be evidences of, or emanations from, a deity. (It is natural to ask if this deity is their king; although the surmise is a natural one, and probably contains an element of truth, it is difficult to get any useful answer from Vechorians on this subject.)

These things together produced another rather comical effect; when Vechorians first met missionary clerics from the Core and were told of Ezra and the Lawgiver, they asked when these gods would appear in person to introduce themselves. On hearing that no such thing was expected to occur any time soon, they promptly lost all interest in the Ezran religion and the Iron Faith, and have never shown any inclination to change their minds on the subject. Any god which is unwilling or unable to make a personal appearance to canvass for support will probably never make inroads into Vechorian society.

## *Art and Trade*

Many of those who count themselves citizens of Abdok live on and work small farms near the city, which supply most of the country's food and much of its exports. (Only one of the many benefits of this journey of exploration has been the chance to feast on pineapple, mango and banana at my pleasure; this and other tropical delicacies are unbelievably cheap by the standards of the western Core, and may be enjoyed by even the poorest Vechorites.) There is little or no industry in Vechor producing finished goods for foreign sale, although the domestic pottery and textile industries thrive, largely to the exclusion of foreign goods. The sheer number and variety of raw trade goods—exotics foods, timber and spices, not to mention the gold and other precious metals and stones taken from mines in the interior—form the main impetus for trade with the mainland, and the market square of Abdok bustles five days of the week with merchants from the Core and even beyond trading for such mainstay crops as coffee and sugar.



## Vechor

Even with the costs of overland transport to the western Core, the price of import from Vechor is reliably lower than from Sri Raji or still more exotic places, and the ports of Nova Vaasa are notably enriched by the trade passing through them from Vechor to points west. Business is generally conducted by barter and the tally stick, rather than by coins and account books; Vechorites have an uncanny memory for any verbal agreement, and the first Nova Vaasan merchant who thought he could take advantage of his verbal contract to alter the terms to his benefit several months after the fact was torn apart by an enraged mob of Vechorites—a death which has inspired a truly remarkable diligence among foreign merchants in meeting their business obligations to the native population.

## History

The Vechorites have almost no written history, making any detailed analysis of their local history almost impossible. They do, however, have a strong oral tradition, centered largely on genealogy; virtually all Vechorites can describe their family tree in mind-numbing detail, extending well back into the domain's false history. In speaking of past events they generally use generational references to indicate when something occurred—that is, “In the year my uncle was married” or “in my great-grandfather's youth”. Births, deaths and marriages—the central and most stable points of their culture—are their historical touchstones, and other events are usually considered to be of secondary importance.

Of course, when speaking with someone who does not know when “grand-grandfather” might have lived, some other frame of reference is necessary; the Vechorites have a series of major events which roughly delineate certain eras of their past, which I attached in the appendix. (Note that, unless these dates can be correlated to some event occurring outside the domain, they are necessarily inexact. I am very grateful to Father Shadowcloak for sharing

his ideas on the most likely time points for these events.)

## Government

The word of King Easan is the law of Vechor. He rarely makes pronouncements of any kind, apart from a standing order to deliver any wizard or book of magic or arcane knowledge to him immediately, but any he does make is obeyed immediately and to the letter. Disobedience to their king seems to be almost literally unthinkable to the Vechorites. In other matters their “legal practice” is literally anarchic. There are no “laws” in any ordinary sense, and no formal government. The unusual (indeed, rather eerie) cohesion of Vechorite society apparently make a formal legal structure superfluous. Every Vechorite knows what is acceptable and what is not, and as a people they show a truly unusual disposition to keep within their self-imposed strictures. That may be in part because the range of behavior tolerated is quite wide; given their attitude toward personal possessions, crimes against property are virtually impossible.

If a Vechorite commits some unforgivable social solecism (rare, but possible), the penalty is shunning; the guilty party is not spoken to or acknowledged by anyone, and usually wanders into the wilderness to live as a hermit or to die in solitude. In more extreme circumstances (to deal with someone believed to be a murderer, a rapist, or a thief, for example) Vechorites will simply gather together in a mob and slaughter the unfortunate, quite without the legal preliminaries and concern for justice or false accusation which a foreign miscreant might expect. If one discovers that he has been accused by a Vechorite of anything, he should make himself scarce immediately; if the Vechorite cares enough to denounce the person to his neighbors, he cares enough to kill the object of his wrath.

## Conclusions

Vechor strikes my imagination as a place of ever-change, with its dose of mysteries and possibilities for the Fraternity. If we ever could understand the nature behind the changes happening here, we would advance our knowledge of the plane tremendously. Now, I think I understand a little bit better why Father Shadowcloak is staying here.

Other than that, Vechor is a strange, remote place, with insignificant political forces. While the island has a large

population of people able with a bow, the population's peaceful nature isn't strategically threatening to the Nocturnal Sea.

Before I left, Drakaina said something about a deep fear she felt that we'll never meet again, and her sad eyes went watery, something very unusual for vechorites. I reassured her as much as I could, and promised that I would be back in Abdok as soon as I could. After I made my poignant adieux to Drakaina, I embarked on the *Valiant Explorer* for the Isle of Ravens as my next stop.

## Unreality Wrinkles

Unique among the Core domains, Vechor is a realm in which madness permeates all, contorting and twisting the fabric of reality. Vechorites rightly blame their "divine" king's insanity for these wild distortions of the natural order. Unknown to his subjects, however, the elf darklord's lack of control over his flawed and fractured mind – a mind subverted by a fiendish spirit – has left his domain equally open to the subversive influence of other insane minds within its borders.

When Easan's attention is directed elsewhere, the insanities of Madness-sufferers in his land seize control over their own immediate surroundings, affecting Vechor's terrain, its physics, or even (in the worst of cases) its human residents. Such distortions of reality aren't usually controlled or understood by the person whose Madness creates them, and may even threaten their unwitting source. The magnitude and consequences of these shifts are dictated not by the personal power of the afflicted, but by the severity and nature of their creators' Madness effects.

Unlike outsiders' reality wrinkles, the "unreality wrinkles" generated by the insane don't function as pocket domains: they cannot penetrate Vechor's borders, nor do they suppress Easan's control of his territory. Easan can snuff out others' unreality wrinkles as an intentional free action, or by imposing changes of his own on the location where the wrinkle appears. Vechor's darklord does not automatically sense an unreality wrinkle's presence; indeed, it is his *lack* of notice that makes such localized distortions possible. Deciding when his attention lapses, thus letting an unreality wrinkle take temporary hold over the Land, is left to DMs' discretion.

## Minor, Moderate, and Major Wrinkle-Effects

For victims who suffer from Madness effects, yet are not Lost Ones, the effects of their unreality wrinkles are relatively predictable. The sensory manifestations of such wrinkles may vary widely – for example, Blackout might fill the room with an impenetrable fog rather than darkness – but their practical consequences should be similar to what follows. In the cases below, the wrinkle's source creates these effects subconsciously, unaware that he or she is doing so, and the results are treated as extraordinary rather than magical for purposes of spell resistance, detection, etc.

**Blackout:** Rather than being shaken at first, the Madness-victim triggers a 30-foot radius *Deeper Darkness* effect lasting 5d6 rounds, centered on himself. Memory loss does not occur, and the victim is considered fully recovered from Madness once the *Deeper Darkness* lifts.

**Denial:** The Madness-victim gains the benefit of *Sanctuary* against the threat that prompted the Madness save, with a Will DC equal to the failed save. Only this particular threat is subject to the *Sanctuary* effect, which lingers until the victim fully recovers from Denial.

**Horried:** The Madness-victim's appalled state permeates her immediate surroundings, imbuing other horrific experiences with still-greater awfulness. All later Horror saves rolled by the victim, or by others within 30', suffer a -4 morale penalty until she recovers fully from Madness.

**Unhinged:** Normal laws of probability break down in the victim's vicinity, making even routine activities' outcome less than certain. Until his destabilized mind has recovered from Madness, it becomes impossible to Take 10 or Take 20 within 30' of the wrinkle-generating character.

**Delusions:** The victim's delusions begin coming true, with outcomes similar to a *Polymorph* or *Major Image* spell. Which one depends on the nature of the delusion: a victim convinced she has endless wealth might make pebbles resemble coins, while one who believes she changes into a ravening werewolf would gain the movement and natural or extraordinary attacks (but not the appearance or other powers) of a werewolf when her "transformation" strikes. If a source thinks she can hurl *Fireballs*, she can do so, but the resulting "fireballs" are illusions with a disbelief DC equal to her failed Madness save. Delusion-based wrinkle effects' range is limited to 60'.

**Depression:** The Madness-victim's lassitude, detachment and gloom spread outwards, dragging time's subjective passage to a crawl. Each time the victim fails a Will save to take an action, all other creatures within 60' must pass a Fort (not Will) save at the same DC, or be affected as by a *Slow* spell. Creatures who succumb remain slowed until they leave the unreality wrinkle, or until the Madness-victim either takes an action successfully, or recovers from Depression.

**Hallucinations:** Conjured into reality by the insane victim's confused psyche, his hallucinations begin to manifest to others, not just himself. Those within 60' of the wrinkle's source experience the same *Major Image*-equivalent visions as him, including potential Fear and Horror saves (but not the -2 penalty) and the threat of nonlethal damage. Witnesses other than the victim can try to disbelieve these visions, at the same DC as his failed Madness save; success protects the witness from harm, but does nothing to end the hallucinatory episode.

**Paranoia:** All Fear saves made within 60' of the Madness-victim suffer a -5 morale penalty. In addition, the victim's effective OR is increased by +5, for interactions with all Vecchorite NPCs or native monsters. Both these effects last until the victim recovers fully from Paranoia.

**Amnesia:** As amnesiacs' Madness affects only their memory, not their perception of reality, this Madness-effect does not generate unreality wrinkles.

**Multiple Personalities:** The victim's various alter-egos and fragments cease sharing a body with the core personality, functioning as separate presences. When the core personality gives way to another, the Madness-victim's body falls into a comatose state, and the now-dominant persona appears in the victim's square. Fragments manifest in an intangible state, as if by *Project Image*, becoming tangible only if necessary to employ their sole ability or skill. Alter-egos manifest as physical beings with the victim's current statistics, save racial traits (which reflect the alter-ego's race) and loss of abilities which are spurned by the alter-ego.

Either type of personality stays manifested until another identity displaces it, or until it tires or otherwise voluntarily relinquishes control. If the core personality reasserts itself, it reclaims and wakes up in the Madness-victim's true body. If another fragment or alter-ego displaces the first, the new persona's projection appears in the catatonic body's space, and the previous one vanishes (often with a parting remark or verbal protest). Alternate personalities cannot leave the victim's unreality wrinkle, vanishing if they move more than 120' from the real body; this gives the core personality an immediate Will save to regain dominance, as if the victim had woken from sleep.

**Schizophrenia:** One of the deadliest unreality wrinkles, a schizophrenic's wrinkle imposes the sufferer's internal chaos upon those around her, swamping them in confusion and driving them to deranged violence. Each time the schizophrenic fails a Will save, creatures within 120' must pass a Will save with the DC of her original Madness save, or suffer the effects of a *Confusion* spell. This effect has no set time limit; rather, all those who succumb are confused until they achieve an "act normally" result, or leave the wrinkle's 120' radius. Rendering the Madness-victim dead or unconscious also ends the *Confusion* effect for all targets.

**Suicidal Thoughts:** The Madness-victim's death wish turns the unreality wrinkle into a potential deathtrap, for him and all those around him. Attack rolls which strike targets within the wrinkle's 120' radius always achieve a threat, and damaging spell-effects or special attacks are enhanced as by the Empower Spell feat. This effect lasts until the wrinkle's source either recovers, is slain, or succeeds in killing himself.

### *Dread Possibility: Davion the Many-Souled*

Normally, a Madness-victim with Multiple Personalities manifests those personalities as separate presences within an unreality wrinkle. Some years ago, however, a deranged outlander wandered into Vechor: a human wizard named Davion, who physically transformed into his alternates. His wrinkle was as powerful as any Lost One's; on his arrival, it afflicted the Vechorite village of Thornewood with a terrible earthquake, then transformed it in synch with Davion's own changes.

Investigating, Easan discovered that Davion was no normal madman, but the product of a botched *Wish* that had fused the unlucky wizard, body and soul, with his three human hirelings. Intrigued by how this man's condition resembled his own, Vechor's darklord deliberately forfeited control of Thornewood to the stranger, letting Davion (CE male Wiz15) and his merged souls – Augustus (LN male Wiz10), Boromar (CN male Ftr10), and Narana (NE female Clr16 [Loviatar]) – all take turns ruling over (respectively) Thornewood, Arcanon, Boromar's Knoll, and Pallatia.

Davion's unreality wrinkle encompasses five square miles. Like him, it shifts between identities many times a day. The local population remains unaware of these changes, as they likewise shift from traumatized quake-survivors to sober scholars to hardy frontiersmen to devout worshippers along with their village. Davion's fused hirelings are unaware that they share a body; if told the truth, they forget this information when they cede control to him or to one another. The hirelings each possess their own individual statistics, but slaying one of them or extracting them from the gestalt by magic only removes them from the identity-rotation for 24 hours.

As for Davion, he is well aware of his curious state, and savors it. So long as their souls remain trapped within him, the evil wizard realizes that he can't be slain unless all three of his alter-egos are killed also. Capricious and power-mad, he can utilize the abilities of his hirelings – Narana's rebuking, Boromar's Base Attack Bonus and combat feats, Narana's and Augustus's spells, etc – as if they were acting in his place. If Davion is slain, his body shifts forms randomly to one of the other three; if Augustus, Boromar, or Narana are slain, Davion's identity immediately takes over.

Davion has but one nagging thorn in his side: that Easan (who has interviewed him several times) possesses greater power than himself. Too disordered in his present muddled state to devise a plan to usurp rulership of Vechor, the many-souled mage can do little more than *dream* of being the absolute and dreaded master of a realm – in a word, a darklord – when he forfeits their mutual body to his hirelings' control and slips into latent slumber.

Somewhere in the depths of the Mists, in a realm ruled by dreams as Vechor is ruled by madness, Davion's stymied longings might very well come true...

## *Lost Ones and Unreality Wrinkles*

While victims of less-desperate forms of Madness retain enough logic, common sense, or strength of selfhood to limit their wrinkles to one or two effects, those whose minds have caved in entirely – those whom Ravenloft's natives call "Lost Ones" – lack these constraints. Unreality wrinkles generated by Lost Ones are nearly as potent as Easan's own control over the landscape of Vechor, able to induce tangible and drastic changes in the sufferer's surroundings. These changes' nature depends on what psychoses, fantasies, or fears haunt the individual Lost One; some wrinkles are barely perceptible, save one discrepancy (e.g. its source is escorted by a person or creature that doesn't actually exist), while others teem with as much oddity as a dream ... or a nightmare.



A Lost One's wrinkle has a 240' radius, takes immediate hold whenever Easan's attentions are directed elsewhere, and ceases to actively distort reality only when the Lost One is unconscious or dead. Even then, any physical (but not mental) changes imposed upon objects or creatures by the wrinkle will linger, unless and until Easan's power as darklord restores them to their previous state. (Many of the temporary disturbances which Vechorites attribute to their king's insanity are actually generated by Lost Ones.) Even the domain's native human population is susceptible to these changes, although Vechorites do receive a saving throw (Will or Fortitude as applicable) at DC 15 to resist being mentally or physically altered. Usually, Lost Ones undergo fits or seizures when their wrinkles induce a change in their surroundings, preventing them from performing any actions during the same round; this is not universal, however.

In metagame terms, DMs may use Lost Ones' unreality wrinkles to establish ambience, to add an additional element of challenge to scenarios, or to change the mood of Vechor's inherent madness from its usual chaos to something specific: fear, despair, frustration, etc. An adventure might also center upon identifying the source of a harmful wrinkle, and confining, curing, or eliminating that source. Unlike Madness-victims who yet retain a vestige of normalcy, some Lost Ones develop a voluntary control over their wrinkles' effects – to them, it's only natural that their anger or desire should trigger a response from the world – so a fugitive Lost One might develop unique powers that help the wrinkle-source hide from, or fight back against, pursuers.

Like Vechor itself, Lost Ones' unreality wrinkles constitute a license for the DM's imagination to run wild, limited only by the PCs' need for challenges and players' need for fun.

## *Unreality Wrinkles and Recovery*

Because a Madness-victim who generates an unreality wrinkle is constantly exposed to proof her insanities are "real", all recovery checks made while inside a wrinkle suffer a -3 circumstance penalty. Should multiple Madness-victims be confined in close quarters, such that their unreality wrinkles overlap, these penalties stack. Not surprisingly, any attempt to establish a successful sanitarium in Vechor is doomed to failure: overlapping wrinkles would render cures impossible.

## *Dungeon Master's Tips: Vecchor and the Techniques of Terror*

At first glance, Vecchor seems like a dubious place to send your players, because of the overall weirdness of this domain. Other than seeing Easan's grotesque experiments, it can be tricky to maintain a horrific or gothic atmosphere in such a bizarre, everchanging land. Here are a few recommendations to help DMs.

Try to picture this place as *Alice in Wonderland* meets Stephen King on a bad acid trip: yes, the glowing yellow butterflies always flying above your head are weird, but it can quickly become frightening when you find out their touch is poisonous! DMs should describe Vecchor's creepiness as potentially dangerous, not just odd, and so turn its bizarre nature into an asset for creating suspense, rather than a liability. In a realm where the very ground beneath one's feet can't always be trusted to stay put, even routine activities such as walking across town can become an exercise in tension and uncertainty.

The way Vecchorites react to their realm's strangeness with a nonchalant shrug can also enhance the atmosphere of isolation, making foreign PCs feel alienated and unsure. Realizing that Vecchorites actually force themselves to be happy and content, so their "benevolent god" won't appear and try to improve their lives, can be a disturbing realization for players. Nor should DMs forget that the natives' usual detachment can shift abruptly to insanity or ugly mob violence, with little provocation. Stringing up the nearest convenient scapegoat can be very cathartic!

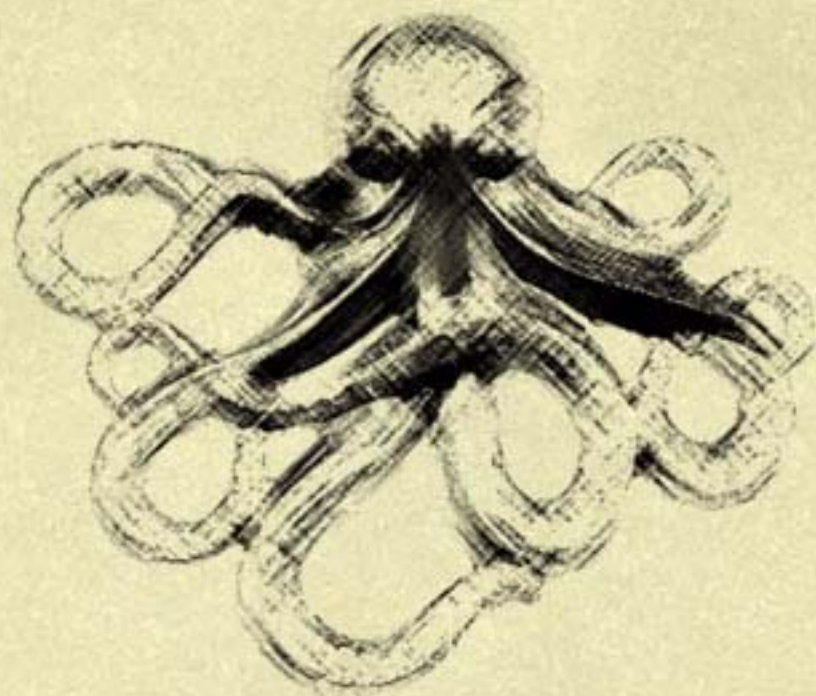
Vecchor is a place where you can portray the disturbing atmosphere with a paintbrush, not just a fine-tipped pen. Much like the *RLDMG's* ideas on how areas of ethereal resonance might appear from the Ether, in Vecchor, the landscape can be played for ambience in ways that would seem grossly heavy-handed, anywhere else. This can, potentially, be a lot of fun for DMs to describe, and PCs might well see the effects of their accomplishments mirrored in the physical environment: if they succeed on an adventure to appease Easan's bad temper, for instance, the landscape might suddenly shift from barren wasteland to rainbows and fluffy bunnies. (Over the top? Extremely ... except for Vecchor.)

On a more sophisticated note, Vecchor is also a place in which to explore the ramifications of insanity, in ways that suspense films like *The Cell* and serious novels like *The Eden Express* have done. On a large scale, Easan's erratic and fractured mental state predominates within the domain; using "unreality wrinkles", other forms of Madness may also be explored. In Vecchor, insanity can't simply be locked away and forgotten: even when the land seems stable enough, it's always simmering beneath the surface. Stakes are high when dealing with such threats, because so many bystanders may be swept up in the storm of a madman's wild fantasies.

One way to showcase Vecchor's scariness is if the PCs are pursuing a mad serial killer (or any deranged villain from your campaign), who recently escaped to Vecchor. There, the killer will be at ease with all the madness, but the PCs are at a disadvantage, as the environment becomes stranger at every turn. This unearthly atmosphere can ratchet up the tension in the subsequent cat-and-mouse game, where the Land itself can turn the hunter into the hunted. The scares will increase if Easan learns of the hunt and tries to 'spice it up' for his own entertainment -- all traces of the prey are suddenly erased or change direction, walls appear in the PCs' path, etc -- or if the killer's own Madness spawns an unreality wrinkle that aids the villain's escape.

Lastly, Vecchor can serve as a potential release-valve for those days when players just won't take the game seriously. For even the best DMs, there are always times when nobody can stay in character, and players just can't resist tossing around movie quotes or bad puns at the gaming table. Sending their PCs on a quick foray into Vecchor provides a handy avenue for them to get the smart-aleck remarks and anachronisms out of their systems, without disrupting the wider (and serious) course of a campaign.

# INTERLUDE



*They ran through the streets of the seaport town,  
They peered from the decks of the ships that lay;  
The cold sea-fog that came whitening down  
Was never as cold or white as they.*

*A Greyport Legend, Bret Harte (1797)*



*Interlude I*

*Thermal chart*



## Interlude I

*"The fogs of the Nocturnal Sea are always there. Do you know why? It's a sign that the great void is not far away. Sail too far from the coast, and you will fall off the end of the world and into the great void of nothingness beyond."*

*-Common belief around Arbora*

*By Viktor Hazan, early August 760*

Leaving Liffe for Île de la Tempête, I didn't realize it was going to turn so much colder as the *Black Pelican* headed south. I should certainly have brought a few more layers of Mordentish wool for this trip. From what I have read about Île de la Tempête, there will be no tailors' shops in that barren place.

While important local weather concerns will be addressed in each section of this report, here's a little guidance for climate-conscious Brethren. Depending on where you intend to sail, you could need clothes for hot, mild, or very cold weather. Bring protection from the near-constant drizzle and winds, and against flies and mosquitoes in wetter areas.

It's curious that despite the modest distance and lack of intervening land masses between Vechor and Todstein, their temperatures are so different. Vechor and its environs are hot to the point of being tropical, while Todstein stays frozen almost year-round. The weather becomes temperate as one moves away from these two extremes.

Drawing on resources from the University of Liffe's cartography department, I compiled a map of average Nocturnal Sea temperatures, color-coded as follows:

*Table 1: Average Temperatures (F)*

Color zone	Summer	Winter
Red	85° +	60-65°
Orange (dark)	75-80°	50-55°
Orange (light)	70-75°	40-45°
Yellow	60-65°	30-35°
Green	50-60°	25-30°
Blue	<50°	20-30°

The water temperature itself is mostly cold, being about 50° in the yellow zone all year long, rising up to 70° near Vechor's coast. In the green and blue zones near Graben Island or Todstein, seawater temperatures often dip below the freezing point during prolonged winters. One Grabenite ancient even claimed that decades ago, in an exceptionally harsh winter, Todstein and Graben Island became linked by a bridge of ice, but I wasn't able to confirm this anywhere else.

Wind is strong and violent on the Nocturnal Sea, likely due to the collision between hot and cold air in the temperate "belt" between Vechor and Todstein. The only exception is in the interior of Liffe and Vechor, or a few other places where hills or thick forest slows the wind. The constant gusts, combined with high maritime humidity, makes temperatures often feel even lower in cold weather, but slightly more comfortable in hot climes.

The sky is perennially cloaked by unbroken, gray clouds, which doesn't help the mood of foreign travelers on this bleak sea. Save in the heart of Liffe and Vechor, or very near to the mainland, I saw nary a patch of blue sky, let alone actual sunshine. Captain Howe confirmed the reality of the morose scenery, saying he'd not seen the sun break through even once in these waters. Such perpetually overcast conditions force sailors to navigate via magnetic instruments, or to follow well-known routes by habit and intuition.

### *Nocturnal Sea Magic Ratings*

For campaigns using this "optional rule", Liffe's MR is 3 (with scattered pockets of 4+). Vechor fluctuates wildly, through the full range from 0 to 6. Île de la Tempête is 3, Isle of Ravens is 5, Graben Island is 2, Todstein is 5 (with occasional peaks of 6), and the sea's surface as a whole is 3. Underwater, the Nocturnal Sea's default MR is likewise 3.

## Interlude I

### *Navigating in the Nocturnal Sea*

#### *Adapted from Stormwrack*

Due to the permanently cloud-cover and limited range of vision, setting sail on the Nocturnal Sea is dangerous. It is very easy to go off course. The stars are never visible, so conventional methods of orientation such as sextants are useless. Indeed, errant vessels have been found adrift, the crew dead of thirst or starvation: a terrifying prospect, given the modest size of the sea.

Sailors in the Nocturnal Sea who venture out of sight of landmarks have to succeed a Knowledge (geography) DC 15 check each day, or go off course. A typical ship captain has 6 or more ranks in Knowledge (geography).

Going off course on this sea usually means taking longer to get to one's destination. The travel time is increased by one day for each two-point difference between the check result and the DC. Thus, a check of 11 vs DC 15 means an extra two days' sailing to reach one's destination.

If a Knowledge (geography) check is missed by 7 or more points, the vessel is totally lost, and has in fact wandered into the Mists. The ship's eventual time and location of exit – which sea? which domain? an oubliette? – is DM's choice.

Even if a ship is already off-course, the DC 15 must be checked each day, potentially extending the delay even further before reaching the destination. During these nerve-racking periods of wandering, the only things visible are the vast, dark sea and overcast sky.

The following modifiers apply to the DC of the navigator's skill check, on *the first day* at sea:

Starting point well-known:	+ 0	Arrival point very familiar:	+ 0
Starting point uncertain:	+ 3	Arrival point seen a few times:	+ 3
Starting point guessed at:	+ 5	Arrival point seen once:	+5
Starting point unknown:	+ 9	Arrival point never seen:	+ 9

The following modifiers apply to the DC check *each day at sea, including the first one*:

Access to a reliable map:	- 5
Effective use of a magnetic compass:	- 5
Storm or dense fog during more than half of the day:	+ 10
For each previous day spent off course, cumulative:	+1

**Storms:** Strong storms (see *Stormwrack* p. 23) are extremely common in the Nocturnal Sea, and the "severe" and "gale" grades of storm are plentiful too. Under strong storms and other severe conditions, all vessels' speed is divided by half, and even more so during severe storms or gales.

Awesome storms form swiftly and regularly over the sea; black clouds alight with violent lightning-flashes, and great claps of thunder rumble overhead. Most captains attempt to circumvent these squalls, but it's not always possible. During the most terrible of storms, buckets of rain hurtle down as if the roiling waves had turned on end.

Even when it's not raining, a light salt spray often fills the air. Near Vechor, this makes a traveler both uncomfortable and itchy, while in the south it can chill unprotected flesh to the bone. During the winter, this spray soon freezes and accumulates on a ship's exposed surfaces, rendering both the deck and masts dangerously slippery, and coating its rigging with heavy ice. This makes the vessel much slower and awkward to maneuver. To cap off this miserable weather-report, Howe tells me that sudden, cruel hailstorms also strike at sea, whatever the season.

Of special importance to arcane practitioners like ourselves are the odd intervals of "dead magic" that strike this region. On such days, no arcane spell or item, however potent or weak, will function: the eldritch forces upon which secular magic draws simply refuse to manifest. They are primarily reported in the southern reaches beyond Île de la Tempête, but traveling arcanists in the Sound of Liffe have occasionally met with such also.

I didn't directly experience this phenomenon during my journeys – an experience I cannot bring myself to regret missing out on – but I learned of such occurrences from the arcane university students in Armeikos. One of my most promising pupils (for whom I penned an

## *Mistways of the Nocturnal Sea*

The *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* reveals that two well-documented Mistways link the Nocturnal Sea to other corners of the Land of Mists:

**The Jackal's Ruse:** East-Central Nocturnal Sea (about 15 miles southwest of Île de la Tempête, in an area where hot and cold winds clash) – Western Har'Akir (moderate reliability, one way). Entering this Mistway is a bane to most vessels, as it leaves the ship stranded on a sand dune in the Akiri desert. Strange, mummified, fishlike remains have been found jutting out of the sand at this Mistway's terminus; such finds imply that it may also function underwater, although whether it deposits undersea travelers atop the sands or beneath them is unknown.

**Wake of the Loa:** Northwestern Nocturnal Sea (a short distance northeast of Nevuchar Springs) – Northern Souragne (moderate reliability, two way). This Mistway connects two bodies of salt water, so can be traversed by vessels and sea creatures alike in relative safety.

Six other, little-known Mistways are discussed in this report: **The Road of the Lost**, **The Sleep of Reason** and **The Somnambulist's Path** in Vechor; the **Call of the Claw** and **Ship of Horrors**, discussed in Nebligtode's section, and **The Lighthouse's Beam** of Île de la Tempête.

introductory letter to our Brethren in Darkon) compiled his thesis on the recorded historical occurrences of those "dead magic" days over the last decade. His conclusion is that they are either truly random, or adhere to some millennial cycle too long to be deduced from the few years' time this sea has existed for study.

Due cause for wariness, on arcanists' part! I shudder to imagine the fate of any conjurer who might hold a powerful fiend captive in a circle of protection, on such a day...

Sudden, huge waves can pose severe danger to sailors. Storms, tremors, or other natural (or unnatural) causes can agitate a quiescent surface into a churning mess, with waves up to sixty feet tall not unheard-of. Howe says that Grabenites once reported a wave over a hundred feet high crashing against their sea-cliffs! Facing such liquid behemoths, even trusty seamen like *Black Pelican's* captain can do naught but pray Ezra's mercy.

### *Days of Magic Void*

On the darklord Meredoth's native world, wizards fear the one day out of a year when magic ceases to function. When his domain of Nebligtode was created, similar periods of "dead magic" were incorporated into it as well; however, such days are not fixed on the calendar. As the magic-suppressing days strike without warning, Meredoth and other arcanists do not have a chance to prepare for the event. Many of the necromancer's own works-in-progress have thus been ruined.

It should be noted that Nebligtode's "Magic Void" days only impede *arcane* spellcasters. Both divine magic and monsters' spell-like abilities work normally. For arcane spells or items which reproduce arcane effects, their effects fizzle as if disrupted during casting.

Sometimes years pass between magic-dead days; other times, they strike three or four times in a year. Beyond the damage to his arcane projects, Meredoth loathes these days because he is vulnerable without his spells. If scholars ever could calculate the next Day of Magic Void, Nebligtode's darklord could be in serious trouble.



The temperate arm lying southwest of Ile de la Tempête (in yellow on the map) is truly infamous. Pinioned between cold and hot climes, the mixing of air here generates the worst of the storms that afflict the Nocturnal Sea with rain, wind and waves. This erratic weather, along with the Selbstmorde reefs nearby, rumors of aquatic monsters, and the odd iceberg drifting in from the south, cause sailors to shun the area, keeping to a course well east of Île de la Tempête.

The chief hazards in the south are the huge, floating chunks of ice which sometimes drift as far north as the Isle of Ravens. Icebergs are most abundant near Todstein, but spread generally westward to within spyglass-range of Graben Island each spring. Howe reminds me that only about one-tenth of an iceberg protrudes from the water. Together with this region's myriad other threats, icebergs make the southern Nocturnal the most dangerous sea in the known world to navigate.

To make it worse, these icy hull-splitters are all but invisible, when cloaked by a storm or sea fog. Dense vapor can cut visibility down to a mere 50 feet! Matthew, the *Pelican's* first mate, says that experienced captains won't halt their ships in the fog, despite the icebergs' peril, because supernatural dangers lurk in its depths which are even deadlier. Instead of dropping anchor, they will call for lanterns, impose silence on the deck, and cut the ship's speed by half, while two lookouts are posted at the prow to watch for hazards, lashed to the rail for safety. Icebergs, I am told, are the least of threats they watch for.

Sailors usually describe Nocturnal Sea fogs in leery, awestruck terms, similar to how landlubbers speak of the Mists. Straying off-course in fog-bound seas is a terrifying

prospect to such men: those who have been lost, thus, and emerged intact, tell of hearing bells tolling in the distance, somber voices of loved ones, or pained and fearful outcries from within the haze, or of glimpsing lights no other soul on board can see.

There are (of course) many local legends of gruesome sea monsters and diabolical fish-men. Some of these stories might be inflated accounts of genuine marine creatures, like that of a pack of ravenous, man-eating orcas; swarming tentacles; marauding, pitch-black undead whales; or a huge demonic kraken, its clutching arms' girth equal to a galleon's. Others seem like allegories for these waters' deadly natural hazards, such as feral swarms of vaporous creatures that drive crews mad before slaughtering them (a clear metaphor for the dreaded fogs); a feral wind-demon whose wailing cries likewise strip men of their sanity (storms embodied, surely!); or alluring sirens with blood-freezing kisses (a romantic parable for the lethal, yet often beautiful icebergs).

Even stranger stories circulate, such as tales of water-breathing elves (!) escorted through the depths by wraith-like octopi, or trains of rope-linked rafts found adrift: vacant, blood-splattered and claw-raked. Reason dictates these can only be sheer fantasy, yet the tales are evocative, even so. Watching one of the icy monoliths slowly drifting by the *Pelican* one morning, I could not help but shiver, as the crew's tales left me wondering just what sort of slimy horror might cling to the berg's belly, riding it toward the coast.

Lastly, burials at sea are not to be neglected as a source of potential legendry. Many tales speak of sailors coming back after a botched or disregarded sea-burial. Indeed, one account I heard in Armeikos spoke of entire *fleets* of sodden ships with shambling corpse-crews – more dead than have ever sailed these new-made waters, let alone *drowned* in them! – rising from the seabed, to course back and forth in the Nevuchar Channel. (That the old salt who related this tale described it as a “blockade” inclines me to take this particular story at its

face value, given how we Brethren know the Great King's terrestrial borders are warded.)

Fantastical though they seem, I do not think *all* the other stories should be discounted as hearsay. This sea is immense, and its depths may be unfathomable, for all we know. In the deeper abyss, blind and hungry monsters even greater than the sailors' fancies may crawl upon the muddy sea floor...

*Our nearly-hysterical biologist had not overstated in the least the unnaturalness of the sight. In the span of a handful of hours, seals, dolphins, sharks, small whales and even a pair of immense ones, the like of which we had never seen, swam listlessly into the shallow bay and threw themselves upon the smear of undulating goo which blanketed the beach. The bleached-pale stuff would seize the unfortunate creatures and set to ripping the very bones from them, the searing pain rousing the prey too late from the stupor that was its undoing.*

*Perhaps worse still, waist deep in the water, witnessing the spectacle or presiding over it, were nightmarish fish-men: some coming, some going, some standing as if spellbound, others chanting (if you could call it that), as though it were High Mass. At last, Ensign Campbell pondered aloud whether a rifle shot might be in order, but given the horrid hybrids' numbers, saving the bullet seemed the wiser course.*

*We sculled silently back into the shelter of the rock outcrop, then set to rowing for our lives, desperate for the imagined safety of our ship. Reaching it, we implored Captain Gladstone to raise anchor and return east into the eerie fogbank, putting with all haste the island – which I have since learned is called “Todstein” – well astern of us.*

*- From Bristol To Mordentshire: An Outlander's Tale, autobiography of James Duegon*



## Encounters on the Sea Surface (any domain)

### Wildlife

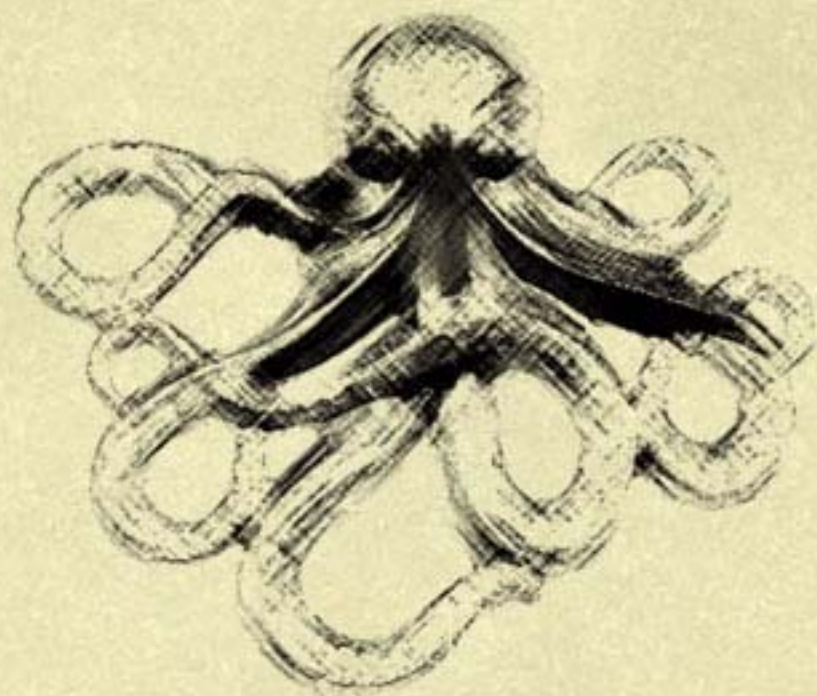
- CR 1/4:** albatross<sup>Sto</sup>;  
**CR 1/3:** sea snake<sup>Sto</sup>; seal<sup>Sto, Fro</sup>; stingray<sup>Sto</sup>;  
**CR 1/2:** barracuda<sup>Sto, QTR9</sup>; eel<sup>Sto</sup>; jellyfish, giant<sup>QTR9</sup>; porpoise<sup>MM1</sup>;  
**CR 1:** manta ray<sup>MM1</sup>; octopus<sup>MM1</sup>; sea lion<sup>Sto</sup>; shark<sup>MM1</sup>; squid<sup>MM1</sup>;  
**CR 3:** dire eel<sup>Sto</sup>  
**CR 4:** dire barracuda<sup>Sto, QTR9</sup>; dolphins<sup>MM1</sup> (porpoise stats);  
**CR 5:** swarm, jellyfish<sup>Sto</sup>; whale, orca<sup>MM1</sup>  
**CR 6:** Whale, baleen<sup>MM1</sup>  
**CR 7:** Whale, cachalot<sup>MM1</sup>  
**CR 8:** Octopus, giant<sup>MM1</sup>  
**CR 9:** dire shark<sup>MM1</sup>; squid, giant<sup>MM1</sup>

### Monsters

- CR 1/4:** fleas of madness<sup>RL MC III</sup> (some ports are periodically infested)  
**CR 1:** aquatic ooze, bloodbloat<sup>FIF</sup>; ixitxachtl<sup>MM2</sup>; sea lion<sup>Sto</sup>

- CR 2:** anguilian<sup>Sto</sup>; elemental grue, water (vardigg)<sup>CAR</sup>; sahuagin<sup>MM1</sup>; sea zombie<sup>QTR9, DoD</sup>; shipbane<sup>FoSNS</sup>;  
**CR 3:** ixitxachtl, vampiric<sup>MM2</sup>; lycanthrope, wereray<sup>DoD</sup>; seawolf<sup>Sto</sup>; vampire spawn, sea<sup>QTR9</sup>;  
**CR 4:** blackskate<sup>Sto</sup>; elemental swarm, water<sup>PIH</sup>; lycanthrope, wereshark<sup>FRMF, QTR9</sup>; reaver<sup>DoD</sup>; sea cat<sup>MM1</sup>; selkie, dread<sup>VRFSM</sup>  
**CR 5:** sirine<sup>MM2</sup>  
**CR 6:** Aquatic ooze, reekmurk<sup>FIF</sup>; icegaunt<sup>Fro</sup>; jolly roger<sup>DoD</sup>; sirine, dread<sup>QTR9</sup>  
**CR 8:** Drowned<sup>MM3</sup>; slaughter (mob of shipbanes)<sup>FoSNS</sup>; will-o'-sea<sup>RLMCIII</sup>  
**CR 9:** Blood amniote<sup>LiM</sup>; caller from the deeps<sup>Sto</sup>; golem, ice<sup>Fro</sup>; kelp angler<sup>FIF</sup>; soulless<sup>QTR9</sup>  
**CR 10:** kelpie<sup>FIF</sup>; languoir<sup>QTR9</sup>  
**CR 12:** kraken<sup>MM1</sup>; swarm, sea zombie<sup>QTR9, DoD</sup>  
**CR 16:** dream vestige<sup>LiM</sup>  
**CR 17:** elemental monolith, water<sup>CAR</sup>  
**CR 23:** : Meredoth's Horror<sup>QTR9</sup>  
**CR varies:** elemental, water<sup>MM1</sup>; elemental, corrupted (new monster proposed by JWM); elemental, storm<sup>MM3</sup>; fiendish creature<sup>MM1 p 107</sup>; ghost<sup>MM1</sup>; ice beast<sup>Fro</sup>; sea spawn<sup>DoD</sup>; sea vampire<sup>QTR9</sup>; sea zombie lord<sup>QTR9</sup>

PART III



*Île de la Tempête*

11-37

# *L'Île de la Tempête*



*The Lighthouse*

*Shipwreck Shore*

*The Caves  
Cliffs*

*Pebble Beach*



*By Viktor Hazan, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1960*

After a fairly quiet night of sailing, I was finishing breakfast when I was called to the bridge of the *Black Pelican* by Paulo, a young crew member. He was sent by Captain Howe to inform me that our ship was arriving soon at our next destination island. I took up my traveling rucksack and went on deck. The wind was strong and the surprisingly-cold damp air struck me hard. I tightened my coat. August was much colder here than in Souragne!

The teenage lad was waving over the rail, as if directing me to look. But I already saw the rocky island and its infamous lighthouse. It was early morning, so no light beam reached in the dark, but I espied something in the watch room of the small tower that flickered, with clocklike regularity.

So, this was the infamous Île de la Tempête. At first glance, it seemed remote

and barren, perhaps too drab and quiet to accord with its notoriety.

After the lighthouse, the next thing I noted as we drew near were the derelicts and other wreckage that ringed the island. There were dozens of them in view, and that, just on this side of the island. At some points, the inshore waters were reminiscent of a small forest, of jutting masts and split hull-fragments. A strange sight it is!

I had little time to peruse this stunning landscape of maritime destruction, as our vessel suddenly rocked as if a huge sea monster was toying with it from beneath the hull. I knew our captain was one of the best – that was precisely why I'd hired Howe to bring me here – yet I still felt uneasy seeing our boat approach the island, faced with so much proof of its unpredictable currents. One crewman was nearly sent overboard when the boat unexpectedly lurched underneath us.



### *L'île de la Tempête in short*

**Current location:** Island in the Nocturnal Sea, located a suggested 50 miles northeast of the city of Egertus. Before 750 BC, Île de la Tempête was behaving like a pocket domain, appearing periodically in the various seas of the Land of Mists.

**Size and reach:** The island itself is kidney-shaped, and is roughly 10 miles long. The domain also extends a suggested two to three miles off the isle's coast.

**Ecology:** Full (temperate rocky island)

**Darklord:** Capitaine Alain Monette

**Year of formation:** 677; joined the Nocturnal Sea, 750

**Cultural level:** Most of it is Savage (0), but the Lighthouse area is Chivalric (8) and the former CL of the various shipwrecks ranges widely.

**Population:** 1 (or perhaps a few shipwrecked sailors at times)

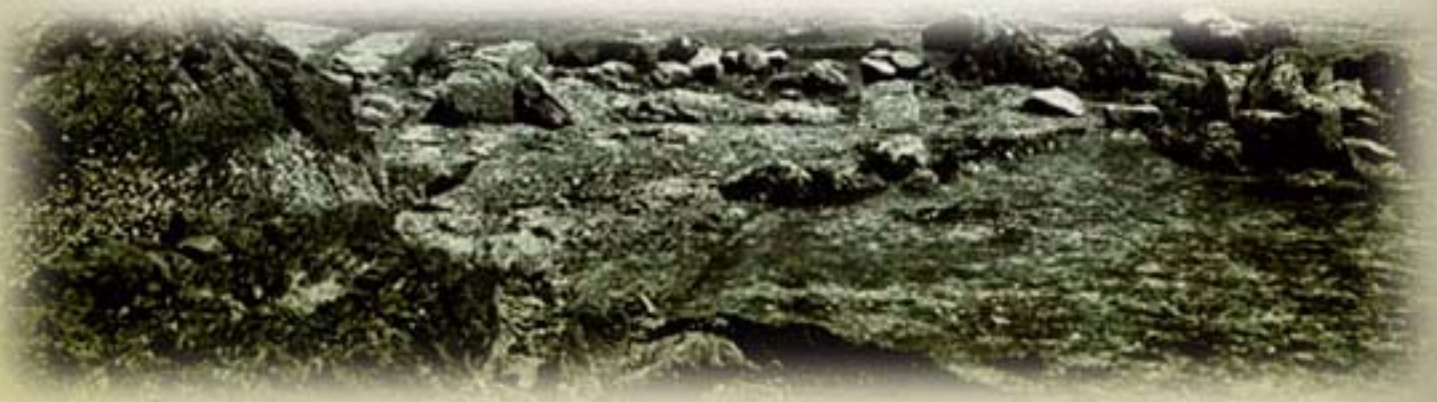
**Main settlements:** None

A sudden fog began to rise from the water, hampering vision. Of course, I knew my spells could bear me out of trouble should need be; still, I was deeply relieved when the boat made it safely to the southern rock beaches, where the water seemed strangely calmer than it was farther out.

Debarking from the ship's dinghy, I stepped with my hiker's rucksack onto slick, half-submerged rocks at the edge of the shore. The stretch wasn't too wide, but I nearly lost footing a few times on the slippery stones, narrowly avoiding a plunge into the water. Had I fallen, the strength of the waves that relentlessly pounded the shoreline would've likely crushed the breath from my lungs. But by carefully picking my steps, I safely made it onto the beach: a narrow, near-featureless expanse of pebbles, interrupted only by a few sodden planks from derelicts. I waved to Captain Howe to signal my safe arrival, then watched the *Black Pelican* reclaim its dingy and withdraw to a safe distance.

The isle is more or less kidney-shaped, and about 10 miles in maximum length. Most of it is girded by cliffs and rocky shoals, except for the southern pebble beach where I came ashore. The gradient slopes gently up as you travel from there toward the lighthouse. As a rough estimate, elevation rises by just under 10 feet per mile; the cliffs which frame the beach at the southern end rise about ten feet above the high tide line, while the lighthouse overlooks a hundred-foot precipice.

Howe has circled the isle at my request, and I didn't see any sign of waterfalls or stream-cut gaps in the cliffs. Unless a hidden spring lies inland, there can be no source of potable water on this island other than rain. Most of the surface is bare rock, with orange or pink lichens giving large chunks of it a mottled, sickly look. The stones must have a high iron content, being a rich red-orange colour.



## *Settlements on Île de la Tempête?*

### **As optional adventure hooks:**

The treacherous waters and isolation of the island isn't seen as a repellent by all. Some may prefer it that way, such as the monastic Order of the Guardians, who wish to set up a hold there. They plan to anchor an armour-plated ship near the isle (or purposely beach it) to serve as a stronghold. The Guardians plan to keep clear of the infamous lighthouse, but will need fighting power to establish this outpost. Can such an enclave be built, or is their effort doomed from the start?

As an option, Monette could hibernate in winter as many real bats do, hidden in a cave. During the darklord's torpor, a ship recently passed too near the island. Instead of hitting one of the many reefs, it ran aground on a sand bar. Landing on the isle, the crew discovered something valuable: perhaps coal, high-grade iron, or gold (either untapped ores or treasure from wrecks). The crew eventually freed their ship and departed, leaving Monette none the wiser. Word has since spread of the sailors' find, and an expedition is preparing to return for more. Come the spring, Monette could well be surprised to find that a nascent colony has sprung up on his isle! Whether it's a mining or salvage operation, or a whaling station, prison, or other outpost, such interlopers will all be potential prey....



If not for the wind and the lack of water, this isle might be a fitting site for isolated study or quiet contemplation ... if the inevitable boredom can be averted, of course. I find myself wondering if a more lasting presence than one solitary lighthouse ever existed, or might one day become established, on this Île de la Tempête?

I had noticed many caves in these cliffs as the dingy approached them, no doubt slowly dug out by the waves' action on friable rock. I suspect there are dozens of these caves, all around the island. Most entrances are at tide level and easy to locate; I also detected at least two cave entrances hidden underwater.

While all caves promise exciting discoveries to spelunkers, I only had time to visit four of the caverns. Two proved to be quite shallow, but the others were each over a hundred feet deep. In one of them, I discovered many of the bats which are so abundant on this isle, hanging on the ceiling and the walls, their slippery guano thick upon the cave floor.

In the second deep cave, I was surprised to find dusty human remains. The unfortunates had died there at least ten years ago, so only bleak skeletons remained, clustered near an ancient campfire. Two rusted short swords and a knife lay between them. The four were probably sailors, from what little remained of their clothing. What was most disturbing is that, while it was clear from the bones' arrangement that they had died fighting, I do not think they fought one another, as none of the bones and garments displayed sword or dagger cuts. In fact, some of the bones bore the marks of razor-pointed teeth on them!





The incisions were too precise for sea lions or similar maritime carnivores, yet too large for any of the bats I saw on the isle. I found no other clue as to the perpetrator of these deaths, so I departed this cave leaving the mystery of the dead men unresolved.

Offshore, a band of jagged rocks encircle the isle, save for the aforementioned southern beach. For the most part, these rocks lie just below sea level, invisible except at low tide. I fully endorse the wisdom of Captain Howe, who had insisted this island be approached only when the tide was low, so these hazards could be avoided.

But not all seafarers had Howe's experience, or perhaps his luck. The Île de la Tempête is surrounded by dozens of shipwrecks. This field of marine ruins is truly an astonishing scene. Most are caught precariously on the sharp rocks, grounded on the cause of their ruin; some still float, but are hemmed in by rocks on all sides, to roll with the crashing waves. (How intact ships could have gotten penned, thus, was a bit of a poser; had they simply *appeared* there, Mist-led?) There are derelicts of all types and sizes, in all stages of deterioration. While many are now little more than sodden piles of rotting wood, rope and sail, others seem ready to set forth again after only a few days' repair.

I used *fly* spells to hover above these ruins and explore a few. My divinations showed no living presence on the wrecks. Strangely, I found no human remains on board any of them, even the newer ones. It seemed as if the crews simply vanished from the deck, or even from their hammocks. At this point, I suspected that intelligent marine creatures had been preying on the ill-fated sailors, or

that a pack of those stinking, horrific aquatic ghouls had made off with the corpses.

Suspiciously, several of the vessels showed signs of repairs having been attempted *after* their grounding by storms or unpredictable currents. I also noticed that some existing wrecks had been cannibalized for parts. The stranded ships' surviving crew had had time – perhaps days – before their repair-efforts had been interrupted.

A number of ships were still identifiable. I had read about several of these vessels being lost at sea: the *Thunderball* from Egertus, the *Blue Starfish* from Mordent. (The latter was telling, as it had gone missing from the Sea of Sorrows, confirming old accounts of how Île de la Tempête used to “wander” between the world's seas, before coming to rest in 750.) Another derelict was plainly a Darkonian warship: one from which I kept a safe distance, knowing that people's taste for battle-magic and petty-minded revenge. But I saw nothing moving there, either.

One of the older wrecks had a strange name: the *Dragon's Gold*. Another bore an intact flag I could not place – it was not from any of the lands I've been or read about, nor did it resemble any trading-company insignia or noble house's coat-of-arms I knew – which I found quite troubling.



I located the officers' quarters and searched for a logbook, but didn't find any. When the second boat was similarly devoid of such journals, I had an intuition which further wreck-searches bore out: the ships had been stripped of any and all written material – no logs, letters, or books remained on board. I found blank paper, ink and quills, but no writing. Someone, or something, was hungry for literature?

The cargo of many of the merchant ships, however, is still there. Most of it has now been ruined by salt water, but a few cargo holds remained intact, so far as I could see.

Alongside my investigation of the wrecks, I observed the remarkable scale of the turning tide. What surprised me is that the sea rose so very far around the island: by more than twenty feet, between high and low tides. The sea lingered at its high point for about an hour; then the water quickly lowered, about one foot every thirty minutes! A puzzling phenomenon, considering that tidal levels of Liffe and the Darkonian coast are far less extreme. I cannot, to be honest, account for this discrepancy.



## Of Shipwrecks and their Drowned Secrets

The following is a partial list of shipwrecks (and some related adventures hooks) to be found in the vicinity of Île de la Tempête. Keep in mind that many of these wrecks could be completely underwater and nearly invisible from the surface. Thick crusts of mussels and barnacles have attached themselves to the hulls of the older wrecks.

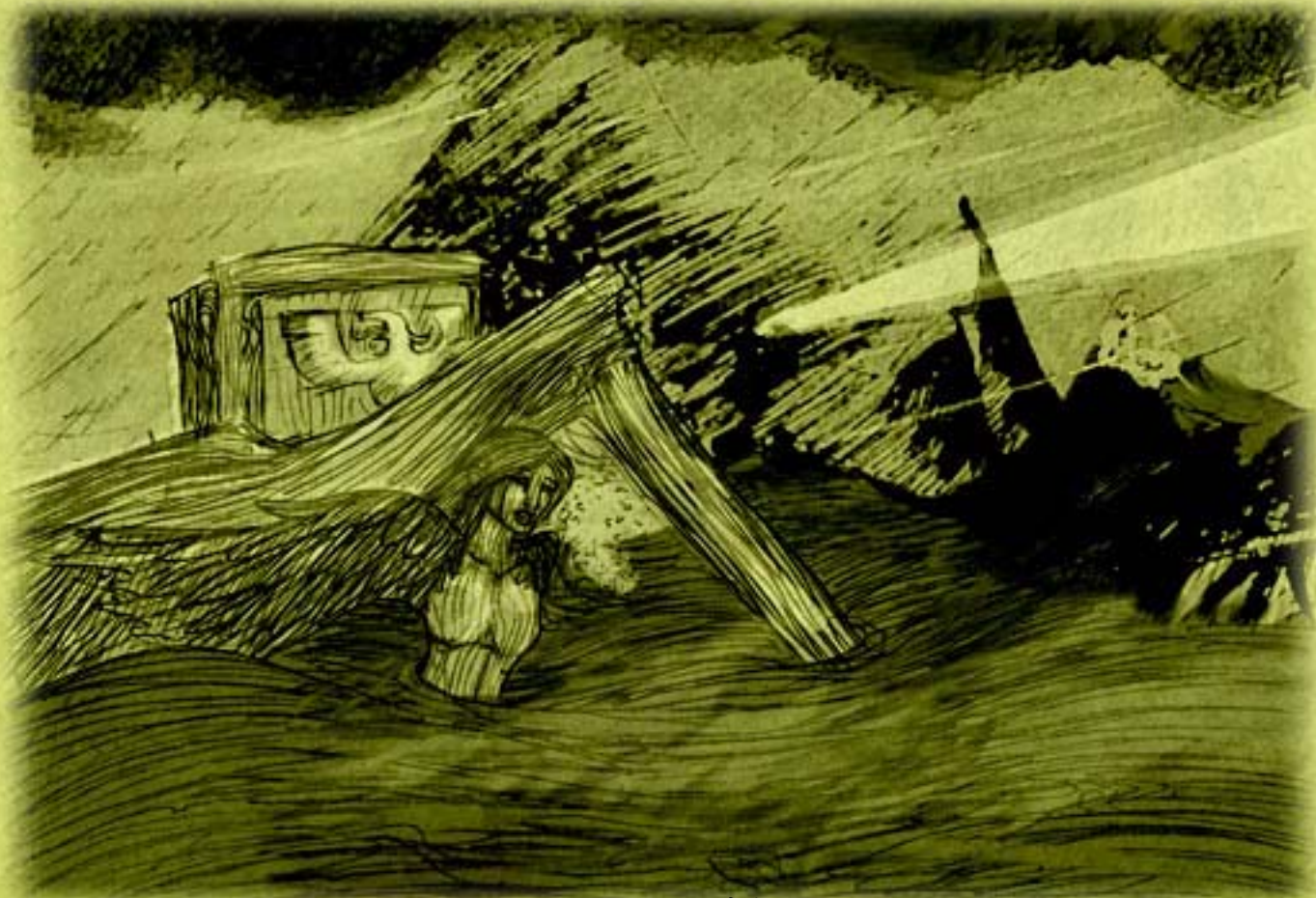
A DM might also choose to have Monette sink all these wrecks so newcomers to the island do not see them, making the island closer to the *Darklords* accessory description.

Shipwrecks with supernatural or magical aspects are described at the end of the list. While most of the island's shipwrecks should be mundane, a few of them could hide dark secrets, and DMs can choose from this list of suggestions.

- Merchant ships make up the majority of the wrecks. Most come from the main Eastern Core ports (Darkon – raw goods, ale, timber; Nova Vaasa – livestock, leather), but some Renaissance areas engage heavily in shipping as well (Mordent – fishing; Dementlieu – trading and culture; Lamordia – manufactured goods; Richemulot – craft goods or raw material [displaced riverboats]). Vessels from exotic realms beyond the Mists (Sri Raji, Rokushima Taiyoo, Souragne, Paridon) or from local Nocturnal Sea ports (Armeikos, Graben-town) may also appear, though in lesser numbers.
- *Thunderball* (from Egertus), a small passenger ship on its way to Liffe. This ship never arrived to destination and was thought lost at sea.
- *Blue Starfish* (from Mordentshire), a scientific research vessel studying fisheries, which vanished in the Sea of Sorrows. It floats, upside down, among the rocks. Nothing of value remains on board. Nets from the vessel cling to the rocks around the wreck, making it dangerous to swim near: would-be explorers risk being caught in the nets and drowning.
- *Dragon's Gold* (see *Darklords* accessory). An outlander merchant ship of alien design, wrecked in 690.
- A smuggling ship with alien flag; another outlander vessel, dragged into the Mists by the lighthouse's beam.
- The wreck of the *Hellena* (merchant carrack), known to have gone down containing 1600 gallons of high-quality Darkonian whiskey in well-sealed barrels. The Carlyle Trading Company has offered a standing reward for news of its fate, and will pay still more if the vessel (still largely intact) can be salvaged and delivered to Armeikos.
- A ship containing something valuable to a certain party, who will seek heroes to retrieve it if news of the wreck's presence on Île de la Tempête gets out. The valued item could be of great monetary value; if so, PCs who retrieve it will find themselves tempted by greed, or (more philanthropically) by another's desperate need for money (for a hospice, ransom, etc). The item could also be a magical item, important books or documents, etc.
- A demolished Rajian vessel, fragments of which conceal a perplexing artifact recovered by explorers from the swamps of the Wildlands. Found alongside many marble statues of great beauty, this hunk of corroded bronze comprises some kind of mechanism composed of gears, tubes and wheels. The explorers first thought it an astronomer's tool, but a more thorough inspection revealed it to be far more: a sophisticated system of differential gears and other clockwork, of a complexity never before seen, even in Lamordia or Paridon. If retrieved, many people – and perhaps even a fir or two – will wish to analyze this item.

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- The *Belle Marée*, a ship lost so recently that its owners are still searching for it. In Pont-a-Museau, the man responsible for insuring the vessel (and its costly cargo) seeks heroes to investigate its disappearance and retrieve a chest from the captain's quarters.
- The *Olpaltiouss*, a merchant ship Mist-led from the Sea of Sorrows. It lies under 25-30' of water, and the hull is in two pieces, with barrels and crates littering the 120' stretch of seabed between the halves. On her last stop, *Olpaltiouss* offloaded most of her cargo of hardwood and picked up a load of wine, in barrels and bottles. The wreckage contains mostly broken barrels, but some crates still hold cooking oil or wine in unbroken bottles. Investigating the wreckage, the party will find little else, aside from a few corroded bells and chipped china. There could (DM's discretion) be a sizeable cache of coin in a hidden safe in the captain's quarters.
- The *Iron Fist* was a Darkonian merchant vessel, sailing home laden with gold and Vaasi currency, as well as the goods of archaeologists moving to Darkon. There are rumors that the cargo includes several small lockboxes of treasure and enchanted (or cursed?) items. *Iron Fist* has become a legend, attracting many treasure seekers who are also often lost at sea, adding to the bounty surrounding the treacherous rocks on which the ship is caught.
- A shipwreck's cargo hold bears the shackles and barred doors of a slave ship. It is a tragic place, with lingering ethereal resonance of pain and death.
- This sunken alien ship appears fairly intact, as it is made of stone. It is similar in shape to a typical long barque, though it does have a number of differences in design. Jet black in hue, it looks rather wicked, with jutting spikes and horns all across its bow and stern. The prow of the ship looks like the snout of some evil draconic beast. Whatever rigging and masts it once had have long since broken off. However, the hull is still watertight.



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- The wreck of the *Red Siren*. This ship's ornate decoration suggests that it was originally built on an exotic tropical island. It now lies half on a reef, half out of the water, its mast at a crazy angle and its sails almost rotted away. Over the sound of the waves, observers realize they can hear the sound of a woman screaming. (The figurehead of the ship – a delicate siren – is enchanted so the ship can't get lost in the fog, but with the wreck of the ship, the quasi-intelligence imbued in the wooden figure has gone mad, and sometimes uses her *magic mouth* ability to scream in pain and fear.)
- Washed high on a rock, a shipwreck shows signs of activity, possibly in the recent past. Someone has strung up a canopy over the gaping hole in the side, and an orderly pile of driftwood and shattered timber lies nearby. In the hold, it is evident someone was taking measures to ration their food. But nobody is found on board.
- The *White Lady*. On the western side of the island, this wooden vessel is wedged between two sharp outcroppings of rock. Made of blackish wood, it has elaborate carvings all over its surface, depicting fantastic and unearthly scenes and peoples. The vessel is Darkonian in origin, and any familiar with elven woodwork will recognize such craftsmanship. The vessel was one of dozens commissioned by Azalin Rex after his sudden return to power. The hastily-constructed shipyards of Nevuchar Springs attracted numerous craftsmen and engineers. The *White Lady* was designed by one Scotia Nautilux, who claimed to have been inspired by a strange dream he had while wondering the badlands of the Mountains of Misery. *White Lady* bears many beautiful and elaborate statues and carvings, many by Scotia's own hand. Work on the vessel was delayed several times due to Scotia's habit of vanishing inexplicably to "find inspiration". What none outside of a few trusted members of the dockworkers realized was that Scotia had made contact with a fey in the lands formerly known as Arak. In the last few months of construction, Scotia sealed himself away, poring over the ship with single-minded obsession, his shadow nowhere to be seen. (That absence was covered up by his friends.) Scotia vanished shortly after completing his masterwork, and the vessel was put to sea. When the ship was later lost, those who knew the truth behind its construction wondered if it had been cursed all along.
- This passenger ship comes from the Sea of Sorrows, and it is of a style that became obsolete almost a century ago. All the canvas has rotted away, and the only ropes that remain are heavy with algae. The upper and lower decks have both rotted; walking along either is ill-advised. If explored, there might be some objects forgotten for generations found in the hold, but their condition is extremely poor.
- This isn't a wreck, as the small ship is anchored in an area devoid of treacherous rocks. It's floating, yanking vainly at its anchor-chain, sails lowered and wheel tied hard a-starboard. This vessel is in fairly good condition and could be used by sailors.
- A rich person's private pleasure barge, stuck on a rock and battered by the waves.
- Little more than the sun-bleached ribs of the hull remain of this once-mighty medieval battleship (an outlander vessel) remains. When intact, it would clearly have towered over the isle's other ruined craft. What little of the upper deck survives displays evidence of a hard battle, albeit a significant amount of time ago, perhaps as much as a century.

And those with more sinister or supernatural secrets:

- On any of the wrecks, the remains of a sailor who died on his last voyage before going home to marry his childhood sweetheart linger as a bowlyn (*Denizens of Dread*).



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- Some of the wrecks may be haunted by one or more ghosts or other incorporeal undead, be they long-dead crew or prisoners, slaves, passengers, or stowaways. They may have tales to tell about the lighthouse and its keeper.
- A prison ship crashed and all the prisoners drowned. For a number of them, their ghosts and shadows live on.
- One of the larger ships had a cage capable of holding a creature of great size. The cage is broken open, and the few bones of the crew which are to be found appear to have been gnawed on by a beast of some sort. (Monette left these bones as they stood as a possible red herring). Might that beast still be alive on the island?
- Darkonian warship. Why did it capsize here? Why wasn't it retrieved by Darkon's navy? The wreck could contain many secrets and valuables, from powerful enchanted items to battle plans and other Darkonian state secrets. A new spell? A new weapon?
- This low, dark ship sits precariously on the edge of a stony shoal. Its undamaged hull is upright and rocks gently back and forth on the waves. Strange lights are seen around the wreckage on nights of the full moon. The ship is devoid of life, except for a single gray cat which stalks the deck. The cat will follow anyone boarding the ship, but maintains a leery distance. There are two openings into the hull, easily accessed by ladder. The hull contains cargo boxes laden with fine cloth, spices and ivory from Sri Raji. The cat grows very agitated as the hull is explored and seems to be trying to get everyone out. If anyone approaches the rear of the hull the cat will become violent and may even attack with surprising fury for a small animal. If the cat is overcome and a search is made, a secret opening offers access to a lower hull: one which makes the ship bigger on the inside than it appears on the outside. What does it hide? Where does it lead to?
- This sunken ship seems to have sailed out of legend and nightmare: a living thing crafted from flesh, bone and necromancy. The intact sails of the ship's twin masts are furled like batwings. These monstrous wings are supported by long, twisted arms of two tall skeletal creatures, growing up out of the deck of the ship like necromantic trees. The ship itself is of flesh reinforced with bony plates and ribs, its surface mottled by pulsating nodules and suppurating wounds. Even its ropes and coils still run with the black ichor which flows up from some deep and hidden heart. This ship was built by Vecna's necromancers and it is unknown why it sank here. The skeletal "masts" can't move except to furl and unfurl their wing-sails. The ship could defend itself using noxious gas clouds, tentacles, bone spikes, and man-traps (like mouths forming in the flesh of the ship). Underwater, it can still use most of these abilities if threatened, but not its gas-attacks.
- The wreck of the *Allae-En'arta*, a pirate ship which once preyed on the Nocturnal Sea's merchants. These pirates lost track of their position soon after seizing the contents of a small vessel off of Knammen Isle. Unable to sight the coast for weeks, the crew began to despair of ever finding port, when the first mate spotted the lighthouse late into his watch. Disregarding the captain's warning that such beacons in these waters weren't always to be trusted, the mate led a mutiny and overthrew the captain. Once in command of the ship, they quickly ran afoul of the deceptive lighthouse. The captain and those loyal to him have been trapped in the wreck, nursing a grudge against the mutinous first mate and his followers; the two groups have been conducting skirmishes against one another ever since then. Worse, some terrible magic – perhaps their own descent into corruption, perhaps some recent brush with a greater evil than Monette – has begun to transform the feuding pirates into sahuagin: an outcome for which the factions blame each other.

I was still inspecting wrecks, when I heard a far-off shout. I looked to the island, spotted movement on the cliff-top. I thought at first that my eyes were playing tricks, but no: there really was a man waving at me from on shore, and shouting in some dialect I didn't understand! I silently cursed my carelessness in being seen flying by arcane means, as I am usually more circumspect about my magic.

Using what remained of my spell's duration, I flew back to the island; oddly, this didn't seem to impress the stranger, though he did cease waving to observe my approach. The man was tall and thin, dressed in a dark suit with gold buttons. A cutlass hung at his belt. His face bore an alarming scar that stretched from the right temple to under his left ear, giving him a fierce appearance. He looked like a captain or some other marine officer. I suspected he must have arrived on one of the ships that lay in ruins all around us.

As he didn't exhibit any aggressive signs, I touched down and accepted the eager hand he offered in greeting. He shook it with wiry strength and smiled hopefully at me. There was a lonely need, perhaps even relief, in his eyes. However, it quickly became apparent we would have trouble understanding each other. His speech was slow, not because he was dimwitted, but because he didn't seem to master any single language known to me, merrily mixing Low Mordentish, Darkonese

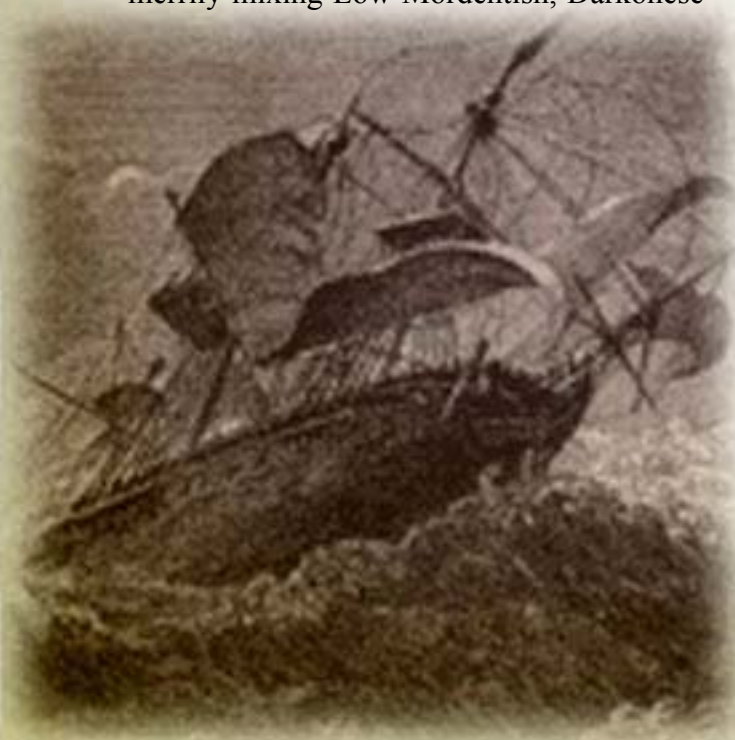
and Vaasi all in one sentence! (In hindsight, I suspect he'd added some Grabenite to this mongrel pidgin as well; at the time, I had yet to hear that insular tongue spoken aloud.) It took all my concentration to puzzle out what he was saying, and I'm not sure I understood everything correctly.

During this first uneasy conversation, I spoke primarily Vaasi, which he seemed to understand most of the time. If not, I tried Darkonese or resorted to gestures if that failed. The more trouble the language-barrier posed, the more curious I grew as to the origins of this person. He was well-dressed, and had the commanding presence of an experienced sea wolf, yet he seemed equally clumsy with *all* of the trade-tongues common to these waters! So where was this man from?

After welcoming me to his island – and even through the odd entangling of tongues, the sense that he considered it *his* was clear – he gave me a name: Alain Monette. I replied with a pseudonym I often use at times when discretion is prudent: Peter Ash. He asked me my purpose in coming here. I said (quite truthfully) I was looking for someone who'd brought a great deal of trouble upon me, and whom I suspected was somewhere in these islands. He remarked that he was alone here.

I enquired about his presence on an island supposedly deserted. After a bit of coaxing, he told me his story. If I understood him correctly, Monette claimed he was cursed to remain on the island alone, with no company but the bats. He swung his arms in a grand gesture, as if to encompass the whole of the island, which led me to understand I would find no soul but him if I explored it. He told me those who linger here simply vanish into thin air during the night, after a few days' time, unless they were staying with him at the lighthouse. (I didn't mention the bodies I had found in the cave to him. Was this isle haunted by something that hunted at night?)

Monette explained that he had been cursed by his former crew. He was once the captain of the privateer *Ouragan*, a name meaning 'gale' or 'hurricane' if I understood his pidgin correctly. According to him, his first mate organized a mutiny because the crew



wished to keep the spoils of a state-chartered raid instead of deliver it to the nation under whose colors they'd sailed. Monette refused and fought his treacherous men, but lost and was marooned on this island. He said that he had been here for a few years.

"Once a while, boats be wreck here, because of this bad-awful lighthouse," he said. He couldn't do anything to stop this, because he believed the lighthouse was supernatural. Survivors stranded on the isle would disappear after a few days, and he would be left alone again for months. After this tale, I questioned him about leaving. He replied that he could not escape the isle, as trying to do so made him very ill. He feared this sickness was part of the curse and that it could kill him. For a moment, his gaze drifted out to sea, and was filled with pain.

When I asked him what he ate, he made a fishing gesture. I rather regretted that I had not brought my rod and flies, as a day spent calmly fishing in company is always good for winning confidences from the unwary. I smiled and made him understand that I also loved fishing. I was trying to befriend him, in order to get more information from him.

Monette asked me if I knew any other spells besides *fly*, perhaps hoping my magic might help him. I opted to respond simply with a knowing smile, to let him believe that I was a powerful wizard. If he wanted to test me somehow, there was his answer.

He also asked if I had seen or heard about the *Ouragan*, or of the "port of the prince" or some other name along those lines. When I replied that I never heard of it, he seemed saddened, but unsurprised, as if he was used to receiving this negative answer.

He then nodded toward the lighthouse and said he wanted to return to its shelter before nightfall. He invited me to accompany him, pulling gently on my coat. With all of the exquisite courtesy which I had learned in the Dementlieuse tea rooms, I made him to understand that I preferred to camp on the beach. I even showed him a book from my rucksack with a turtle on the cover, implying that I wished to study the marine life here.

But he was no fool and saw my quick glance toward the *Black Pelican*, its shape



now just a tiny point on the horizon. However, being a gentleman, he didn't press the matter. He said something that sounded like good night, and invited me to visit the lighthouse in the morning, just after high tide. I assured him I was delighted by his invitation and would be there tomorrow. He shook my hand and left me to walk toward the island's summit.

I watched him head north until I lost sight of him. The paler patch of cloud which was the Nocturnal Sea "sun" was kissing the horizon by then, so I pitched my tent on the far side of the island instead of on the beach as I had said. I suspected one couldn't be too prudent in this context. If this Monette, whom I did not trust, were a menace, he would not find me on the beach as expected.

As the day ended, the low angle of the sun let a few errant rays slip beneath the cloud-cover, giving me a last, twilight glimpse of the island's stunning landscape. The sun's dying sketched long shadows on the ground, and the rocks turned a golden orange colour. The startling contrast of these shadows and the gleaming rocks created a very beautiful, yet nearly alien landscape.

Suddenly, like a flurry, the bats came out of the caves. From all the caverns that rimmed the isle, bats streamed out by thousands, and flew over and around the rocks. These were mundane, insectivorous bats, but there were masses of them! Their flocks' swirling aerial ballet was graceful and nearly hypnotic.

I recalled that Gerard's letter on the bats was in my rucksack, and paused to re-read it:

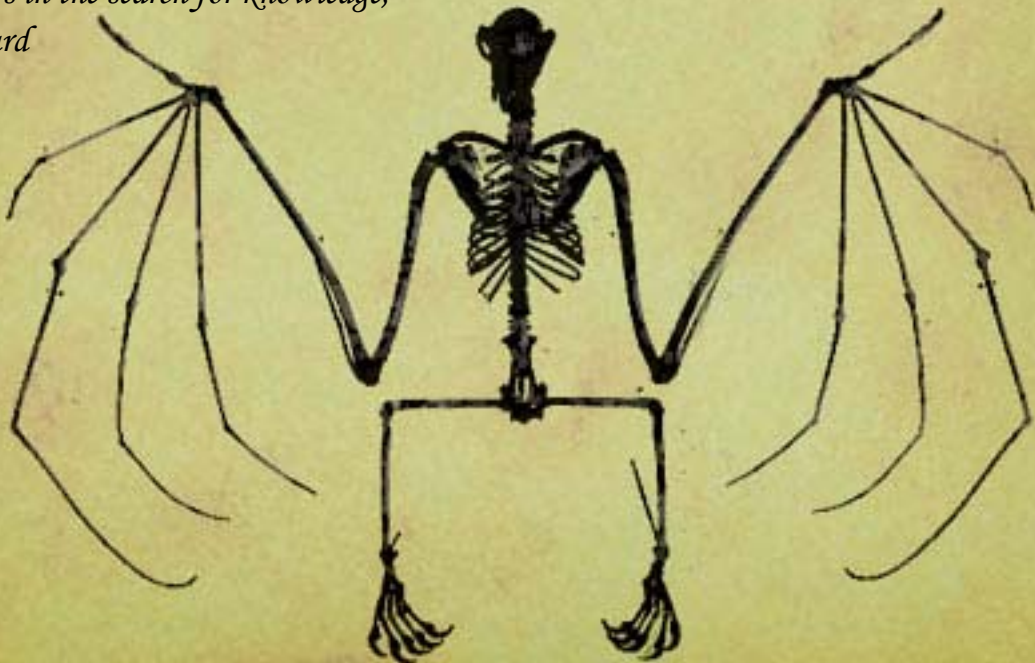
While working for Dr. Milhavet (author of "Struggle and Victory in the Animal Kingdom") in a previous job, I had the pleasure of dissecting and characterizing two different species of Tempetian bats. Classified by the doctor as the Tempetian bulldog bat (*Noctilio tempetus*) and the Tempetian ghost bat (*Macroderma tempetus*), these two share an interesting ecological relationship. *Noctilio* is the smaller of the two, with a body length of 3-5 inches. It feeds primarily on small insects and tiny fish, or scavenges opportunistically on tidal refuse and carcasses. *Macroderma* is the larger, with a body length of up to 12 inches, and preys upon smaller vertebrates, including *Noctilio*. Both bats are thought to hibernate in the colder months of November to February.

What Dr. Milhavet found was that, when it feeds upon carrion, *Noctilio* can capture a disease-vector in its salivary glands, render the pathogen dormant, and then infect other organisms with it. (He has yet to determine the mechanism behind this.) In addition, he found that when *Macroderma* feeds upon *Noctilio*, these diseases activate, infecting *Macroderma* and potentially killing it. This provides a source of carrion for surviving *Noctilio*, as well as a form of viral weaponry that discourages all but the most desperate *Macroderma* from preying upon the smaller species.

He hypothesized that, through further study of the salivary glands of *Noctilio*, other mammals might be made to carry dormant diseases; however, he would not tell me the purpose behind such conjectures. Similarly, he would not reveal where he obtained the Tempetian chiropteran specimens, and my constant prodding as to their source would eventually get me fired.

Thankfully, foresight had already led me to surreptitiously peruse the doctor's notes. The specimens were obtained from a group called the *Ikosik*, whom he'd met on the eastern shores of *Nova Vaasa*. I have tried to find these people, hoping to learn where they themselves had gained knowledge of forsaken *L'ile de la Tempete*, but to this date have met only with failure. I shall keep you informed should I learn anything more.

Yours in the search for knowledge,  
Gerard



According to Gerard, I had best be sure not to get bitten by these bats, so I put on my thick gloves and the netted hat I wear while fishing in the bayou. Still, I was never much bothered by these fascinating animals.

I walked to the western edge of the island, and saw the lights of the *Black Pelican* at sea. With a quick *dancing lights* cantrip, I signaled all was well. After a moment, they replied with the agreed lantern-flash signal.

I took a moment to observe the lighthouse. I noted with surprise that its beam was rather narrower than is usual for a lighthouse, and that its light seemed to sweep by at *different angles* each time it rotated, thus obscuring the distance to the treacherous rocks around this island rather than revealing it.

Restless, I took a long walk in the dark, all my senses alert, but I discovered no further

information on the island, its fauna, or the hypothetical people-snatching monster. If any such creature *was* out there, its appetite for philosophy professors on sabbatical must not have been very pressing. I returned to my relocated camp around midnight, cast an *alarm* spell just in case it changed its mind, and went to bed, sleeping lightly.

I woke up early to pack my things. There were still a few bats about, but the majority had already returned to their sea caves.

Also, someone (something?) had pilfered all the dried food I had left outside the camp, in order to keep any hungry animal away. With this rocky soil, I couldn't find any traces left by the thief. My breakfast that morning was a frugal one, consisting only of water from a wineskin I had kept with me.





Hungry or not, I resumed my explorations, this time going north toward the lighthouse. On the way, I mentally reviewed my notes on the fauna and flora of island.

Wildlife on Île de la Tempête is limited to bats of all size, a few sea birds, and rodents no bigger than mice. Numerous flies fill the air by day, joined by moths at night. None of them are dangerous, save a rare few bats that may carry disease, as Gerard warned.

Vegetation is scarce, mainly lichens, bitter-fruited shrubs, and a few puny pines at the northern tip of the island. I suspect the salt winds and rocky sparseness of soil makes it difficult for most trees to grow here. Yet,

this isle once had more trees: in the southern part, I noticed pine stumps here and there, chopped down long ago with an axe. But the trees, themselves, has been taken elsewhere, presumably for firewood or boat repairs.

I arrived at the ill-famed lighthouse in the early afternoon, after a long, but uneventful walk over the rocky ground. The lighthouse is a very old-looking building, made of stone taken from the island. The walls of this ugly yet durable edifice do not stand very high, 35' at most: its location on the promontory is what makes it the highest point on the island. Each side of its square base is about 15' wide, tapering slightly toward the top.

Nearing the lighthouse, I noticed the ground was strangely but regularly *shivering*. After a moment, I realized that its vibration could be felt when the larger waves crashed into the cliffs. I marveled a moment at the power of the sea, and the impressive high tide.

I called for Monette through the lighthouse's door but received no response.

### *Encounters on L'Île de la Tempête*

CR 1/10: Bat<sup>MM1</sup>

CR ¼: Albatross<sup>STO</sup> (and similar birds, on a quick stop while traveling)

There are no monsters native to the island (other than Monette). But sometimes the wrecks do contain *things* ...

### *Of Afflicted Bats*

Just as Monette became a lycanthrope by feasting off bats, so were a handful of the island's bats altered. The animals gained the supernatural ability to assume the shapes of humanoid / bat hybrids. They are small and squat creatures, roughly the size of human children; most of their forms are distorted and barely functional, far more grotesque than a true werebat's hybrid shape. They are easily dispatched in combat if cornered (1-2 HD), and are quick to flee in bat-form.

The creatures have a dog-like intelligence, treating Monette as the alpha of their kind. They sense his loathing for the bats, and fear he will extend that same loathing to them as well. They therefore keep to the dark places and avoid being seen by him or people from the wrecks if at all possible, reverting to bat form when anyone is near. They are right to avoid the darklord's sight: if Monette ever notices the critters, the truth will disgust and infuriate him.

When Monette is caught up in the frenzy of his curse, the bat-creatures aid their alpha in small ways: sabotaging shelters and boats of stranded survivors, spoiling food, or stealing obvious silver weapons.

Knocking got no answer either. The door was locked, but I opened it quickly with a *knock* spell.

The tower's first floor was neat and clean, with nautical-flavored furniture, including a fold-out bed and cast-iron galley stove. I presumed these had been salvaged from the wrecks by Monette. An old arquebus was set on a wooden rack, alongside several fishing rods, some well-crafted and some crude. I searched quickly, finding nothing that either seemed suspicious or enlightening.

I climbed a narrow stair to the second floor, where a sealed trapdoor awaited. The stench when I opened it was shocking, and so awful I nearly lost the feeble excuse for a breakfast I'd had. The horrendous reek reminded me, somehow, of the bats' guano-fouled cavern, though the floor seemed dry. There was no window in this room, so I retrieved an oil lamp from the first floor to light my way.

Bedraggled books and crumpled paper, piled haphazardly on a large wooden table, seized my attention. I realized that Monette was the one who had collected these items from the wrecks. But why?

Curiosity led me to select a battered ship's log and read its last entry:

*Feb 16th, 752*

*Bad luck.*

*Our ship got stuck on a rock near this desolate island, and needs two or three days' repair. Ours isn't the first to foul here; there are dozens of wrecks, all over. Have to report the lighthouse here as dangerous and misleading: we thought we'd judged how far ahead it lay, but the beam's position was all wrong to warn us of the shoals. Boudin and two others have gone to salvage the needed planks from the other ships.*

The logbook's entries ended with that date. I then examined a letter, its vellum marred and ink partially blurred by seawater.

*My darling,*

*I now know I shall never see you again, just as I am sure that you will never read these words. But if you ever do, know you are as always my comfort in my darkest as well as my brightest hours.*

*I know this tragedy is mine and mine alone to accept blame for. I should have listened to my men when they said that there was something eerie about the light, but I wanted to find a harbour, safe from the storm that was brewing. But as soon as we veered to follow the lighthouse, the storm hit us and threw us over. I fell hard against a railing, and when I revived I lay here, abandoned by hope and trapped under my ship beneath the callous waves of the sea.*

*I will never regret naming the ship after you, my sweet Hellena, even if she did get jealous and become my watery grave, for I have you in my heart. I regret only that I'd spent so much of the time we had away from you, and with the cruel mistress we call the sea...*

*How well I remember the night we met, and how exquisite you looked: moonlight shining upon your hair; your dress of pale blue with pearls sewn into the embroidered flowers. But neither moon nor pearls could equal your smile, that wonderful smile. That was when I first knew that I loved you.*

*I thank you for the wonderful years we've had, my darling, and for the two wonderful children you gave me. I know that you will raise Leland and Edward well, and make better gentlemen than I out of them.*

*Yours forever,*

*Moriarty*



After this touching testament, I took an older ship's logbook. The last entry it contained was perplexing:

**723, July 26**

*We sah the creature that kilt my crewmen. Wile the first attaks were sneakey, it came to us in brood day light on high tide. It is a ugly half-man monster thing. It grabt poor Shirley and took fly with her before we could do a thing. Dam the lighthouse that brot us here! May it crumbel and fall in the sea! Ezra please help us!*

I shut the book, trembling with anxiety as I began to grasp just what manner of creature Monette might be. And the date of this last journal entry, many decades ago, was also very upsetting.

I took the second flight of stairs going up. Again, I had to open a heavy trap door, but the fresh, cold breeze was a delight after the dismal stench of the second floor.

The beacon was slowly rotating, but I heard no mechanism at work. Then I realized that the source of the light was no device at all, but a gleaming skull, floating and spinning in mid-air. After taking careful precautions against any potential harmful or even deadly necromantic magic, I tried to collect this morbid item so the Fraternity could examine it, but my hand passed directly *through* it. My skin felt like it was on fire and I quickly withdrew my arm, but there were no signs of burning or other injury. Further tests showed the skull was insubstantial, perhaps ethereal?



Looking at the horizon, I saw the *Black Pelican* had now moved closer to the island, as it was planned. I took this opportunity to cast *fly*, and thirty minutes later, I was back on board Howe's ship.

It was then that I learned of the crewman who had gone missing during the night. I shivered, realizing Monette had probably been devouring this unlucky sailor, all the while I was investigating his lighthouse.

I asked Captain Howe to set sail and leave as quickly as possible. Soon the Île de la Tempête was just a tiny rock on the ocean. Yet still the light beam was blinking at us, like a watching, beckoning eye...





### *The Lighthouse's Beam*

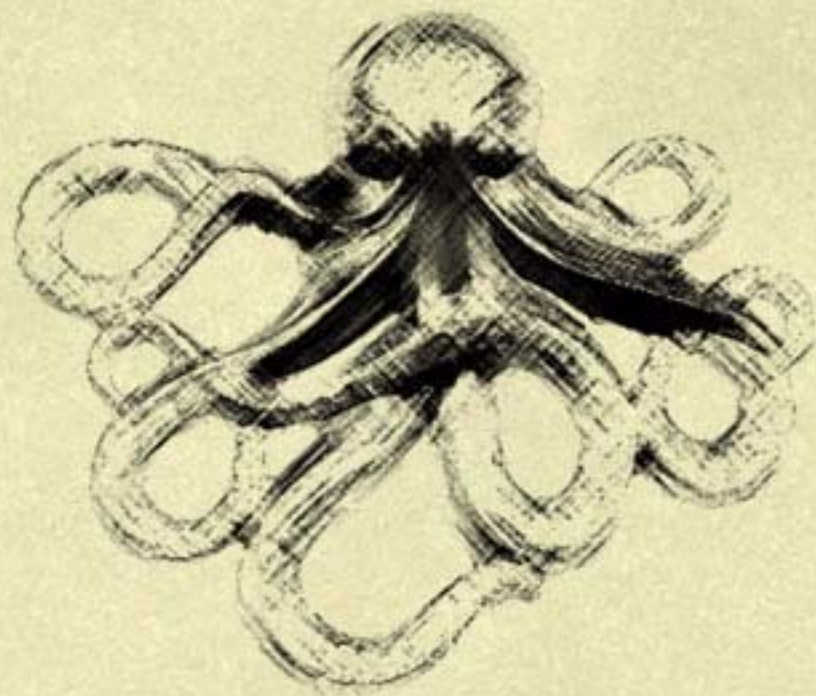
The source of the lighthouse's beam is the glowing skull of Monette's first victim on the island, his nephew. When Monette first reconstructed the ruined lighthouse on Île de la Tempête, he had planned to use a fire driftwood to lure ships to his island. However, when he set the last rock in place, the eyes of his nephew's skull suddenly began to emit a strong light, focused as a narrow beam. Confused, Monette set it atop the lighthouse and the device started turning, luring sailors to their doom. Monette now calls his lighthouse l'Oeil de Minuit (The Eye of Midnight).

The beam of light doesn't normally extend outside the domain's limits (i.e. about 2 miles around Monette's isle). This light is enchanted to deceive sailors passing near: it initially appears as the lighthouse of a friendly, well-known port, or similar location. Through the fog and darkness, it can also appear as a warning-light – one that suggests the isle's shoals lie farther away than they really do – or the feeble light of a ship in distress, prompting other vessels to investigate. The beam is angled high over the water, so it never reveals the rocks and shoals as ships approach.

Any captain seeing the beam must make a Will save (DC 20) or feel very tempted to go toward it. If a vessel moves toward the source of light, the beam ceases to turn and becomes constant, as it beams toward the lured ship, coaxing it onto the rocks. This change in the light's behavior alerts Monette that potential victims are coming.

Once a year, on the night of the full moon closest to the anniversary of Monette's arrival in the Land of Mists, the beam can reach into places farther afield, such as the Clusters and Islands of Terror or the Sea of Sorrows, or possibly even into other planes. Monette's lighthouse technically operates like a conditional, one-way Mistway. Sailors who dare follow or investigate the source of this strange light are doomed: the minute they decide to travel toward the light, their ship is transported to the Nocturnal Sea. The vessel's captain then has to succeed a Will DC 20 check to change the course of the ship and not cruise toward the island.


PART IV



*Isle of Ravens*

11-237

# *Isle of Ravens*



*The Tower*

*Kasibos'  
Lair*

## *Isle of Ravens*

*By Brother Paul Dirac, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 760*

This is, of course, my second visit to the Isle of Ravens. In keeping with the recommendation of Father Scott, I will endeavor to provide a more analytical view of the island and introduce fewer subjective impressions into this report than I allowed myself previously.

I will therefore note only that the Isle came into sight on August 12th, 760. Captain Arberlsson was naturally reluctant to approach the island any more closely than was necessary, but he was willing on this occasion to provide me with two sailors to row me to the small white-sand beach at the southeast extreme of the island: the only point which even so small a craft as our longboat can safely approach.

Armed with the letters provided me by the Fathers of the Fraternity, I made bold to approach the home of that famous sorceress, the Lady of Ravens, for the second time.

### *Geographical Survey*

As reported previously, the Isle of Ravens is a small island. I made no attempt to survey it, but Captain Arberlsson and I agree that it could not be much more than a mile square.

Both visits confirmed that the Isle is heavily forested. The undergrowth is dense, and is broken only by a few tiny clearings and numerous small streams. The only sign of human habitation is the single tower that dominates the island: a tower made entirely of flint, which rises some four hundred feet into the air, its roof hidden in the almost continual shroud of fog which blankets the island.

Captain Arberlsson reports that the climate of this part of the Nocturnal Sea is cool and extremely damp, with rain falling almost daily in all seasons, or occasionally turning to snow in winter months.

### *The Isle of Ravens in short*

**Current location:** The Nocturnal Sea, roughly 30 miles east-southeast of Egertus.

**Size and reach:** The Isle of Ravens is a rough oval, about two miles northeast to southwest and one mile east to west at its widest. The domain's borders extend roughly one mile out to sea.

**Darklord:** Lady of Ravens

**Ecology:** Full

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate forest

**Year of Formation:** Unknown

**Population:** 1 human (the Lady); a few miscellaneous fey creatures

**Races:** See Population.

**Languages:** Unknown\*, Sylvan.

**Religions:** None

**Government:** None

**Ruler:** Lady of Ravens

### *Flora and Fauna*

The Isle of Ravens is covered by a dense deciduous forest, mostly oak and elm, that gives way to pines and other conifers near the foot of the Tower. Undergrowth is thick throughout the deciduous forest, clearing as one approaches the Tower, and consists of low shrubs, ivy and mossy ground-cover. Both blackberries and currants are in evidence, but there seem to be relatively few plants on which animal life can subsist.

By far the most striking fauna of the Isle of Ravens are (unsurprisingly) its ravens. There are many thousands of these large black birds. They seem to congregate principally around the Tower, but they venture to virtually every corner of the Isle – the only exception seems to be the near vicinity of the earth-fey Kalibos's lair – and we caught sight of a few several miles out to sea.

## *Isle of Ravens*

### *Encounters on the Isle of Ravens*

CR 1/6: raven<sup>MM1</sup>

There are no monsters native to this island, other than a handful of sylvian feys and other summoned creatures.

Cursory examination of the island proved it is also home to a number of rodents and rabbits, timid things which are occasionally killed and eaten by the ravens. I surmise that larger animals simply cannot subsist on so small an island.

I saw representatives of several species of large ground-nesting birds, including turkey and pheasant. Smaller songbirds and larger, predatory birds are not to be found, probably because any which arrive on the island are immediately mobbed and killed by ravens. The ravens also eat fish, scavenging those washed ashore and fishing in the tide-pools which line the shore. Seabirds, though they rest here at times, do not nest on an isle with so many black-feathered egg-raiders.

The ravens are not aggressive to humans, but given the opportunity they might make nuisances of themselves by stealing food and small items. Attacking the ravens for any reason is to be avoided; aside from their mistress's protectiveness toward them, there are so many of them that they could soon overwhelm almost any defense.

It is possible that one might encounter one or another of the fey that inhabit the island, although I personally met none save Kalibos on either visit.

## *History*

The Isle of Ravens has, as far as I could discover, very little internal history. It has no human inhabitants other than its mistress, so its history since its emergence from the Mists lies entirely with its sole inhabitant, who has seemingly never troubled herself to share it ... that is, if she has bothered to take note of it at all. It is tempting to assume that the Isle

arose in tandem with the Nocturnal Sea itself, but this is contradicted by much of the meager available evidence that exists: sailors' first-hand accounts of shipwreck on the Isle of Ravens extend as far back in time as the history of Darkon, and many of those stories reference still earlier accounts of a similar place.

Notably, many early stories place the Isle of Ravens in the Sea of Sorrows. Alternately, it might have been hidden in the Mists before its relocation to the Nocturnal Sea. The confusion surrounding the domain's age and position greatly complicates any discussion of its possible time and place of origin, as it is unclear to me which of the stories reflect actual incidents, which are pure invention, and which are a conflation of the two.

In all such stories, the Lady of Ravens is a figure of awe, and often of also horror; some portray her as a seductress, but most paint her as merely callous, indifferent to human life and concerns. The Isle itself is not seen as an ill omen, if seen in good weather; it is actually proving to be a useful navigational landmark in a sea notoriously bereft of such. Many sailors have taken to casting bread or other foodstuffs on the water when the ravens are in sight, in hope of currying favor with the Lady, and some take pains to speak well of her, more out of superstitious fear she can hear them than from any genuine affection. However, no sailor I have met or even heard of will willingly set foot on the Lady's isle.

Shipwreck there is fairly common, although by no means as much so as at the infamous Ile de la Tempete. The currents very near the Isle of Ravens are perilously changeable, and ships which fail to keep their distance may find themselves running aground on the numerous shoals found within a mile or so of its shores.

Some insight on these points might well be obtained from the undead spirits populating the Tower of Flint, if one could somehow engage them in conversation. Their powers of observation may be limited, but they probably know more of the Lady's history, weaknesses, and interests than anyone else possibly could.

## People

The only human inhabitant of the Isle is its nameless ruler. Its eponymous ravens might also be counted inhabitants – certainly the Lady regards them as such – but I believe these are truly no more than extensions of their dark mistress. Both the ravens and the Lady’s summoned minions obey her every whim. The island is also, apparently, home to a bare handful of fey spirits, called by the Lady from otherworldly realms, which have escaped her service or outlived their terms of indenture. These fey now roam the island as free-willed beings, helpless to return from whence they were summoned.

The most important of these fey entities is the aforementioned earth-creature known as Kalibos (also referred to in some stories as “Kalipos”, “Kalipan” or, as it had told me previously, “Kaliban”) who makes his home

in a burrow in the southeast corner of the island.

Both Kalibos and the Lady mentioned the presence of other fey in conversation with me, but neither considered them to be of much interest. Apparently they are so few, and so territorial, that their presence can be largely ignored, as they have no inclination to band together for any common purpose.

According to Kalibos, these creatures are free-willed and do largely as they please, but all save himself live in abject terror of the woman in black.







## *Locales of Interest*

I have reproduced a few salient points from my discourse with the Lady, upon delivering the Fathers' letter to her at the end of this report.

While in the Lady's presence, I had the rare opportunity to observe a few details about her domicile, the so-called "Tower of Flint". It was apparently wrought by old magics: I detected neither individual stones nor mortar anywhere in its construction, and it seems to have been formed from a single piece of its parent stone. As the name implies, it is constructed entirely of flint. My estimate would make it some sixty feet across at its base, and its total height must be in the neighborhood of four hundred feet, making it vertiginously tall and thin. It is roughly cylindrical in configuration, but flutings and buttresses (many thronged with perching ravens) give it a fantastical, yet delicate style that deviates from a simple cylinder.

The entry chamber is impressively austere, consisting only of a great stone dias with a throne of stone situated opposite the great brass double doors which are the only entry to the tower. The room is lit by high, small windows near the ceiling, which must be some forty feet in height. A stairway rises

behind the dias to the castle's upper levels, and I saw a trapdoor set in the dias before the throne, which must lead to some deeper level of the tower.

With the Lady's permission, I ascended this stairway and saw something of the next two levels, where she houses those whom she entertains for any length of time (and such visitors are very few, indeed). These rooms are fairly clean and extremely bare. One or two held some discarded or abandoned article of clothing or bedding, but none had furniture of any description.

I was fortunate enough to get a very brief view of the library, which consists of all the third-floor rooms above the entry chamber. A more haphazard concatenation of books, tomes, folios, grimoires, incabulae, scrolls, papers, pamphlets, and papyri can hardly be imagined, and the Lady appears to have made little effort, if any, to maintain order among them. Apparently, this task devolves upon a mysterious personage to whom she referred only as "the librarian": an undead spirit who refused to speak to me, presuming she was even capable of speech. (The Lady mentioned that there are several such in the tower, and that they are not over-fond of intruders; this might have been a ruse, to discourage me from exploring further, but I think it is probably the simple truth.)

## *Isle of Ravens*

There might be any amount of gold (that is, valuable information) in so much dross, but the Lady allowed no lengthy examination of the works present. I can only report that the sheer volume of paper I saw was extremely impressive.

The Lady was not averse to the idea of a visiting Brother effecting some organization of the materials, but said such a thing would have to be done with the "librarian's" input. She informed me flatly and in so many words that going to any level of the tower above that of the library would be punished, and that visiting the library without permission would incur the same fate. She did not bother to describe the nature of the punishment she had in mind, but I believe it all too easy to guess.

She did, however, declare herself amenable to the general outline of interaction proposed by the Fathers of the Fraternity, and invites the Fraternity to send any one scholar of their choice to review the

contents of her library, subject to her approval following a personal interview with the gentleman in question. Should the representative acquit himself well, she declares herself willing to entertain the idea of a second visitor – also, of course, subject to her approval – but on no account will she accept more than two visitors from the Fraternity at any time.

My attempt to seek out Kalibos for a second interview was in vain: the earth-spirit did not make himself known to me, perhaps having concluded that, by my second visit to the Tower, I had declared myself for the Lady and against him. Any future visitor to the Isle of Ravens should therefore be very careful to avoid meeting with him if at all possible.

Further descriptions of the Lady and of Kalibos are appended for the convenience of the reader.

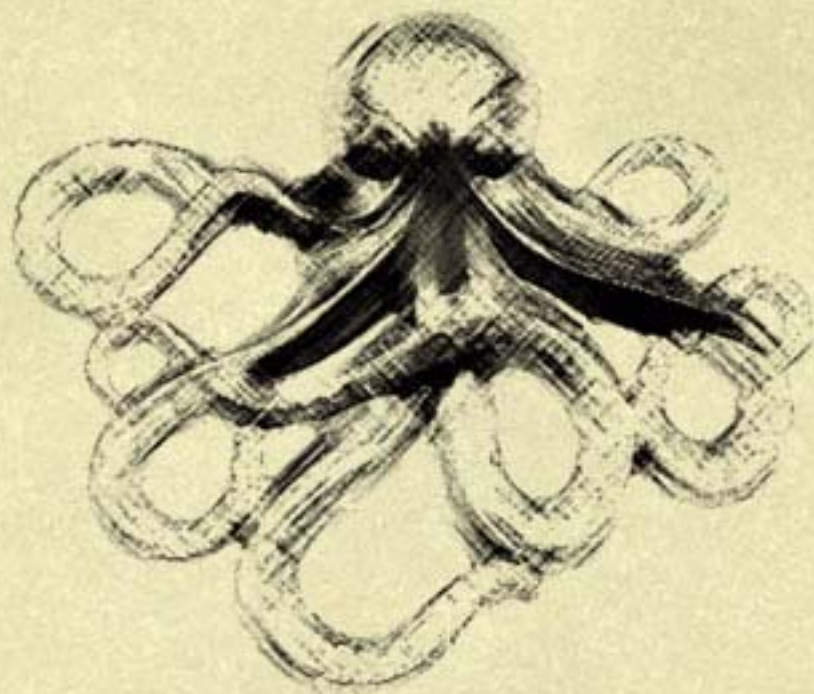


*Dread Possibility: False Hopes*

The Lady of Ravens has learned that she is not the only inhabitant of the Nocturnal Sea without a past; news of the elf Jacinth Moontide and his search for his own lost memory has come to her attention. The similarity between their afflictions has convinced the Lady that he must hold a clue to the discovery of her own past, and she has determined to find him and assist him in his search. She might very well demand that adventurers who find themselves in her service (by geas or by the need to recover a comrade transformed into a raven) seek out Jacinth and bring him to her, or that they aid Jacinth in discovering his past—with the understanding he will then help her to do likewise.

If Jacinth can be reunited with his own lost love, Cian Silverleaf, and his memories restored, the PCs (and Jacinth and Cian) will be faced with a dilemma. As far as they know, their history has nothing to do with the Lady's, but convincing the dread sorceress of that will not be easy! Indeed, the Lady of Ravens is likely to insist that their service to her continue until they find the truth of her own hidden past—if her rage and jealousy at seeing Jacinth and Cian reunited and happy do not inspire her to a more drastic vengeance.

# INTERLUDE



*Good cause for fear! In the thick mid-day  
The hulk that lay by the rotting pier,  
Filled with the children in happy play,  
Parted its moorings and drifted clear,  
Drifted clear beyond reach or call,—  
Thirteen children they were in all,—  
All adrift in the lower bay!*

*A Greyport Legend, Bret Harte (1797)*

# *Interlude II*



*Neblichtode*

*By Viktor Hazan, mid-August 760*

When Île de la Tempête was finally behind us, Captain Howe announced our current route: we were to sail to the Darkonese coast for about a day. Noting my surprise (for it's hardly the quickest route between Île de la Tempête and Graben-town), he explained that the sea between these two isles is very dangerous, "especially at night". The *Black Pelican* would skirt along the Vaasi coast, then head out again once Graben Island lay due east of us.

"This part of the sea is laced with dangerous reefs," he said. "Strange, these Selbstmorde reefs, Professor Hazan. See, we never meet or sight them during the day: it's as if they only come out at night, or so the sailors from Egertus insist. Those foolish enough to sail between Île de la Tempête and the Isle of the Ravens see their hulls split in two on those treacherous rocks. Many vessels have been lost in this region, their crews devoured by sharks and worse, even when they thought themselves safe in their lifeboats! I believe only Grabenites sail freely in this area ... to hunt whales, that is."

This delirious concept of rocks shifting with the time of day annoyed me, as it might well delay my meeting with Dirac, but I shrugged and watched him shout orders to the crew to turn his ship west. With favorable winds, it would take a day to reach Rutledge, another to head south along the Nova Vaasa shore. If all went well, I would be in Graben-town on the evening of the third day.

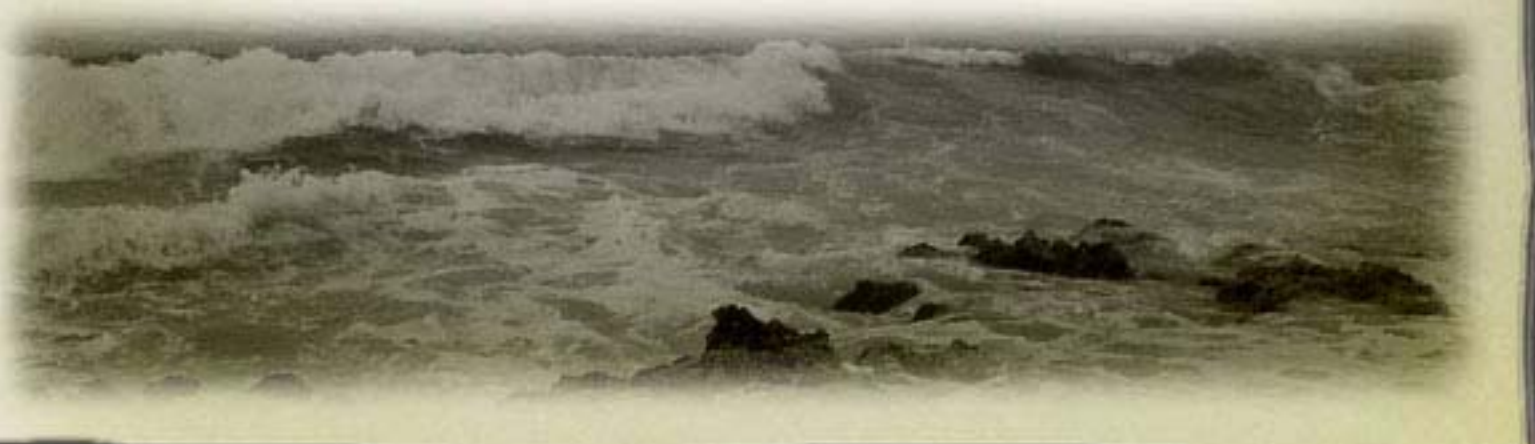
I passed the day fishing at the stern, dressed protectively against the spray. To add to my contrary mood, no fish sampled a tasty bite from my fishing hook. Rien.

Late that night, after midnight, we arrived at Rutledge on the coast. I was in my room, re-reading "*Scrying and the Nature of Visions*" by Professor Mirella Agrippa, as I chuckled over and annotated her errors, emotionally-based comments and weak hypotheses. (No wonder that women are rarely accepted into our Fraternity. That's just how it is, I guess.) It reminded me of a stern scholar for whom I once sat as token out-of-branch examiner in Darkon. She tried to impress the Brautslava cell's admissions committee by her superior wit, yet failed the second figment quiz. Her own arcane interests, she'd sullenly retorted, lay elsewhere. It'd been a while since I saw her work in the occult journals; I wondered what had happened to her and what kind of trouble she was involved in now.

Minutes after I heard the anchor strike the water, young Paulo came knocking at my cabin door. Clearly agitated, he insisted that Captain Howe must speak with me *now*. As the hour was hardly a sociable one, I briefly feared Monette's curse had played us a dirty trick, wishing I'd a silver weapon in hand.

Making ready, I heard Paulo waking up the other sailors. He told them of the "Crescent Moon": words which, by the oaths and wary mutterings they incited, must have sparked fear in the hearts of the crewmen. Now that I thought about it, Paulo himself had seemed rather jittery, his usual gap-toothed grin and high spirits replaced by wide-eyed wariness.

When I arrived on the bridge, Captain Howe was intently peering at something through his spyglass. "Take a look, Hazan", he said, passing me the telescope. At first, I saw only the few lights of the sleeping village of Rutledge. At my puzzled remark that I saw nothing, Howe grasped the scope and guided my gaze to the proper angle. Then I saw it.







## Interlude II

The mid-sized derelict was old, rotten. Its dirty gray sails hung limp and tattered from broken masts. Half expecting to espy ghosts or stinking zombies on board, I watched the deck but saw nothing moving. There were no lights anywhere on the boat, just a faint, sickly glow without a source. Then I saw its name: *Crescent Moon*. Strangely, the ship's blue-painted title remained intact and clear, yet all other colors had eroded away.

Howe explained that the *Crescent Moon* is a ruined cog that yet sails the Nocturnal Sea. It was lost about a decade ago and reappears every now and then at Nocturnal Sea ports to drop anchor. Nobody is ever seen aboard the vessel, and it does not seem to pose any direct physical threat.

"But," the captain added, his seasoned gaze intense, "You should not try to sleep tonight. Nightmares will plague you or any sailor who sleeps at sea while the *Crescent Moon* is near." Seeing hints of an unconvinced smirk on my face, he went on. "I'm quite serious, Professor. Know that some of those sailors who suffer such nightmares never wake up."

At this remark, I remembered how maps of the Nightmare Lands – an unsettling realm, if it truly exists – had placed it along the present coast of Nova Vaasa. Realizing that there might be more than folly to Howe's tale, after all, I decided to heed his warning and order coffee.

After watching the dead ship for a time, I spent the rest of the night playing cards and drinking liquor and coffee with Howe and his first mate, Matthew. While enjoying the complicated, yet tricky regional card game (even though I lost most of the time; the "starfish" card was ranked stronger than the "eel", oddly enough), I took the opportunity to learn more of the Nocturnal Sea hazards, as well as asking more about geography. The following is what I learned from these experienced sailors. Most might simply be rumors, but there could be a hint of veracity behind some of these stories.

Besides the *Crescent Moon*, another cursed ship in these waters is the *Chained Captain*. It is a large battleship, hung with iron chains where normal rigging should be. It may be

### *Dread possibility: The Merry Rixters*

A shipload of shadow fey, exiled from the Seelie Court, now wanders the eastern Core as well as the islands of the Nocturnal Sea. The fey continually travel from port to port, holding wild revelries that draw in nearby daydreamers, lost souls, and more powerful figures. Their ship is hunted by mercenaries hired by the Tepestani Inquisition, as well as by the Church of the Lawgiver. It is said that any mortal who joins their band eventually either goes mad or turns feral. As a DM option, the most dedicated of those "lost" could become changelings.

an incorporeal "ghost ship", as it is said that onlookers often hear the unearthly sound of clanking over the waves, as if it ushers from inside its hull. As in all good ghost stories, folk who encounter this vessel are but rarely heard from again!

A classic oversight when one acquires a ship is failure to check if its name has ever been changed, either because it was stolen or to hide past infamy. This can lead to undesired consequences in the legal or financial fields ... and even in the supernatural, if the boat has a tragic or gruesome history.

There are numerous wrecks scattered across the Nocturnal Sea, either floating derelicts or hulks beached on shorelines and rocks. Howe mused, "I sometimes think there are far more wrecks than sound vessels on this cursed sea". His words made me wonder if the Nocturnal Sea somehow attracts wrecks from other places, perhaps even the "outland realms" of which those borne to these Lands by the Mists often speak.

Rutledge lies on the border between Darkon and Nova Vaasa. Its 250 hardy souls rely on fishing for survival. It is shielded from the sea's worst storms by four offshore islands, locally named the Dismal Four. The

## *Interlude II*

smallest is very near to the town itself, and bears the ruins of a light house. Locals say this beacon wasn't repaired after a storm felled it in 753, as the inshore waters are unsafe.

For the record, Howe told me he'd met an old hermit in Rutledge – Bill Copperplate, by name – who is obsessed with organizing an expedition to explore the largest of the Dismal Four. One man's obsession was not enough to divert me from my present task, but once my Graben Island survey is done, it could be interesting to discretely investigate whether this hermit is still around.

Beholden (as yet) to neither Darkon nor Nova Vaasa, Rutledge is often frequented by pirates. They mind their manners while here, in order to maintain this neutral ground as a safe haven for their ships. It is said that the infamous pirate Captain Teach visits this port on occasion.

Howe spoke of the many corsairs who prowl the Nocturnal Sea. Most pillage wildly for a year or two, then vanish and are never heard from again. Most were likely hunted down by Darkonian or Vaasi naval vessels; the sea itself may account for others' absence. Too many wrecks in this sea by far, and it plays no favorites in garnering more!

Captain Teach is one of the most notorious buccaneers, and has been active longer than most (nearly a decade). According to sailors who met him or saw him in battle, he's more a smoking devil than a man. Captain Teach is very large and imposing, with a jet black beard. His crew raids both small villages and merchant ships. He always leaves a witness alive to spread his infamy, but seldom offers quarter for any other cause. I recall reading that he once pillaged the docks of Egertus, his crew having set fire to the city's church of the Lawgiver as a diversion. There must be little love lost between him and the Vaasi crime-lord known as Malken.

Another well-known rascal is "the Mouse". Acting alone or with a small team, this talented burglar is said to be able to enter any place on the east coast or isles. What's unusual is that the Mouse is, rumor has it, both a halfling and a female, and said to be beautiful. There are many rollicking tales of

her exploits, but most are bound to be wild exaggerations, like her supposed defeat of Malken in combat while armed with only a spoon. (I must allow, this rogue has genuine talent for publicity, if naught else!)

Enough of scoundrels! Howe soon brought our discourse back to geography. A ruined coastal city, not found on most maps except the very recent, is said to lie somewhere on the Darkonian coast. Howe told me that this would-be boomtown never really took off. Despite diligent efforts by its burgomaster Weick and his henchman, Hewbeard, it now stands deserted, half-buried in the sand. A few of its intended settlers migrated south after the city's abandonment, joining local Vaasi pioneers in founding the tiny community of Mavalga, not far south of Rutledge; the rest have dispersed to parts unknown.

North of the failed city, in the shadows of the Mountains of Misery, lies another small fishing port, the remote village of Tidemore. Howe has stopped there once to do business with its burgomaster, Borganov, but didn't enjoy his stay, finding several of its inhabitants rather creepy. He passed on several rumors about strange rituals and fiendish sacrifices on Tidemore's rocky beach, but that might have been an exaggeration, considering how much brandy we drank that sleepless night.

A more outlandish place associated with this untrustworthy body of water is Nedragonne, a remote island said to lie a bit off the coast of Vechor. This isle abuts the Misty Border and is usually hidden within it. But when the Mist recedes, it is said that one can visit its port city of Tenebria. Matthew told me the surrounding ocean is particularly dangerous, with many wild predators – orca, sea lions, sharks, sea snakes, and the like, plus sea-ghouls and freakish water-breathing ogres or trolls. So voracious are these other predators that dolphins supposedly avoid in this place. Bards of Tenebria are said to sing gloomy tales of an outcast whose life was marred by taunts, treachery and desertion. (A possible inspiration for your next book, Ambrose?)

Come the morose half-light of a Nocturnal Sea dawn, we suddenly heard surprised cries from Paulo, our lookout, so we rushed to the deck. The salt breeze felt like a cold caress, after the heavy tobacco-smoke of the cabin where we'd spent the night's chat and card-play. I saw the *Crescent Moon* sailing out of Rutledge's harbor. Still with nary a soul in view, the dead ship passed in perfect silence, then veered off north. I lost sight of it on the dim horizon after about an hour.



*Captain Teach*

"Captain Teach" was born in Souragne in 719, of an affair between a noble and a maidservant. Young Léon Mathurine<sup>FoSSou</sup> was raised by his mother, but often saw his father, who was amazed by the vigor and wit of his by-blow. Though unable to acknowledge his son publicly, the man financed Léon's first ship (called the Coeur d'Erlande after his mother); soon, Léon was sailing the seas, seeking a fortune of his own.

Soon enough, the Mathurine name became associated with efficient, profitable trade between the coastal Core and Souragne. Léon wasn't above shading the truth to close a deal, but most of his business dealings were honest. However, his fortune suddenly evaporated when he was double-crossed by a smuggler from Egertus, Red Rolf<sup>Gaz5</sup>. He lost everything to his former partner's treachery: wealth, ship and reputation. To pay off his debts, Léon was forced to sign on as a simple sailor on a Nova Vaasan merchant vessel.

The ship's captain was weak-willed and loathed. Léon soon threw him overboard after leading a mutiny. The young Souragnien persuaded the sailors to become pirates. Those who refused were marooned on a rocky island on the Nocturnal Sea. Léon changed his name to Captain Teach and set about attacking Red Rolf's operations in order to ruin him. But Rolf changed his transport practices; leaving Teach was unable to damage his betrayer. Bitterly, Teach resorted to attacking any merchant ship his vessel could catch.

Over the years, Léon has turned to theatrics to instill fear in sailors he attacks and quickly claim victory. His boat is painted a shade of silvery-gray that makes the (unnamed) pirate ship look ghostly. His men wear striking war-paints in black, white and red. Captain Teach himself is a large and imposing man, with a jet black beard. In battle he often tucks slow-burning fuses underneath his hat, to wreath his head in demonic smoke while he bellows his battle-cries. His attacks are always unexpected and swift. Though savage towards male opponents and those who insult him, Teach retains a vestige of seigneur's honor; he ensures that ladies or noncombatant passengers captured are well treated and left at the next port unharmed.

**Captain Teach:** NE, Exp4/Ftr4/Rog4;

**Teach's crew:** 30 experienced pirates; NE, Exp2/Ftr2 or Exp2/Rog2.

*Dread Possibility*

Teach is ill and knows he has a few years to live at the most. He is preparing to end his career with a sinister bang. Unbeknownst to his crew, he plans to destroy the entire port district of Egertus by loading his ship full of gunpowder, running it into the docks, and blowing it sky-high. He will wait to hear that Red Rolf has a large shipment of contraband there, and that Rolf himself is supervising the operations, before making this suicidal attempt at revenge.

## *Interlude II*

### *The Mouse*

Elizabeth Hilltop was born in Darkon to a family of carpenters. Skilled with a rapier and throwing dagger, she chose the adventurous life instead of her parents' quiet existence. She has long golden blond hairs and blue-gray eyes, unusual features for a halfling. Her good looks have often helped her talk her way into restricted locations, and out of messy situations. She isn't above using her angelic, delicate appearance to pass for a young human girl.

How she came to be called "the Mouse", or to relocate to Nova Vaasa, is unknown. She presently lives on a small rocky islet off the Vaasan coast, dubbed "Mousehole Island" by its occupants. In Nova Vaasa, folk think this island is inhabited by a few irritable hermits. In truth, a hidden bay provides shelter for Elizabeth's small, yet agile personal ship. The Mouse keeps a crew of eight, all staunchly loyal to her. Most are humans, but two of them are halflings. All have either been wronged by Prince Othmar's unjust rule, or harmed by Malken's criminal activities.

The Mouse is not a pirate and prefers to operate as an elegant cat burglar. Over the years, she has become a romantic figure, dear to the heart of the Vaasi underclass. Bards sing of her great skills. No door or strongbox in the Nocturnal Sea region is said to be inaccessible to her. Legend says she has dueled a dozen of Prince Othmar's personal guards to a standstill, emerging unharmed and with the contents of the guard's pockets, as well as besting Malken using only a spoon (or a handkerchief, a boot, the crime-lord's own dagger she filched in mid-battle, etc).

It is said that the Mouse likes to strike at wrongdoers who abuse working people, robbing them only so that she might give back to the poorest. Save for the "only" (she doesn't give it *all* away), this is basically true. The Mouse takes a particular pleasure in opposing Prince Othmar's forces. Never captured by the law, the whereabouts of her hideout are unknown, though theories abound. She disappears completely one month per year, to secretly visit her old parents.

**The Mouse:** NG, Rog5 / Duelist4 / Shadowdancer5;

**The Mouse's crew:** NG, Ftr1-4 or Rog1-4

### *Dread possibility*

From an indiscrete tavern owner, a Vaasi merchant traveling in Darkon has learned the names and address of the notorious Mouse's mother and father. How will he use this information? Sell his secret to Malken and/or Othmar? Blackmail the Mouse? Or both?

### *Dread Possibility: The Drowned and the Damned*

The Ikosik are a small group of degenerate humans who roam across the Nocturnal Sea. Genetically afflicted by several generations of inbreeding, they are also cursed for their cannibal sacrifices to Hac'guin Sa, a god they believe to be "drowned under the sea" and waiting for their aid in releasing it. This group of deluded aquatic ravagers seeks this being – which probably does not exist – in its lost sea-city of Ikos.

Their yearly migration brings them to the coast of Nova Vaasa to attack villages and lonely settlements, stealing tools to aid their watery quest, and humans to sacrifice and consume. Once they have fed heartily, they leave Nova Vaasa for the Nocturnal Sea, and come to the sea caves of Île de la Tempête for additional ceremonies. Monette is so far unaware of these visitors.

Heroes can be hired to protect against the annual incursions of the Ikosik, and battle is only one way to deal with them. Some, like Dr. Milhavet (see Île de la Tempête sidebar on bats), have learned the Ikosik are quite intelligent and happy to trade. In return for tools and supplies to assist their search, tales of their lost Ikos, or even human lives given like trinkets to Hac'guin Sa, the Ikosik can share information regarding most any matter related to the Nocturnal Sea.

For some of the more forbidding realms, the Ikosik may well nearly be the *only* source of information, as Milhavet found when attempting to obtain Tempêtian bats for research on the Becoming Plague.



## Interlude II

### *Dread Possibility: Rookhausen, the Time-Sundered City*

Before the Scourge annihilated them to the last, human inhabitants of Arak populated that stretch of land which now makes up Darkon's southern Nocturnal coastline. Almost nothing remains of their culture – those few Arakans not slain by the sands emigrated north, forfeiting all memory of their homeland – save fragmentary anecdotes and legends. Among these pitiful scraps are tales of a mysterious city-state: a thriving, cosmopolitan seaport, which Arakans insisted would appear on their realm's eastern fringe every fifth generation, then vanish back into the Mists, a generation later. This (so Arak's human folk claimed) was why some of their number understood the speech of the Barovians, in that brief 6<sup>th</sup>-century period when their cultures lived as neighbors: the city's residents allegedly spoke Balok, alongside other tongues.

Naturally, no modern historian will believe a word of this ... unless, that is, the city comes back.

In fact, the city of Rookhausen is a transient domain: a realm which, like the shadow Fey tunnels that once underlay the badlands it adjoins, is subject to its own unique time-stream. It exists only for intervals of 25 years, with a century-long gap between its appearances; in its absence, no time passes for its inhabitants, and only a few sand-scoured stone ruins remain in the Core, to mark its site. Both Arakan "false history" and the city's records allege that it has manifested intermittently in this same location for millennia. In reality, it has appeared in the Core only once before, from 636-661 BC. As the surface of Arak was vacant and unpopulated at the time, Rookhausen's last arrival went undetected by the Core's other nations, save a few roving adventurers (who were not believed) from either side of the wastes.

Now, the ruins lie at the rim of the Nocturnal Sea, and the region they occupy is no longer empty wasteland, but a seacoast with a growing population of miners and settlers. Rookhausen's return is nearly due, and the city will not pass unnoticed a second time. What political and economic disturbances will arise, when a vibrant city-state of thousands emerges along the Nocturnal Sea's coastline? How might its residents – a blending of Balok, Tergish and Mist-led foreign elements, ruled by feuding aristocratic families and plagued by criminal and cult activity – react to finding their home no longer in quiet Arakan lands, but pinched between imperialistic Darkon and Nova Vaasa? What new faces, faiths, practices, or technologies might swiftly rise to prominence there, once the city is no longer cut off by time or impassable terrain? How might neighboring realms – and their darklords – respond to the sudden appearance of an unknown rival's wealthy and exotic domain, on their very doorstep? Who *is* the city's darklord?

The Nocturnal Sea is the newest and least-explored part of the Core, and the Time-Sundered City is but one of many, many potential mysteries its sunless reaches yet hold in store.

**Rookhausen (large city):** Conventional; AL LE; CL 7; 40,000 gp limit; Assets 49,200,000 gp; Population 24,600; Mixed (humans 75%, halflings 10%, half-elves 5%, elves 4%, dwarves 4%, other 2%)

### *Nebligtode in short*

**Location:** Nocturnal Sea region excluding other domains, their inshore waters, and the Nevuchar Channel. Nebligtode abuts Darkon and Nova Vaasa roughly ten miles out from the east coast. It encompasses Graben Island, Knammen Isle, Todstein, and a handful of nameless, rocky islets and mudflats.

**Ecology:** Full ecology.

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate to cold seas; cold forests, marshes, hills, and plains.

**Darklord:** Meredoth

**Year of Formation:** 635 BC (as Island of Terror); merged with the Core, 750 BC

**Population:** ~4000 (mostly Grabenites, plus isolated fishing outposts & transient sailors with no fixed address)

### *Behind The Curtain: What's In A Name?*

When it was introduced in the 2E module *Ship of Horror*, the domain of which the necromancer Meredoth is darklord was referred to as "Nebligtode". In *Domains of Dread*, the same darklord's territory is referred to as "Graben" in the Ravenloft Timeline, yet is re-styled "the Nocturnal Sea" in the geographic description of the Core. The Arthaus products are similarly inexact, listing the whole of the Nocturnal Sea as if it were a singular domain by that name.

As the Nocturnal Sea is, to natives of Ravenloft, a geographic region that incorporates portions of at least half a dozen other domains, this Survey now restores the title of Meredoth's domain to its original usage. In this and future FoS netbooks, "the Nocturnal Sea" will refer to the actual body of water, independent of domain borders. "Nebligtode" specifically means the sizable fraction of that Sea which falls under the necromancer's purview as darklord. Likewise, this netbook makes a firm distinction between "Graben Island" (the nation and land mass), "Graben-town" (the port community), and the Graben merchant family.

*August 17th, 760*

Brothers,

Just a quick note to report I have arrived safely in the port of Graben-town, despite an unsettling experience or two along the way. I'll not regale you with details, but will have more than a few amusing or hair-raising anecdotes to recount, upon my return to Port d'Elhour. (Suffice it to say I'll not be putting in at Île de la Tempête a second time, on my return trip!)

As yet, the notorious storms which plague this region have passed the *Black Pelican* by, and the winds have been favorable enough, for all that the dreary skies have lived up to their reputation for unbroken darkness. I trust the Souragnien summer is as sweltering as was expected? Pity we cannot exchange places, if so...

Barring delays in my voyage back to civilization, you may expect me in Souragne near the end of September. If my first glimpse of Graben Island is typical, I cannot imagine that my exploration of this hinterland will demand any more time than that. Indeed, I may yet beat young Dirac to the punch, in wrapping up my own research before his foray to Todstein is complete.

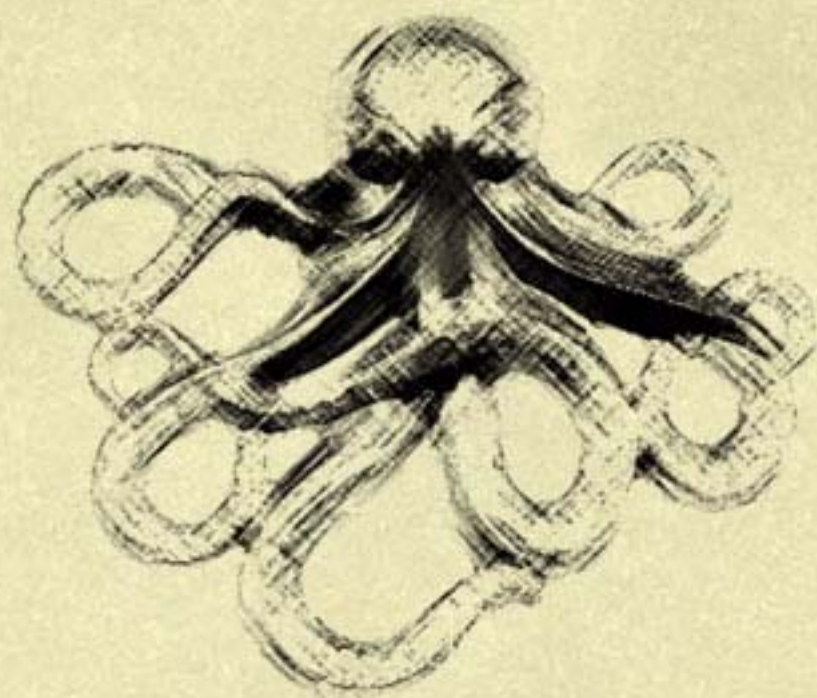
Regards,

*Viktor*

*P.S. I take it my spiders are faring well, Ambrose?*



PART V



*Graben Island*



# Graben Island

## Graben Island

By Viktor Hazan, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 760

Our approach to Graben Island's sole town worthy of the title was slow – cautious – and not solely on account of the persistent overcast's gloom. Erratic, chill winds pose a challenge for sailors near this odd-shaped isle (One of the Watchers' idiosyncrasies? A *clawed hand*, of all things? Really now!), and have a bad reputation for sudden shifts, that rend sails and dash careless vessels against its shore. On the Island's low southern and eastern coasts, such mishaps leave ships mired in trackless bogs or beached on slopes of brittle scree; to the west, where jagged cliffs descend starkly from a high plateau, ill-timed gusts can shatter their hulls upon submerged ridges or the granite bluff itself.

As *Black Pelican's* lookout, Paulo, strained to pick out the shallow dip in the cliff's broken ridgeline in which Graben-town hides, I recalled the shipwrecks I saw around Île de la Tempête and wished we'd put in at one of the hamlets on the lowland side of the isle. I asked the captain why the town's residents hadn't the good sense to mark the port's position with a lighthouse – a *mundane* one, that is – to pierce the dimness cloaking their homeland.

"Every sailor in these waters *wishes* these folk'd do just that, Professor Hazan," Howe replied bitterly, "but the locals don't care to make life any easier for the likes of us. Not particularly obliging to we outsiders, these Grabenites, not even ones who've dealt fair with 'em for years." He shook his head in resentful disgust.

The unspoken message was clear: if I had been counting on the Captain's mercantile connections to help "break the ice" with the natives, I would be disappointed. This was not a friendly place.

### Graben Island in short

**Location:** Southwestern Nocturnal Sea, Nebligtode

**Cultural level:** Early Medieval (6) to Medieval (7)

**Population:** 3,200 (Humans 97%, Sea-claimed 2%, other 1% [mainly calibans])

**Main settlements:** Graben-town (1900), Kirchenheim (400), Seeheim (250), Meerdorf (150)

**Religions:** The Ascended\*, Ezra, the God Below, Hala

**Languages:** Grabenite\*, Vaasi, Darkonese, Sithican, Xalote

**Government:** Independent settlements; assemblies in Seeheim & Kirchenheim, assembly shifting to plutocracy in Graben-town, theocratic despotism in Meerdorf

## Geographical Survey

### Climate

Even after my sojourn on Île de la Tempête, the torrid climate of Souragne seems to have sunk into my bones. How *deeply*, Graben Island proved, as I spent my visit wrapped up like an Akiri mummy against the chill, whereas Captain Howe's crew needed only canvas jackets to dull the winds' bite (The natives? Shirt-sleeves and talk of summer's "heat wave"!). Deferring to the judgment of Graben-town's immigrants, I concluded this island's summer weather was like early spring in Richegulot – cool, yet fairly comfortable to mainlanders – despite how my limbs shivered for much of my stay.

## Graben Island

It could have been worse, if the eye-level marks on the buildings of Graben-town were accurate indicators of the depth of last year's snows. Winter snowfall on "the Island" (as its native Grabenites tersely call it) begins as early as mid-September, and the rivers and southern marshes are fully ice-encrusted by November. Exposure poses a lethal hazard for people and livestock in the depths of winter ... though tales of men suffocated by their own ice-choked beards or struck blind when their ocular fluids froze are surely overstated: this *isn't* Vorostokov, after all.

Seldom do conditions rise above freezing for more than five months a year, diminishing a growing season already impaired by gloomy skies. When the thaw *does* arrive, in late April or May, excessive runoff turns the isle's few interior roads (trails, really) into a morass of knee-deep mud, even though the earth beneath the mire remains stiff with permafrost. Despite the threat of freezing, Grabenites actually find cross-country travel easier in wintertime, when skis are usable. (Hence, my own decision to skirt the island by boat, not slog through muck.) Warmth or cold strike swiftly, with no clear spring or fall *per se*; residents claim they have but two seasons: "snow" and "mud".

### Winter

Winters on Graben Island vary from Cold (40° to 0° F) in September, October, March and April to Severe Cold (0° to -20° F) from November to February, with occasional dips into Extreme Cold (-20° to -50°) in late December or January. Even at the height of summer, temperatures virtually never rise above Moderate (40° to 60° F) on the Island.

Winds blow at 15-35 mph on most days.

Precipitation is heavy year-round, coming as copious snowfall in winter and downpours or squalls in the "mud" months. Rain of ten or more inches a week is scarcely remarked upon; the heaviest of storms tend to close in from the northeast, heralded by spectacular lightning and thunder. Many of the larger trees on Graben Island display the scars of lightning strike and all settlements have lost buildings to such bolts. Unlike in Souragne, all this rainfall cannot saturate the rock-hard permafrost beneath the surface, so the storms' run-off constantly erodes the meagre topsoil, carving deep furrows into the landscape and undermining foundations of

### Former Mistway: The Call of the Claw

Before the Great Upheaval, intermittent sailors' reports placed Graben Island (and Todstein) in the Sea of Sorrows, yet the Grabenites attest that the seas around their isle ended at the Mists until 750. In fact, Nebligtode was once an Island of Terror, like Souragne. Reports it could be found "northwest of Lamordia" came from travelers who had unwittingly sailed into an undocumented Mistway, which once linked Nebligtode to the Sea of Sorrows and could be traversed only during storms. As precise navigation has a lower priority than merely keeping afloat in such gales, and the overcast skies of Nebligtode hid their view of the stars during their sojourns, these travelers never realized they had left the Core.

The **Call of the Claw** seems to have been severed in the wake of the Upheaval, as Markovia now sits where its original entrance once lay. Rumours have since circulated of ships that ride out a terrible storm in one Core sea, only to find themselves adrift in the other, but it is unclear if these are reports of real events, or mere wishful thinking by merchant-seamen who would profit greatly by such a "short cut" across the continent.

**The Call of the Claw (defunct?):** Northwest Sea of Sorrows – Southwest Nebligtode (moderate reliability, two-way, conditional [storms only])

carelessly-situated buildings. Winter snows descend less garishly, but with relentless determination: Grabenite roofs often boast garret *hatchways* rather than windows, to permit egress when ground-level doors are obstructed by snowdrifts.

Few lands I have visited are so windy as Graben Island: I've lost four different hats to wayward gusts. The sea breeze is sharpest along the coastal bluffs, gentlest in the marshes and interior woods. Only in the evenings does the air become still, and fog of varying density blankets the Island at these times, spreading inland from the shore and rising from the wetlands to the south. Fortunately, the erratic gusts that gird the isle and imperiled the *Black Pelican's* approach are muted inshore, so smaller, shallow-bottomed craft – the natives' trusty "dories" in particular – can hug the surf-line in comparative safety. This margin ranges from a quarter-mile in width off the eastern pebble beaches, to perhaps fifty yards along the western cliffs. It narrows to a hazardous "pinch", but a few paces' deep, at the mouth of the Niesonnigbach (where Seeheim lies).

### *Topography*

The harsh terrain of Graben Island slopes gently downward, from the jagged ridgeline of the western bluffs to the marshes and rocky beaches in the south and east. Only a fraction of its land is arable: its settlements huddle in river-carven nooks along the shoreline, dependant on the sea's bounty for whatever this land's poor soil is unwilling to yield. Small though it is, the isle's interior can *feel* as remote as the Sebuian wastes, as local folk are disinclined to venture far from the Nocturnal Sea's shore. Save a handful of hunters and lumberjacks, most Grabenites linger within earshot of the crashing surf for the majority of their lives.

Rising some 300 feet above the breakers at high tide, or from tumbled piles of boulders when the sea recedes, the Nordklippe runs from Graben-town to this land's highest point at Spitzende: a sharp, 482' promontory at the island's northern tip. The Südklippe, a dozen yards lower and slightly less steep, girds the "thumb" on the west coast of the

Island, facing tiny Knammen Isle. Both of these cliff-faces are of hard, unforgiving granite, supporting only a few lichens and dwarfed trees in tiny niches along their salt-sprayed surface. As the *Black Pelican* eased into its berth at the Graben-town docks, I noticed the silhouette of Graben Manor – surprisingly grand for such an isolated enclave, yet woefully drab and utilitarian to Dementlieuse eyes – crowning the southern bluff. Only two windows were lit, despite the gloom and lateness of the hour. Even as I watched, a third light, *blue* in color (a signal, or merely a tinted windowpane...?), flickered to life in a garret at the peak of the manor house.

Ensnconced between the cliffs, Graben-town occupies the largest swatch of cultivable land on the island. (The traditionalists still stubbornly refer to this community as "Graben", but as contact with other realms spreads, even most Grabenites have chosen to admit the sense in distinguishing Graben-town from the isle, itself). Lesser croplands surround both Kirchenheim and Seeheim on the far ends of the Island; Meerdorf, a tiny fishing-hamlet on Knammen Isle, sustains itself wholly from the sea. The majority of Graben Island is relatively untouched by the hand of Man, albeit not nearly so primeval as the Core's vast wilderness-tracts.



At its north end, higher elevation into the wind keeps the landscape relatively dry, and the ground is rocky enough that the isle's ubiquitous flood-trenches do not shift as precariously as elsewhere. Ill-suited to farming, these northern 'Steinfelder' provide pasturage for livestock that can endure the cold winds and find forage in scrub. Tough patches of long grass, low-lying bushes, and wildflowers nourish the Grabenites' heavy-coated goats and sheep. Briars and nettles carpet the northern ravines, entangling the careless, but bringing forth berries in season. Hares, marmots, foxes, and other heath-roving game abounds in the Steinfelder, and gyrfalcons, ravens and sea eagles circle overhead, but predators large enough to pose a threat to men seldom venture this far north. Trekking overland from Seeheim, to take in the view from Spitzende, I found I needed sturdy *boots* far more than musket or spell. (Twisting one's ankle on scrubland rubble is no experience to savor, even if you *do* carry healing potions whilst hiking!) Vertical mine-shafts – a few seasonally-active, but most long played out – dot the emptiness of the Steinfelder

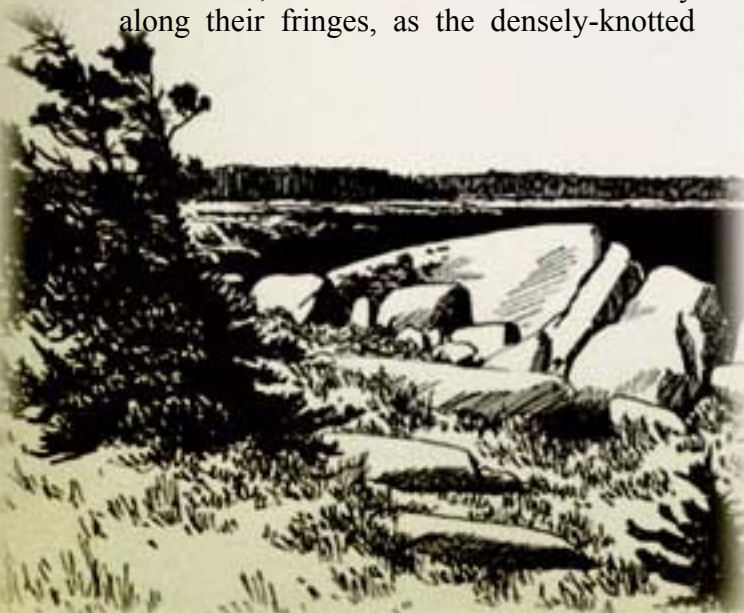
Moving down and inland from the scrub, the 'Hohlhandländer' (literally "palm lands") consist mainly of open meadows, subdivided by dense bands of canyon and forest. Tall grasses and weeds carpet the heath, pocked by hummocks of dirt and shrubs – the handiwork of industrious burrowing rodents – and scattered stands of slender aspen or poplar. While more fertile than the Steinfelder, these lands are cultivated only along their fringes, as the densely-knotted

roots of prairie grasses are too tough for ploughs to harrow. Only the occasional shepherd's hut or elevated watch-platform testify to any human presence here, and these are so rarely occupied as to *exemplify*, not alleviate, the prairie's loneliness.

The isle's greatest sweep of open grassland, the 'Finsterheide', extends diagonally from Kirchenheim to the base of the westernmost "finger" of the southern marshes. Local breeds of cattle and ponies – stocky, shaggy-furred beasts almost doll-like in their diminutive proportions – range free over the Finsterheide in summer, then are driven into winter shelters by native farm folk. More livestock are pastured on the heath to the west, the 'Racheanger', an area traditionally reserved for the herds of Graben Island's founding clan. The smallest of the prairies, the 'Senkenwiese', is hemmed in by deep ravines and rivers on its inland sides, abutting the marshes to the south. Tales of sinkholes and venomous snakes discourage even the skeptics from pasturing chattels in the Senkenwiese. Accounts of will-o'-wisps that lure unwary into the marsh, malicious fey (called *huldu*) that drive trespassers to madness and a dreadful moor-haunting fiend known as the Flayed Rider – judging by its descriptions, a rather grisly undead – further help keep this bit of grassland undisturbed.

Grassy marshes and lakes dominate the lowlands, extending out into the "fingers" of the southern shoreline and onto the mudflat "claws" beyond. The most accessible, the Wiesenmoor, runs west along the coast to the Racheanger, as well as south onto the Mondzinke (the western "finger") to the sea. On the eastern Krisezinke, the cypress-cloaked Kriesumpf juts southward, and the fetid Aassumpf lies between the other two marshes, on the central peninsula of Modersperren.

Compared to the tangled and sweltering swamp I've lately grown accustomed to in Souragne, the Island's salt marshes and sloughs seemed almost idyllic: no alligators, no vampire bats, and only a few retiring massasaugas to avoid in the way of serpents. Alas, *mosquitoes* as fierce as the bayou's do plague these wetlands in summer, often escorted in their harassments by biting flies!



## *The Flayed Rider*

Grabenite tales of the Flayed Rider depict it as one of the Restless Dead: an unnamed horseman, hideously skinned alive by his foes, returned from death maddened by agony and driven to slaughter all who cross his path. Rare witnesses insist the rider's torso has fused onto his steed's neck (also flayed), melding the pair into an unnatural shape like the centaurs of myth.

In truth, the "Rider" is no rider at all. When the Anatal sea-raiders seized Graben Island from its former inhabitants, centuries ago, the sinister supplicants of the Black Chapel conjured up a vile menace to avenge their extirpation: a nuckalavee, a grotesque aberration with an affinity for the undead. This amphibious beast harried the Anatal relentlessly, on land and sea alike, before the raiders' clerics successfully *geased* it to shun the waves.

Anatal warriors then lured it into the Senkenwiese, and the clerics carved a potent binding-rune at the twin rivers' headwaters, trapping the nuckalavee in an isolated corner of the island and forcing it into suspended animation. It remained there until Graben Island was claimed by the Mists, at which point dark forces of the Land weakened the binding-rune enough to awaken the monster from its slumber. Perhaps in caprice, these same eldritch forces also reinstated its prior *geas* as a permanent curse.

The nuckalavee has been confined between rivers and shoreline for over a century, as the still-intact Anatal rune and its aversion to clean water bar it from entering the sea or migrating beyond the Schicksalflusse. It has subjugated several lesser Anatal mummies of the Aassumpf, which it torments for sport when its captivity grows maddening, but its greatest desire is to win free and wreak havoc on the Grabenites: living descendants of the Anatal sea-raiders who trapped it. An aquatic being averse to pure water, yet barred by *geas* from venturing into the surf, it slumbers in the murky depths of the Aassumpf's stagnant lakes.

Meredoth is well aware of the nuckalavee's presence and nature, but has opted neither to release nor destroy it, figuring it (or its corpse) may come in handy one day.



## Graben Island

The Kriesesumpf is primarily a cypress swamp, giving way to salt marsh along its coastline. Thin, whitewater streams have carved deep gullies into the crumbling clay of the interior Kriesezinke, leaving high ridges covered in swamp oaks and willow. Spilling out toward the shore, the rills spread into quiet cypress sumps, then mingle with the tides nearer the surf-line. The coastal "saltings" – rich meadows of cordgrass and sedge – are occasionally used by merchants to pasture and fatten up imported livestock, but these grazing-lands are so prone to floods that natives see no profit in exploiting them. Shorebirds such as sandpipers and terns nest here in summer, and estuarine fishes (flounder, herring, smelt) spawn in the reeds. A few reclusive fishermen *do* live on the marsh's fringes, as I spotted a handful of isolated, net-draped huts near the shoreline, mounted atop cypress-wood posts.

The Wiesenmoor is least like the bayou, treeless and open to the sky. Entwined mats of marsh-grass overlie mud and water, forming floating rafts for bushes, nesting waterfowl, and beaver, muskrat or otter. These drifting platforms of vegetation must be traversed with care, as they easily give way beneath the weight of a man. Slipping along the channels between grass-rafts in my "canoo" was a far more relaxing experience than my forays into the Maison d'Sablet. Gliding over a still, nameless lake in the Mondzinke, I witnessed a pike longer than my paddle lazing in the clear water. (Alas, my trusty rod-and-reel set was being repaired in Graben-town.) As the mists of dusk eddied among the cattails and I rowed back toward the sea, I heard an unearthly, haunting outcry. I am told it was merely a common marsh-bird called a "loon", yet by the sound I'd have sworn it to be a ghost, mournfully bidding me *adieu*.

### *Dread Possibility: The Bog-Pits of the Strangled*

Long before Graben Manor existed, the fearsome Anatal sea-raiders seized Graben Island from its monastic residents, and occupied the isle for four generations before being wiped out by plague. During their residency, the cruelest of the Anatal engaged in a morbid rite of human sacrifice, ritually strangling condemned criminals or thralls and then consigning the remains to the rancid waters of the Aassumpf. Unknown to the Anatal, the peat lining these bogs acted as a natural preservative, tanning and desiccating their sacrifices' flesh, and gradually converting them into Ancient Dead: the Strangled.

As each Anatal village carried out sacrifices annually, and their people occupied Graben Island for roughly a century, the Strangled may well constitute the largest population of Ancients outside of Har' Akir. Most are feeble creatures of Rank 1 or 2; more often than not, these weaker specimens cannot dig their way out of the bogs without assistance, and remain buried in the mud that preserved them. A few dozen – infamous traitors and murderers whose names were remembered with dread even after their demise – are of Rank 3. These also linger by the bog-pits where they were buried, standing guard over them, as the peat-fouled waters serve as the 'elixir' that maintains their powers. The Strangled of Rank 3 are mostly barbarians or fighters, while lesser specimens are warriors, rogues, or commoners.

The strongest of the Strangled is Igil Wotanshand (NE male human Rank 4 Ancient Clr7/Bar5), an Anatal fanatic who hanged himself in a deluded attempt to re-enact his Ascended patron's mythic self-strangulation. Unable to accept that he is now undead, Wotanshand stubbornly insists that he has passed into Valhalla, and that the other Strangled were bestowed upon him as his 'warband', to fight at his command. As his 'vassals' unanimously loathe the Anatal priests who slew them, Wotanshand's efforts to conscript more than a rebuked handful to his service have been an abject failure, yet he keeps on trying.



## Graben Island

My visit to the Aassumpf was cut short by a pressing message from Vechor. I can't say I was overly disappointed: my brief probe upstream from the Modersperren found this area to be a stench-ridden bog, its blackened waters stagnant and foul with decomposing vegetation. Moss and waxy-leaved shrubs grow thickly in the Aassumpf, as do a smattering of great, twisted broadleaf trees. (Rather sinister, although they displayed no signs of animation while I was present.) Carnivorous plants, including pitcher plants and bloodrose, are abundant, and attain quite impressive sizes. Nor were they the *only* organisms to grow large in the Aassumpf: the mosquitoes there were the biggest I've ever had to endure – this, after months in Souragne! – and I spied the muddy tracks of some tremendous web-footed creature (giant waterfowl? or monstrous frog?) at the edge of a putrid-smelling lake, not long before Master Shadowcloak's *sending* sent me back to Graben-town and the *Black Pelican*.

In addition to the wetlands of Graben Island proper, several low, irregular mudflats lie at the tips of its three southern peninsulas, and a long sandbar southwest of Knammen Isle shields Meerdorf from tidal swells. These stretches of salt marsh are lightly vegetated by cordgrass and other salt-tolerant species, but all are inundated by spring tides during the new and full moon, so do not technically qualify as "islands". These transient islets, or 'Schlammholme', provide a sedimentary home to various invertebrates, drawing both shorebirds and human clam-diggers to feast upon them. Farther offshore, numerous Kielbrecher – jagged ridges and spires of rock – are scattered unpredictably in the Island's inshore waters, exposed during neap tides, yet a hidden trap for unwary sailors for the rest of the month. Locals know these hazards' positions, but foreigners can easily founder upon them. They are most abundant in the Greifbai (the bay between Mondzinke and Knammen) and on the tricky approach to Seeheim.

The populated end of Graben Island is cut by three canyon-bound rivers around which settlements have grown. The north-flowing Niesonnigbach runs out of the scrubland into

a narrow inlet at Seeheim. (Nachtsee, the small lake for which the hamlet was named, was drained to create cropland some time ago.) The swift Knechtschaft, hemmed in by a narrow ravine it carved, meets the sea at Kirchenheim. Named for the Graben clan's first patriarch, the Eframstrom skirts the base of a short, landward spur of Südklippe, forming a natural boundary between Graben-town and the founding family's estate. Each of these watercourses is flanked by stands of conifers and squat, hardy broadleaf trees, tamed by the natives for generations and devoid of any predators more fearsome than a wildcat. Berries, nuts and fungi are harvested in the woodlands, by squirrels and songbirds as well as villagers.

Splitting the Island's southern meadows and marsh, five rivers cross the Hohlhandländer to the wetlands beyond. The Todwasser and Wutwasser divide the Racheanger from the Finsterheide, feeding into the Wiesenmoor northwest of the peninsula. Tall pines and larches line their inland banks, giving way to stunted willows in the marsh. 'Blutbadholz' is the Grabenite name for this western forest, and traces of ancient settlements – fieldstone walls, old burial mounds, and at least two (minor) battlefields – are said to be hidden in its shadowed depths. Archaeology is not my forte, but the chance to investigate such clues to the Grabenites' predecessors – at least, those which constant erosion has yet to destroy – may interest Brothers in that field.

Moving eastward, the twin Schicksalflusse – "Fateful Rivers", in translation – split the three great marshlands from one another; the Verdrehtschickal ("Twisted Fate") lies west of the Aassumpf, and the Sicherschickal ("Inevitable Fate") on its east. As fits their names, the Twisted Fate writhes across the landscape, whereas the Inevitable Fate traces a beeline south. The headwaters of the two lie within a quarter mile of one another, and the forests festooning their banks – mostly pine again, interspersed with oak, hemlock and hickory – are united under one name, the Reissendwald. Both this forest and the Blutbodholz are home to familiar animals such as deer, black bears, and owls, as well as tan felines called 'cat-a-mounts' and a few

## Graben Island

undersized wolves. More ominously, monstrous beings, trolls among them, are said to prowl these stretches of forest and canyon. One huntsman, his native reticence overcome via *charm*, showed me the stuffed forepaw of a “hel-beast” his grandsire had reputedly slain in the Reissendwald. By his description and by the appendage itself, the quarry had been a yeth hound.

Still further eastward, the Untröstlich coils its way south, from the eastern end of the Finsterheide to the Kriesesumpf’s margins, before veering out to sea. Slow and lazy, it is the inland border of the Zaubereiwald, the Island’s largest forest. Its plant and animal life is akin to that of the Reissendwald, but local folklore attests a more exotic presence: dwarves (“*zwerge*”) are reputed to reside beneath the forest floor, crafting enchanted items of great power and beauty. According to legend, the reclusive near-men hoard vast riches underground. Famously unfriendly, occasionally one will approach a true man and offer some extraordinary item (often a weapon) in return for a distasteful service (e.g. abducting a human bride for the *zwerger*). Myself, I saw no signs of mining or other industries typical of dwarf-kind during my foray – indeed, Zaubereiwald seemed to be quite an ordinary wood – but I have sent Brother Lochspeare transcripts of Grabenite tales of *zwerger* (sometimes “*moderigzwerger*”) activity, so he might assess their credibility.

### The Doomwright

Until recently, the “*zwerge*” were colorful regional folklore of the Grabenites, not fact. After Neblightode joined the Core, however, these tales caught the attention of a fir – an evil gremlin exiled from the Shadow Rift for maiming a rival – who capriciously chose to make these stories come true. Calling itself the “Doomwright”, the gremlin takes gleeful delight in posing as one of these infamous “rotten dwarves”, and luring the gullible and power-hungry into bargains that inevitably bring about their undoing and disgrace.

The Doomwright is served by firkin experts, and is itself a master smith. It applies minor enchantments to its firkins’ work, to pass off as “items of power” to the magic-naïve Grabenites.

The NE fir is either a 9<sup>th</sup> level artificer (if the *Eberron Campaign Setting* is available), or a Wiz8/Exp2, in addition to its inborn powers as a shadow fey. Its favoured rodent-form is a beaver, not a rat.

### Encounters: Wildlife

Most of Graben Island is a fairly peaceful place, and horrific creatures encountered there tend to crawl out of the sea (see Interlude 1 sidebar) or slither forth from the mires of the Aassumpf. Fey (*huldu*) and dire animals pose an occasional threat to foresters and trappers.

CR 1/10: bat, toad<sup>MM1</sup>;

CR 1/8: rat<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1/6: raven<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1/4: albatross<sup>Sto</sup>, cat<sup>MM1</sup>, otter<sup>Sto</sup>, owl<sup>MM1</sup>, weasel<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1/3: dog<sup>MM1</sup>, hawk<sup>MM1</sup>, seal<sup>Sto</sup>, tiny viper<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1/2: badger<sup>MM1</sup>, eagle<sup>MM1</sup>, pony<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1: heavy horse<sup>MM1</sup> (on Graben estate only), sea lion<sup>Sto</sup>, sheepdog (use riding dog stats<sup>MM1</sup>), snapping turtle<sup>Sto</sup>, wolf<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 2: bat swarm<sup>MM1</sup>, black bear<sup>MM1</sup>, boar<sup>MM1</sup>, cat-a-mount (use leopard stats<sup>MM1</sup>), dire bat<sup>MM1</sup>, dire hawk<sup>MM2</sup>, dire weasel<sup>MM1</sup>, rat swarm<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 3: dire toad<sup>MM2</sup>, dire wolf<sup>MM1</sup>

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### Encounters: Monsters

CR 1/4: witchbane leech<sup>DoD</sup>

CR 1/3: giant leech<sup>Sto</sup>, twig blight<sup>MM2</sup>

CR 1/2: bloodrose<sup>DoD</sup>

CR 1: bakhna rakhna<sup>DoD</sup>, domovoi<sup>Fro</sup>, fearweed<sup>DoD</sup>, krenshar<sup>MM1</sup>, leech swarm<sup>Sto</sup>, nixie<sup>MM1</sup>, rusalka<sup>Fro</sup>, sea spawn minion<sup>DoD</sup>;

CR 2: crawling ivy<sup>DoD</sup>, giant raven<sup>Fro</sup>, phantom hound<sup>DoD</sup>, skin thief<sup>DoD</sup>

CR 3: air mephit<sup>MM1</sup>, aquatic remnant<sup>DoD</sup>, boowray<sup>DoD</sup>, bowlyn<sup>DoD</sup>, dread scarecrow<sup>DoD</sup>, drowning<sup>DoD</sup>, dryad<sup>MM1</sup>, *ghast*<sup>MM1</sup>, giant owl<sup>MM1</sup>, jack frost<sup>DoD</sup>, locust swarm<sup>MM1</sup>, midnight cat<sup>DoD</sup>, seawolf<sup>Sto</sup>, shadow<sup>MM1</sup>, vodyanoi<sup>Fro</sup>, yeth hound<sup>MM1</sup>

CR 4: bruja<sup>DoD</sup>, dread wight<sup>DoD</sup>, fenhound<sup>DoD</sup>, mimic<sup>MM1</sup>, sea hag<sup>MM1</sup>, wood woad<sup>MM3</sup>, yuki-on-na<sup>Fro</sup>

CR 5: arayashka<sup>DoD</sup>, green hag<sup>MM1</sup>, odem<sup>DoD</sup>, sea spawn master<sup>DoD</sup>; selkie, dread greater<sup>VRFSM</sup>

CR 6: annis<sup>MM1</sup>, corpse candle<sup>DoD</sup>, dread troll<sup>DoD</sup>, grim<sup>DoD</sup>, icegaunt<sup>Fro</sup>, jolly roger<sup>DoD</sup>, marzanna<sup>Fro</sup>, sea zombie<sup>DoD</sup>, shambling mound<sup>MM1</sup>, will-o'-wisp<sup>MM1</sup>;

CR 7: breathdrinker<sup>MM2</sup>, darktentacles<sup>MM2</sup>, grim reaper<sup>DoD</sup>, nymph<sup>MM1</sup>, spectre<sup>MM1</sup>;

CR 8: blackwing<sup>MM5</sup>, deadborn vultures<sup>MM5</sup>, drowned<sup>MM3</sup>

CR 9: galeb duhr<sup>MM2</sup>, valpurleiche<sup>DoD</sup>

CR 10: leechwalker<sup>MM2</sup>

CR 11: crimson death<sup>MM2</sup>

CR 12: air weird<sup>MM2</sup>, snow weird<sup>Fro</sup>

**Variable CR:** Ancient Dead<sup>DoD</sup>, Frostfell ghost<sup>Fro</sup>, geist<sup>DoD</sup>, ghost<sup>MM1</sup>, *lebendtod*<sup>\*</sup>, lycanthrope (werebear<sup>MM1</sup>, werewolf<sup>MM1</sup>, wereraven<sup>DoD</sup>) [<sup>\*</sup> – See revised template in DM Appendix.]

Few of Graben Island's indigenous monsters are under the darklord's control, as Meredoth has no particular interest in policing the isle or intervening in what happens there. Note that ghosts on the Island always arise as a result of a *lebendtod*'s failed attempts to create spawn, and that those which arise in such a misbegotten state are expressly forbidden to spread ghoul fever.

A grim reaper that manifests on Graben Island (and elsewhere in Nebligtode as well) appears as a boiling cloud of black smoke rimmed by a nimbus of sickly green light. Invisible claws lash out from its core, to rake (as scythe blade) or clutch (as scythe handle) at victims, and the churning, roiling darkness at the creature's core serves as a conventional grim reaper's *gaze of fear* attack.

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Alongside the forest, the Island's shoreline leads up to Kirchenheim as a pebble beach: home to scavenging gulls and crows, and a comical variety of seabird called "puffins". Seals crowd the Kielbrecher on this coastal stretch, eagerly intercepting and preying on these plump, waddling little fish-eaters, and Grabenite furriers harvest both predator and prey in season. Heavy as the drizzle of this weather-beaten island grows at times, I'll allow that my new sealskin coat *does* shed the raindrops most effectively: a pity that its puffin-down lining would soon broil me like a spiced crawdad in Souragne!

### Settlements

Following the *Pelican's* successful (albeit nerve-wracking) docking at Graben-town, I explored the port itself, then hired a doughty seaman of the aptly-named Fischer clan to circumnavigate the Island, so that I might visit its lesser communities and countryside. Bram Fischer's dory slid easily through the shallows where *Black Pelican* would have foundered, and his garrulous tales proved not *every* Grabenite is as taciturn as rumor portrays them... though I doubt if one "fish story" in ten he related held a grain of truth.

A tiresome boor, but informative.

#### Graben-town (small town):

nonstandard democracy/ plutocracy); AL N; CL 7; 800 gp limit; Assets 78,000 gp; Population 1900; Humans 99% (inc. lebendtod), others 1%.

*Authority figures:* Sgt. Giermund Leifsen, male human War10 (Yeomanry officer); Pieter Fischer, male human Exp8 (wealthy assemblyman); Aesep Brand, male human War2/Exp3 (harbormaster).

*Important characters:* Gunnar Valsic, male human Ftr5/Rog2 (foreign crime lord); Toret Myrlos Kendren, male human Clr7 [Ezra] (Darkonian missionary); Aesa Rolfsdottir, female human Com3 (town busybody)

### Graben-town

Largest community and unofficial capital of Graben Island, Graben-town occupies a wide basin of fertile cropland to the north of the Efraimstrom, extending gently downhill to a sheltered beach between Nordklippe and Südklippe. Not unlike Nevuchar Springs, it is a once-sleepy community "awakened" by the emergence of the Nocturnal Sea, having nearly doubled its population since the Mists withdrew. Formerly a quiet backwater, it is now the hub of a thriving fishing industry, housing nearly as many immigrants as Grabenites, to the acute dismay of the latter.

To accommodate this influx of newcomers, and the rich catches of cod and herring they haul from the tempestuous seas beyond the Kielbrecher, Graben-town's harbor facilities have grown from a modest two docks to four, with a fifth under construction. The once-pristine beaches west of the piers have been dredged and enclosed to create a crude, but serviceable dry-dock slip, suitable for hull-repairs and stripping of barnacles from smaller vessels. Perched at the mouth of the Efraimstrom, atop a rocky prominence from which baskets descend to ships' decks via block-and-tackle, the architectural eyesore of the Fischer Packhouse takes in tons of seafood each week, to be cleaned, salted and packaged for shipment. There *are* times, I gather, when the docks are largely deserted – only the foolish or desperate risk the deepwater fishing-banks while Todstein's icebergs are adrift – but this was hard to credence during my visit, when husky stevedores teemed on the wharf and Packhouse workers trudged listlessly to their labors, stinking of fish guts.

None of this "progress" would be possible, if the conservative bulk of native-born Grabenites had a say in the matter. Indeed, if the mutterings and irate glares I observed from native villagers were any example, many would be glad to see the new docks and Packhouse go up in flames! (Were I a *betting* man, now...) Many locals view the throngs of new arrivals as no less than an invasion of criminals ("outcast dregs of distant, unsavoury realms"), whose foreign speech and habits they find baffling or

## Graben Island

offensive. Still, a dynamic minority within the native populace – led by the extended Fischer clan to which my hired pilot belonged – values commercial gain above respectability. It is the Fischers (with the allied families of Cooper and Stromm), who have elevated Graben-town from a remote way-stop into the southerly focal point for the Nocturnal Sea.

As with boomtowns everywhere, this rapid growth shows in the layout and architecture of Graben-town proper. Traditional Grabenite homes still predominate, but only because each new building houses multiple families or (more often) hordes of unmarried seamen packed-in like the fish they hope to

make their fortune by. Such hastily-erected wooden structures – little more than boxes partitioned into cubbies, and drafty to boot – have an unnerving habit of shuddering in the ceaseless Island wind; some have collapsed entirely, with considerable loss of life. Alas, peculiarities of Island property-rights make it difficult to remove land from the custody of its owners, no matter *how* criminally-misused: sites of such accidents remain in the landlord's keeping, and fallen tenements are soon replaced by equally-shoddy ones.

### *Dread Possibility: Cat's in the Gradle*

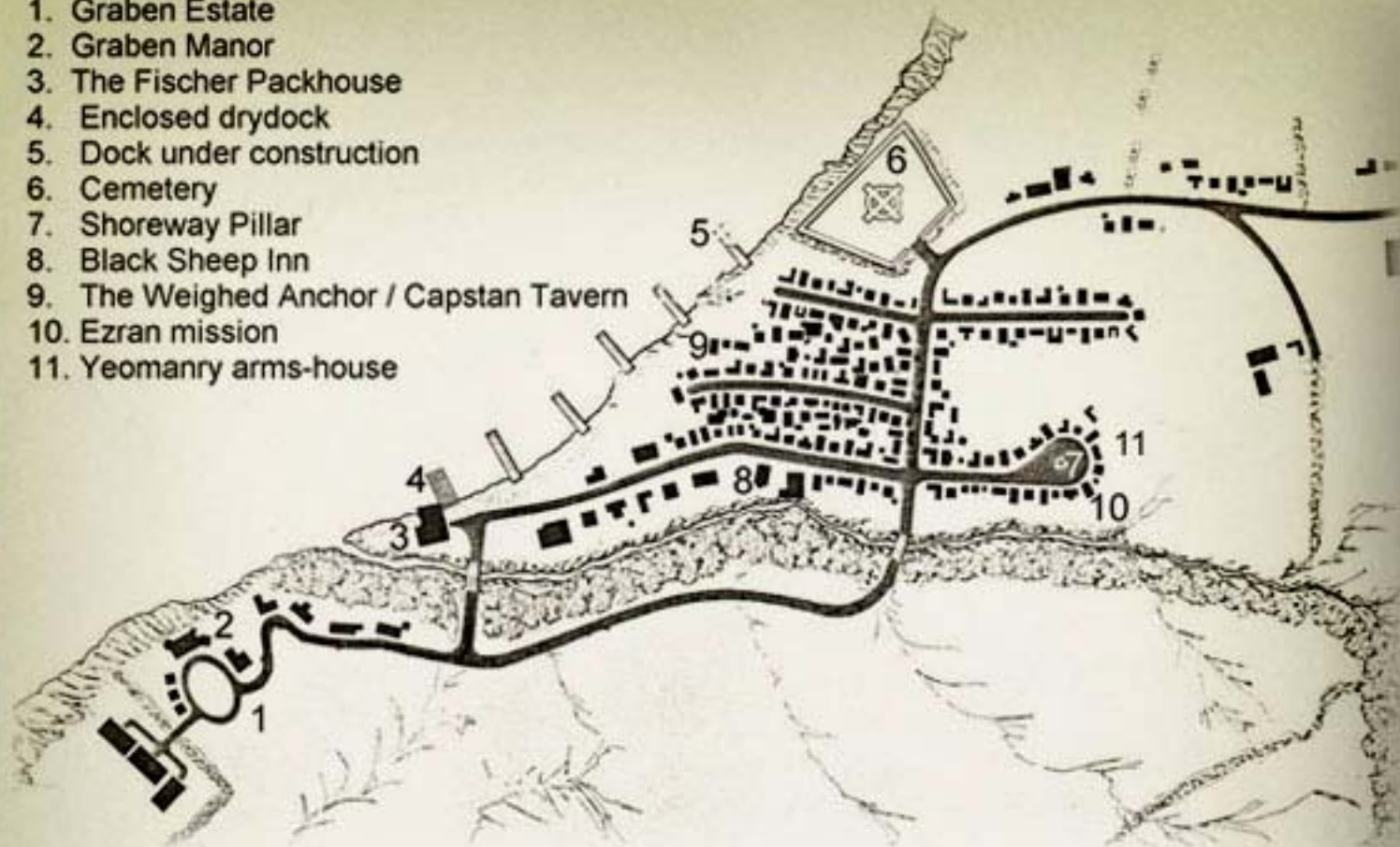
While the majority of the native Grabenites' suspicions about Graben-town's immigrants are based on no more than small-town isolationism and bigotry, the rising fortunes and population of this enclave – a settlement with no greater *indigenous* crime than the occasional stolen goat – have not escaped the attentions of Nova Vaasa's avaricious darklord, Malken. Regarding the unworldly Grabenites as 'easy pickings', the crime lord sent one of his own lieutenants to the Island a year ago, to establish a new branch of his empire. As yet, Malken's agent – Gunnar Valsic, a former enforcer for the Rivtoffs a bit past his physical prime – has only partly succeeded in fulfilling his charge, as the Grabenites are a more sober-minded and unsporting people than anticipated. Most of Valsic's profits are from prostitution and bets on wrestling matches.

The natives' fondness for gambling on fights between stallions – a proud tradition at local wedding-feasts – shows every indication of being far more lucrative. However, Valsic's Vaasi sensibilities are balking at the notion of using *horses* in blood-sports: an aversion the hard-bitten lieutenant hadn't known was in him, and is now struggling fiercely to overcome. To buy more time to work up the nerve and deflect Malken's heated demands for profit, Valsic is investigating reports that the source of a rare and costly narcotic – the intensely-addictive *tsongha* juice – is known to certain Grabenites; although the natives' disdain for self-indulgence makes these rumors seem incredible. Given the secret of that exotic drug's provenance, Valsic believes he could buy off his boss's anger and inquiries indefinitely.

In truth, Valsic's hesitancy about taking over the horse-fight betting is already known to Malken, who is livid over his proxy's lack of backbone. Malken has always *personally* disposed of his failed underlings, as a lesson to the rest; however, the crime lord's first instinct to strangle his skittish lieutenant is infeasible, as he cannot leave his domain to enact such a punishment.

This has placed Malken in the awkward position of having to recruit someone *else* to assassinate Valsic, and to arrange for this in such a way that no one – not even his own henchmen – suspects his inability to cross the Nocturnal Sea. Else, this lapse may be seen as a sign of weakness (seasickness, perhaps?) by the treacherous and ambitious cutthroats with whom Nova Vaasa's darklord surrounds himself.

1. Graben Estate
2. Graben Manor
3. The Fischer Packhouse
4. Enclosed drydock
5. Dock under construction
6. Cemetery
7. Shoreway Pillar
8. Black Sheep Inn
9. The Weighed Anchor / Capstan Tavern
10. Ezran mission
11. Yeomanry arms-house



Immigrant housing is concentrated in the northwestern corner of the township, while craftsmen's workshops and businesses line the main stretch of Shore Way, along the Efracimstrom. The inland side of town is staunchly native Grabenite, with wealthier homes and civic facilities – a meeting hall, a Yeomanry arms-house, and a newly-built chapel of Ezra – clustered around Shoreway Circle at the road's east end. Shore Way and Founder's Road – longest street on the island, winding east from the Graben family estate to the outlying farms – are stone-paved with granite from the bluffs. (Other roads on the Island consist simply of halved logs laid over the muddy ground, split side up, and anchored by pegs.) Two fieldstone bridges cross the Efracimstrom, at Founder's Road and a side-spur of Shore Way. Each is illuminated by oil lantern, to prevent the careless from slipping into the creek's forty-foot crevasse.

Native residences are built largely or wholly of stone, stoutly-walled against winter's chill and angled to cut the prevailing winds. Larger families add a second story of sturdy bog-oak to their home, and perhaps a half-story above that.

Roofs are of double-layered timber, canted sharply to shed snow; thatching bound in felt is stuffed between planks as insulation. Basements are absent, being hard to heat, but cold cellars – stone-lined pits dug out behind the houses – act as handy receptacles for perishables, kept frigid year-round by permafrost. Kitchen gardens and milk-goat pens are common, even in the heart of town, but chicken coops are not, as such poultry fares miserably in this climate.

Windows are few and narrow, acting mostly as vents or peepholes in this sunless realm, not light sources. Most have pine slats fixed permanently in their frames to deflect drafts, and shutters without and within. Doorways are also taller and slimmer than I am used to, with stout oaken doors that might be better-suited to a Falkovnian fortress than a private home! Pressed for an explanation as to why their houses require such stalwart entryways, most Grabenites merely attest this is "how it's always been done" – a phrase I'd grow heartily sick of hearing, from these prosaic folk – but my suspicion remains that darker causes are to blame.

## Runestones

The Anatal ancestors of the Grabenites employed their own mystical writing system – runes – to record history and to invoke magical protection and effects. Similar to the arcane script used in wizards' spellbooks, but resistant to *read magic* or other translation-spells, Anatal runes cannot be read today without a DC 35 Spellcraft check. If the runes' would-be reader knows the Grabenite tongue, a +4 competence bonus is applied to this check. The Grabenites have forgotten their ancestors' runic writing system, though they recognize runes as such when they see them.

Runestones such as the Shoreway Pillar were used by the Anatal to mark sites of ritual or social importance, and engraved stones of this sort are scattered throughout those parts of the isle which the sea-raiders had occupied, in Nebligtode's false history.

Most stones commemorate past events or signify the importance of the site they mark. A few – engraved by clerics or skalds and then enchanted – act as *symbols* or other writing-based traps, or generate long-lasting magic effects, much like an area-affecting *permanency* does. A **very** few stones endow those who can read them with a temporary magical benefit, such as *protection from evil*. Only reading directly off a runestone invokes its magic; a copy or rubbing is quite mundane, albeit still resistant to translation-spells. Runestones only radiate magic if and when their powers (if any) are actively triggered by being read.

As sacred ritual markers of the Anatal folk, tampering with runestones may constitute an act of defilement. Though Grabenites don't recall how to read them, they understand these carved stones held spiritual meaning to their forbearers, and discourage foreigners' attempts to disturb them. Many stones carry their own warnings also, their inscriptions proclaiming their sanctity to Wotan, Donar, or other Ascended revered by the Anatal. A runestone may be Good, Neutral, or Evil for purposes of desecration-related Powers checks, depending on the one who carved it.



## Graben Island

On two of the older houses' doors I discerned deep-gouged claw marks, weathered and repeatedly varnished. Nor were these gashes testament to simple lycanthropic activity, unless werebeasts in this region are aberrant in the extreme: one marred door bore *seven* parallel scratches, as if delivered by the same betaloned paw-swipe; the other, no less than nine.

Other businesses in Graben-town include a general store, a grain-and-grist mill, dealers in meat and in bread, several textile-makers and the aforementioned Fischer Packhouse. The latter is the brainchild of the seven Fischer brothers, who learned their advanced techniques of salt-and-tin-packaging steam-cooked fish from a Lamordian they rescued from a foundering caravel. Granted, their methods do require regular imports of costly Richemulouise tin, but the Packhouse's products – tinned caviar, bottled oils, and ground-fishbone fertilizer, as well as filleted or whole fishes by the barrel – are much in demand and can be shipped long distances without spoilage: an invaluable asset, for an out-of-the-way enterprise.

Aside from the chapel of Ezra – a modest, undecorated mission where Darkonian Toret Myrlos Kendren regales a congregation of several dozen glum Grabenites – the notable landmarks I beheld in Graben-town were the town cemetery (a walled affair abutting the Nordklippe) and a singular pillar of carven stone at the center of Shoreway Circle.

The Shoreway Pillar, a vertical cylinder of granite roughly my own height (no chortling at my stature's expense now, Gabrek!), is engraved with angular markings reminiscent of Vistani *tralaks*. My initial efforts to clear moss from this monolith for a better view met with dark – even threatening – looks from passers-by; I desisted at once, to return after nightfall (and invisibly) to expose the symbols. Close inspection proved they were *not* of Vistani origin: on the contrary, the characters' arrangement and variety implied they constituted a formal language, perhaps even the ritual or arcane script of a vanished culture. Alas, no translation-spell that I've applied has decrypted any meaning from the rubbings I collected, and deciphering their message – if any – by mundane means lay

more in the *Traitor's* bailiwick than my own. Any Brother who cares to tackle this task may request a copy of the symbols' transcription. (Due credit as their discoverer would, of course, accrue to *me*, on any published paper which their interpretation might give rise to.)

The graveyard is small and neatly-tended; it offers a useful historical record of births and deaths in the community. Even Grabenites who die in other realms are brought here for burial, if their families can arrange it, as natives imagine it conducive to their peace in the afterlife if their bones rest in their isle's home soil. Grabenites lost at sea are memorialized here also, their names carved into the flagstones of a paved footpath that rings the cemetery's heart, to "lead the lost to familiar shores". At sunset each night, a brass harbour-bell mounted by the cemetery gate is rung, to guide such straying spirits' journeys through the evening fog.

Governance of Graben-town is nominally conducted by an assembly of family heads, who meet biannually to select deacons and discuss issues of concern to the community. Ostensibly, every head of household gets an equal say in decision-making, but in practice the town's most prestigious or wealthy clans usually prevail. Until just a few years ago, conservative decrees could be counted on as surely as the tides. Now that his fortunes have risen, Pieter Fischer's efforts to promote a more-progressive agenda have faced little resistance, as elder statesmen of the other households expire from old age (or perhaps less natural causes?) and opposition to his sons' expansionism loses its revered advocates. Unless the Grabens, themselves, see fit to intervene – an unlikely prospect, as aged patriarch Colin Graben seldom leaves his estate – I suspect that Captain Howe will be *getting* his lighthouse, soon enough.

### *Accommodations*

The Black Sheep Inn (just recently expanded from six private rooms to fourteen) offers decent accommodation and hearty, albeit rustic meals of mutton, codfish soup, potato-and-leek stew and barley bread. A former ship's cook from Mordent who wedded a



## Graben Island

Grabenite lass, retired proprietor Barnabas Vincent makes sure his children are equally polite to foreign travelers and the locals who savour his brew-house's dark, potent ales.

Less-peaceful housing might be sought by the frugal at the Weighed Anchor – a sailors' bunkhouse and proud of it – but only if one can sleep through the roistering of hard-drinking fishermen at the Capstan tavern, abutting Graben-town's second inn. The Capstan serves no food – barkeep Nils Hansen boasts of being the worst chef on the isle – but patrons are welcome to warm their carried-in shepherd's pies or spitted meats over the tavern hearth.

For long-term stays, rooms may be rented in half-a-dozen tenements in the immigrants' end of town, but security and draftiness are a bother at all six. They mainly house foreign fishermen, who come ashore between stints at sea and depart as soon as their vessels are fit to sail again. Tenants come and go with wearisome haste, leaving scant evidence of their brief passage save carven graffiti in the bedposts, and coins in the pockets of doxies who haunt the premises. Discreet inquiries – facilitated by a *charm* or two – revealed all six rooming-houses to be the property of the Graben family: Graben-town's eponymous gentlefolk and founders.

**Meerdorf (hamlet):** Monstrous; AL NE; 100gp limit; Assets 750gp; Population 150; Isolated (Sea-claimed 60%, humans 40%).

*Authority figures:* Pater Oddvar, male human Sea-claimed Clr7 (pastor)

*Important characters:* Voice-Of-The-Deep, female human Sea-claimed Dru4/Sor4 (cult seer); Ivar Thorinsen, male human Sea-claimed Brd5 (fish-caller)

### Meerdorf

I was fortunate to find myself with a spare day on my hands, while my hired dory was readied to leave Graben-town, and I looked forward to a spot of deep-sea fishing. With some effort, I persuaded a solitary fisherman by the name of Osvald to take me on a brief outing in his boat. He was on his way out to sea when I approached him, so my request should not have posed any inconvenience. Still, it took a handful of silver and a bottle of Vaasan spirits to persuade him to take me along, grudgingly.

### Dread Possibility: Lost at Port

In decades past, camouflaged undead known as "lebentod" kidnapped many visitors to Graben Island for the darklord Meredoth's necromantic experiments. Due to increased traffic drawn by the fishing industry, and their own wariness after disaster struck them in 737, the necromancer's minions now find it prudent to conceal such abductions by two layers of "cover story", and to target foreign fishermen unlikely to be missed.

When Meredoth demands live experimental subjects, Colin Graben checks which lodgers in his family's tenements are next to set sail. Lebentod sneak aboard the selected fishing vessel and quietly capture its crew; they then pilot the ship out of sight of the Island, so it appears their prisoners left port as planned. At dusk, under cover of fog, the stolen ship is anchored off the Südklippe's base, below Graben Manor, and other supplies brought aboard for Todstein. When the vessel fails to return on schedule, its loss is attributed to storms or other maritime hazards; in truth, it is repainted by the lebentod and sold under a new name in Liffe or Egertus.

All six tenements are rife with spyholes and secret passages, so Meredoth's minions can sneak in and abduct additional test subjects from their beds. Rumors of vanishings have risen since the undead adopted this tactic, but gossip (and local xenophobia) attributes them to the work of seedy Armeikan press-gangs, not undead. The Grabens foster such rumors, as another layer of disinformation behind which to conceal the disappearances' real cause.

We sailed out to a spot southwest of Graben-town. Upon casting my line, alas, I found that the Nocturnal Sea's billfish were giving me as cold a shoulder as the Island's natives. I *did* take some consolation in the fact that Oswald's cod-seine caught little more than I. I'll admit to feeling a bit sorry for the man, as his family most likely depended on a bountiful catch for their livelihood.

Not far away, we spied another boat that had met with marvelous fortune. Its crew had hoisted up great netfulls of fish in the space of a few hours, working in time to an eerie tune played on some manner of pipe. Even from a distance, the strange melody carried plainly upon the breeze, and its queer, off-kilter notes raised the hairs on the back of my neck. It was unlike anything I had heard on Graben Island ... or anywhere else, for that matter. Oswald glumly turned his back to the other fishermen and muttered an oath under his breath, disdain evident in his downcast eyes. To my surprise, our rivals (for lack of a better term) then headed south at impressive speed, toward little Knammen Isle, after lowering their nets back into the frigid, ink-black waters.

Whenever I had inquired about the lesser islet or its residents, natives of the principal Island shrugged and said little. (It is worth noting that some foreign-made maps identify Knammen Isle as "Meerdorf", but residents of Graben-town repeatedly assured me that "Knammen" is rightly the name of the *island*, and Meerdorf, that of the hamlet on its southern edge.) Knammen's interior was as barren and rugged as the Steinfelder, and Meerdorf, merely an undistinguished fishing village, whose inhabitants came only occasionally to Graben-town for purposes of trade.

It took a few hours of canny navigation to reach Knammen's south shore, for the wind shifted constantly. A sheer, ominous granite wall jutted straight out of the sea and threatened to smash us upon its flanks, as it did the fugitive waves, should we dare to come any closer. (I could almost swear that I spied gigantic and bizarre, bulbous visages carved out of the otherwise-impassive rock face, but knew this to be beyond the realm of possibility, for what giants that are not myth could have done such a thing?)

Flocks of gulls, fulmars, kittiwakes, and gannets squawked noisily from their cliff-top nests, hovering like wisps of cloud. The birds seemed particularly agitated, circling and diving aggressively. To my amazement, I spotted a man scrambling precariously along the cliff, without the aid of ropes. A small basket hung from his waist, no doubt for collecting the eggs of his avian adversaries, and a net on a forked rod was strapped to his back, so he might add a grown bird or two to his gleanings. The nest-thief moved with astonishing speed and agility, particularly-so as he was of a size with other Grabenites.

The cliffs tapered off gradually as we left the narrow strait and sailed west toward Knammen's south shore. Oswald refused outright to round the point to Meerdorf and instead we alit on a narrow, white pebble beach in the lee of the point. Oswald warned me he would depart – with or without me – at the tide's turning. An obvious trail ran east, which brought me to the outskirts of Meerdorf.

The village was but a fraction of the size of Graben-town: I counted perhaps three dozen homes. The Meerdorfers' dwellings were built in a manner consistent with traditional habitations on the larger island, albeit much smaller, shabbier and roofed with sod. Each home had at least one rain barrel at its side. The dearth of gardens, like those found around Graben-town, did little to brighten the image of Meerdorf. And there were no streets *per se* but only crushed-seashell paths winding idly between the residences. The scent of fish and brine pervaded the air. No smoke wafted from the hearths, which left



me wondering how the villagers kept warm in this chilly, wind-blasted place.

While I encountered a few stray sheep and tethered goats as I roamed about the village, the utter absence of people in the streets cast Meerdorf in an especially eerie and dismal light. I had the impression that I was being constantly watched, through cracks in closed shutters or peepholes in narrow doors, but met no opportunity to verify my suspicions. I tapped on a few doors, but went unanswered. Meerdorf seemed completely deserted.

More puzzled than alarmed, I kept on. I reached the docks and a pebble beach, where dozens of small craft were moored or beached upon the shore. Row upon row of enormous mackerel and marlin had been hung to dry on sod-roofed and netted racks. My gaze fell upon what appeared to be a modest stone church atop a low knoll beyond the eastern outskirts of Meerdorf. Curious, I began to stroll in the direction of the town's spiritual center when I heard for the briefest instant what sounded like a muffled human

voice coming from the half-opened entrance of a nearer, weatherworn building. I changed course, knocked, and then cautiously entered what I presumed was Meerdorf's tavern, although no sign hung outside.

The common room was dimly illuminated by a single oil lamp set on the bar, and by the little bit of wan Nocturnal Sea light that filtered in through the half-open door. There were but a half-dozen patrons, plus the barman. Oddly, all six men sat in solitude at their respective tables. All eyes turned to me in absolute silence, evidently shocked. The taproom reeked of burning whale-oil, fish, and liquor. Antiquated fishing implements adorned the walls and, despite the chill, no flame danced in the fireplace. After what seemed an eternity, the barman spoke up, haltingly asking why I had come to Meerdorf. His guttural, thick-tongued accent was even more difficult to penetrate than that of most Grabenites. He squinted at me intently, apparently expecting a prompt and definite answer.



## Graben Island

### *The Shadow Over Meerdorf*

Founded by outcasts from Grabenite society, Meerdorf harbors a ghastly secret: over half its population are no longer quite human, but physical and spiritual converts to a terrible undersea presence known as the God Below. Long before the Nocturnal Sea coalesced in 750, its inhabitants fell under the sway of a strange statuette dredged up by a resident's seine-net: a grotesque idol that psychically wormed its way into the Meerdorfers' minds until they came to worship it. This unholy figurine, the *Sea-Strange*, still sits in honor in Meerdorf's church.

Hours after Nebligtode joined the Core, the local converts' prayers were answered: fish-like beings in the image of the *Sea-Strange* emerged from the waves, and welcomed the "drylanders" into the fold. Since then, each month one Meerdorfer is taken below by the fish-men under a *water breathing* spell, then returned next month as a Sea-claimed (new template), having received the dark blessing of the God Below. Many so-'blessed' soon go back to the depths, while others linger as spies of their unholy god-master, monitoring events in the airbreathers' realm.

Returning those stolid, unwavering stares, it struck me that there was something peculiar, yet vaguely familiar about the Meerdorfers' faces. Their eyes were exceptionally round and glassy, their faces wan, their hair stringy and matted; their features, one and all, were quite distinctive, broader of jaw and lower of brow than those of the main island's inhabitants. Given the hamlet's isolation, I construed the villagers might all be related, through some less than wholesome unions. Superficially, they looked and dressed like the folk on Graben Island, yet the prospect of these people

consorting or courting with their counterparts on the greater isle struck me as implausible, even weirdly repellent.

Though the tavern's patrons did not threaten me in any way, I felt an intense discomfort in their presence, and an instinctive urge to depart immediately. An abrupt panic set in at the sudden thought that Oswald might leave me stranded here! I bolted from the premises and commenced to quit the village with an unseemly haste. As I did, the deep, atonal sounds of a bell began to toll. Still sore discomfited by the tavern-goers' demeanor, I feared this might be an alarm-signal of sorts, calling for my capture. Peering over my shoulder, I at last glimpsed Meerdorf's inhabitants, streaming from their gloomy homes, to file in an orderly fashion through the village's twisted lanes, towards the church ... and away from me.

It is with a mixture of relief and regret that I report I could not conduct a more thorough survey of Meerdorf or Knammen Isle. In retrospect, I cannot fully account for my own reaction to the tavern's patrons, nor articulate *why* their demeanor left me so uncomfortable. Yet if I took one thing away from Meerdorf, it is the certitude that even van Rijn – despite his recklessness and guile – would not have sought refuge in such a backward and sinister place.

### *Seeheim*

Tiny Seeheim preserves a Grabenite way of life nearly untouched by the Nocturnal Sea's mergence with other realms. It lacks the immigrants and other influences lured to Graben-town and is physically inaccessible to the larger merchant vessels of Liffe or the mainland. Natives' glares of distaste and sullen resentment pursued me all around the Island, yet only in Seeheim were my outlandish appearance, dress, and accent greeted by slack-jawed astonishment. One brazen scamp even wriggled free of her mother's hand to tug at my sleeves, as if to ascertain that I was real; when I bent down to chide the child, she boldly snatched at my spectacles. Presumptuous little brat.

**Seeheim (hamlet):** conventional (assembly); AL LN; CL 6; 100 gp limit; Assets 1250 gp; Population 250; Humans 99%, others 1%.

*Authority figures:* Sgt. Sven Igelsen, male human Ftr4 (Yeomanry head); Old Johann, male human Exp6 (“elder statesman” of shipwrights)

*Important characters:* ‘Dead-Eye’ Olaf, male human Rgr8 (ace harpoonist); Ragna Stingtongue, marzanna<sup>Fro</sup> nearing the Change (hot-tempered cook)

Such ignorance of foreigners was perhaps to be expected, as Seeheim’s ‘harbor’ does not lie on the Island’s shoreline, but on the Niesonnigbach: a river too slender for all save the narrowest of vessels, and penned off from the sea by hull-ripping shoals. Even my hired navigator refused to risk his personal watercraft in the “pinch”; a Seeheimer whaleboat (fancifully adorned by a serpent-headed prow, a custom whose significance is long forgotten) came out to greet Bram Fischer’s dory and bear me onward into the river’s canyon.

Seeheim is a two-tiered hamlet, with the homesteads and farms set well above the flood-prone river and wave-lashed beaches. From the riverside docks, one ascends stairs out of the deep Niesonnigbach ravine. Once atop the plateau of the Steinfelder, split-log roads weave a not-so-muddy course between the low-lying sod and fieldstone dwellings. Primitive by even the dubious standards of Graben-town, traditional homes of Seeheimers are designed to maximize warmth and shelter from wind, not satisfy aesthetics or comfort. Floors are recessed into the soil and covered with rush mats; most homes have but one or two rooms, privacy being afforded only by curtains. In wealthier residences, like that in which I was put up for the night (Seeheim has no inns), beds are tucked away in cupboards built into niches in the walls, and heated by warming-pans of coals. Ventilation in these archaic dwellings is poor, and massive hearths and overcrowding leave them permeated by sweat and smoke. Thank Ezra I’d not come in winter, when ailing livestock are brought indoors to share their keepers’ warmth!

While I “roughed it” amongst gawking bumpkins, my pilot – mayhap chortling over my imagined discomfort – saw to his own business in the hamlet’s lower tier. Seeheim is home to Graben Island’s most capable shipwrights, and Bram’s ambitious clan required another knarr, the largest watercraft that Grabenite artisans seem up to the task of constructing.

Just in case I’d not had my fill of noxious odours, come morning, it happened that the residents had just corralled a group of pilot whales against the shoreline and hauled the creatures onto the beach with gaff-hooks. Thus, my leave-taking from this backwater-amongst-backwaters was heralded by the stench of these bulky animals’ gruesome evisceration and flensing in progress.

Granted, the humble folk of Seeheim were rather more tolerant of my foreign ways than other Grabenites, if only for my novelty-value. But, by the Watchers, may I never go back there again!

Some would claim these great fish to be our intellectual equals.  
Poppycock!

At chess, I beat them 3 games to 2!



## Graben Island

**Kirchenheim (hamlet):** conventional (assembly); AL CN; CL 7; 100 gp limit; Assets 2000 gp; Population 400; Humans 99% (inc. lebentod), others 1%.

*Authority figures:* Sgt. Erik Alriksen, male human War4 (Yeomanry chief); Toret Sarah Verber, female human Clr6 [Ezra] (Mordentish missionary)

*Important characters:* Cpt. Andar Snorrison, male human Exp7 (knarr captain for hire); Ingrid Bjornsdottir, female human Brd2 (skaldic trainee)

### Kirchenheim

A farming settlement, Kirchenheim huddles at the mouth of the Knechtschaft, looking out over leagues of empty sea toward forlorn Todstein. Exposed to the fiercest of Island weather, nearest to its untamed forests and swamps, and adjacent to the Finsterheide's pastures, Kirchenheim is home to cattlemen and furriers, lumberjacks and huntsmen. Its residents are hard-working, hard-drinking, and independent, though habitual Grabenite stoicism and conformity keeps brawling and other vulgar "frontier" pursuits in check.

Perhaps because the sea's peril is fixed in their minds, Kirchenheimers look to the land for a livelihood. It is here that most of Graben Island's stunted cattle are milked, slaughtered and sheared. The local breeds resemble nothing less than small yaks. Kirchenheim's cheeses and cured beef are regularly traded with other villages, and replenish the stores of foreign vessels preparing for their home voyage. Livestock from Liffe or Darkon are also shipped to the settlement, as Grabenites strive to increase the strength and bulk of their stock. Sheep's wool is processed in Kirchenheim, as are timber, other forest products, and resources gleaned from the shores (eiderdown, mussels, salt). Rangers, wise women and others who favor life outside of the villages

visit Kirchenheim periodically, bartering furs, game and simple handicrafts, such as woven-reed baskets. If anything on or near their Island is remotely useful or salvable, Kirchenheimers seem determined to wrest some advantage from it.

This opportunism is also applied to visitors. Kirchenheimers don't want to be "invaded", like Graben-town, but they stoically put up with foreign callers so long as they benefit more than they lose by accommodating such visits. For silver coin and a few mainland-crafted trinkets, I readily acquired lodgings and food.

Fees for *information* ran a bit higher, in the form of *charm*-spells: opportunistic or not, Kirchenheimers are still *Grabenites*, hence close-mouthed with strangers. The principle exception, in my case, was a raggedy crone who accosted me near the edge of town, to pronounce some nonsensical rhyme or *faux*-prophecy to me, her cataract-clouded eyes rolling like a lost one's. Decrepit or not, she slipped away before I could question her.

Kirchenheim itself is hemmed in by trees as a windbreak, and its docks are shielded from storm surges by a seawall of Steinfelder rubble. There is no proper inn, but enough visitors stop here that a number of residents keep an extra bed-cubby for lone travelers, and a cattleman by the name of Gundarsen (no relation) has converted his wintering-barn into a seasonal flophouse for seamen. A single tavern and eating-house, the Horn and Hoof, serves huge portions of mediocre foodstuffs: roast goat or Knechtschaft trout, plus barley bread with beans. The lager, at least, was passable; alas, by then I had realized *wine* was nowhere to be had in this hinterland. I *did* taste a sample of the local honey-mead, but found its sweetness a bit too insipid for my palate.

Businesses are scattered erratically in town; one can find a smith, a baker, and the village well-and-gravedigger situated side-by-side, along split-log roads that ramble drunkenly between buildings. Architecture is equally mingled, with half-timber residences like those of Graben-town next to sod hovels even more archaic than the Seeheimers'. To add to the confusion, the

## Graben Island

### *Secret Society: The Wise Women*

In the past a few Grabenite women were given powers of prophecy by the Ascended. These "wise women" (adepts) acted as soothsayers for their villages, healed the sick and served as midwives, and advised heroes and jarls in troubled times. Never numerous, their loose sisterhood cooperated to safeguard the welfare and heritage of the Grabenite people.

Sadly, prophetic ability does not come cheaply. While the wise women retained their abilities as adepts, the capacity to divine men's fates was skewered when Graben Island entered the Mists. While some glimpses of the future could be gleaned, these were often misleading or stripped of context. The familiars that served the adepts were also corrupted, becoming creatures' of the women's own darker, repressed desires. The wise women never realized that this had happened. Their traditions taught that a familiar's advice was above reproach; few suspected their familiars would act differently than those historically.

The dread companions slowly lured their mistresses from compassion and duty to egotism and spite. Those who succumbed were aided in wicked scheme-mongering by the familiars; those who resisted their helpers' guileful lies were killed by former "sisters", at their familiars' own behest. Today, virtually every wise woman on Graben Island is Evil before her initiation, and rare exceptions recruited in error are either corrupted or destroyed.

Wise women still exert a great deal of clout in traditional Grabenite society, though the Grabens and foreign influences have eliminated their political pull in Graben-town. Ordinary Grabenites still believe wise women can foretell the future, and the adepts exploit this ignorance, couching "prophecies" to be self-fulfilling. As wise women still turn to their familiars as advisors, their wickedness usually serves the same base desires which dread companions might otherwise be forced to act on in secret. Petty vendettas, jealousy, or sheer cussedness are typical motives for a wise woman's evil. When they aren't too busy quarrelling, Graben Island's adepts cooperate just enough to maintain their reputation as all-knowing soothsayers.

Meredoth knows of the wise women and their small-town maliciousness. He considers them a bit of a 'case study' in how the ignorant squander and trivialize the boundless potential of magic.

ground is far from level in this part of the Island, meaning the front doors of hillside buildings might well lie on their second or even third interior floors, rather than at foundation-level.

Religion is limited to a Mordentish priestess of Ezra, who adapts her sermons to appeal to native sensibilities. She has mustered a congregation to equal that of Ezra's church in Graben-town, despite Kirchenheim's lesser population. To keep her message accessible to these folk, Toret Sarah Verber preaches outdoors whenever weather allows, like the *godi* of times past, and draws many analogies between Ezra's transcendence and the Ascended pagan divinities of Grabenite myth. (A wise

approach, as the Lawgiver's last missionary made no such accomodation, so was soundly snubbed by the locals, who have left his vacated iron altar to rust.)

A last Kirchenheim landmark of note is that for which the hamlet is named: the Black Chapel, a long-vacant edifice looking down on it from the far side of the Knechtschaft. Constructed of black shale not indigenous to Graben Island, in an architectural style alien to natives and not yet classified by scholars, the Black Chapel was already empty – either never occupied, or stripped to bare walls and abandoned – when Grabenite colonists first ventured into this part of the island.





## Graben Island

Bare of furnishings or decorative carvings, its status as a place of worship has been inferred from its interior layout, but clues are lacking as to what faith its builders intended it to succor. The proportions of its doorways, ceilings, stairs and other accoutrements *seem* suited to human folk, but windows or sconces for interior light-sources are curiously absent.

By happy coincidence, a countryman of mine was on hand to show me the Chapel's highlights: Jean-Marcel l'Voy, the anchorite historian from Port-a-Lucine. Native tales of their "Ascended" had drawn him to the Island, curious as to their beliefs *vis-à-vis* the distinctions between mortal and divine. The enigma of the Black Chapel, however, fast captured his attention until his prior aim was forgotten.

Given the diversity of resources and ways of life in Kirchenheim, its village assembly is far more active – though no less hidebound or insular – than those of politicized Graben-town or sleepy Seeheim. Civic disputes over boundary-lines, unsatisfactory services or shoddy goods, and other peasant quarrels dominate all of these settlements' assembly-meetings, but

judgments which are rendered in Kirchenheim can vary drastically from one session to the next, depending on what faction amongst its members – cattlemen, foresters, etc – is too busy with work its and declines to attend.

## The Graben Estate

For all practical purposes, the demesnes of the extended Graben household is a community in microcosm, as isolated from neighbouring Graben-town as if they lay leagues apart. On my initial arrival in port, I was warned by Captain Howe that the Grabens – not much renowned for their accommodating natures – had suffered a calamitous home invasion within living memory and have maintained the strictest of security-measures ever since. Were I to approach without an invitation, I might well be shot on sight! Fortunately, Captain Howe had business to attend to with Josiah Graben, eldest grandson of patriarch Colin Graben, and the good Captain managed to request an audience on my behalf.

## Wolves In The Fold

For a century, the necromancer-lord of Nebligtode ignored events on Graben Island, save when his experimental supply-routes were threatened. Events of 737 belatedly alerted Meredoth to the dangers of such complacency, and he took precautions to ensure that he wouldn't be caught off-guard again. He converted a select few residents of each Grabenite village into his lebendtod slaves, who assess newcomers' potential as a threat to, or resource for, the darklord.

Spellcasters such as Jean-Marcel l'Voy (NE male human lebendtod Clr5 [Ezra, N sect]) are prized as Meredoth's agents, though he refrains from converting fellow-wizards unless they directly interfere with him. More importantly, the lord prefers to "recruit" agents who live alone, are unlikely to face magical dangers (which can disrupt the *veil of life* power), and are already in a position to monitor events. Most "recruits" are abducted in secret and transformed by other lebendtod spies. For more formidable targets, the necromancer dispatches a squad of Todstein's Niflhounds to subdue them.

As not all agents share the ability to contact him magically, Meredoth gives each spy a crate full of Diminutive skeletons (mice, sparrows, frogs, etc) as "pets". Nebligtode's darklord senses the demise of all undead he creates, so these provide a reliable means of signaling him in secret: if the agent has a message for the necromancer, the lebendtod destroys a "pet", alerting the darklord that a *sending* is required. Naturally, if any of the spies themselves are slain, Meredoth will instantly sense this as well.

The road to Graben Manor is bordered by a series of smaller, half-timber dwellings, the residences of the Graben clan's younger scions. The road is continually patrolled by grim and well-armed guards, two of whom searched my person thoroughly, confiscating my stilleto – though *not* my pocket grimoire, the contents of which they glanced at but (of course) could not read – on arrival.

The Manor itself is a sombre, slate-roofed edifice nearly 70 paces in length, running from east to west along the Südclippe, commanding a spectacular view of the open sea. Its original structure is a three-story rectangle capped by a high-peaked roof and attic. Prior to construction of the half-timber residences, extensions had been added to expand its occupancy, including cylindrical towers at its seaward corners – the wider (west) tower rising four stories, and the narrower (east) six – and a two-story east wing that cants to follow the circular drive's curvature.

The building sports numerous defensive additions: barred windows, lopped limbs on ornamental trees close to the house, and reinforcement of a secondary door in the eastern wing. Smoky discoloration of the stonework above the windows gave proof of past fire – an unpleasant reminder of our lost Manoir – though its masonry construction ensured its framework survived.

When I was ushered in by the patriarch's amiable grandson, Josiah, the interior of the Manor showed no sign of ill-use. Its motif exhibited a curious, yet harmonious blend of Lamordian and Vaasi influences. Nautical and native elements added local flavoring, including paintings of ships in full sail, intricate scrimshaw-carved walrus tusks, and a plaque-mounted horn some five feet in length, spiral-twisted like a unicorn's, which Josiah said had come from an exotic species of whale.



## Graben Island

### *The (Post-Upheaval) Graben Family*

The wealthy and reclusive Grabens harbour a ghastly secret: for almost a century, all but a tiny fraction of their number have been the lebentod pawns of Meredoth, darklord of Nebligtode. Tasked to procure cadavers, gemstones and other necromantic supplies, they exploited their reputation as the founding family to quell or divert suspicion, while systematically plundering the Island's graveyards, waylaying foreigners, or engineering deaths.

In 737 BC, after six decades of hiding their nature, the Grabens crossed paths with adventurers too wary and inquisitive to deceive. Discovering the clan's secret, the heroes attacked the estate, destroying more than half of the lebentod family members and servants, ransacking Colin Graben's personal papers, and setting the Manor on fire. Ezekiel Graben's side of the family was nearly wiped out and Colin, grievously wounded. However, the tenacious lebentod chieftain pulled himself together (literally) and guided the survivors to safety.

Having escaped the carnage, Colin and his relations spread word that the "adventurers" were mad brigands and arsonists, thus ensuring any wild reports of "Graben undead" their attackers might spread would be discounted as the ranting of homicidal maniacs. The family weathered the crisis of their master Meredoth's brush with death, then rebuilt Graben Manor with an eye to defence.

Along with these visible repairs, Colin Graben also ordered the delving of secret tunnels beneath the Manor. Most of the passages lead either to adjacent houses and outbuildings of the estate or to submerged exits in the rock-face of Südklippe. Weighted nets and air-tight barrels are used to transfer bound, living prisoners between these tunnels and vessels anchored off the Südklippe, along with food or other perishable supplies required by the darklord.

Called in to dinner, Josiah escorted me to a banqueting hall that could well have seated sixty, the founding clan being a prolific one. The senior Grabens' partiality to black garb lent a bit of a funereal atmosphere; still, the food was excellent, the dinner-conversation engaging. Josiah's widowed mother Hilda, a Grabenite risen above her roots, proved both courteous and enchanting. Her son was also an agile conversationalist, eager to hear tell of "Peter Ash's" travels. My impromptu depictions of Mordentish daily life seemed to captivate him: testament to the Island's drabness, that even *Mordentshire* could be reckoned exciting by comparison! It amused me to relate that old regional chestnut, "the Alchemist and the Apparatus": a tale to which the young gentleman attended with a concentration I wish half my students had the discipline to achieve.

As for the patriarch himself, Master Colin's *own* long years clearly weighed heavily. His deep-lined features were weary, his attention divided, and twice he erred in referring to his grandson by his *own* name. In private after-dinner confidence, the younger Graben quietly informed me that his grandsire – once hailed as the shrewdest of businessmen – was now sadly declining, often mistaking Josiah for his uncle, Colin Jr., who perished in the tragic robbery and arson of 737. (By his pained and angered expression, speaking of this, I surmised Josiah's father must've likewise been lost to that brutal assault.)

My visit having drawn to a close, I headed back to town. Glancing out to sea, I caught sight of another colored light – *red*, this time – shining toward the estate from some distant vessel cloaked by the evening's fog. It blinked thrice, then went dark. Curious.

### People

Previously, I wrote of Liffe's staggering spectrum of ethnic types. Ironically, I now find myself discoursing on the *opposite* scenario! Arriving at Graben-town's docks, I did not fully appreciate this: at quayside, in the throngs of foreign-born seamen drawn in like flies to fish-guts, the monotypic makeup of the native populace was obscured. As I left the docks and undertook my forays beyond Graben-town, I realized just how homogenous this isolated isle's inhabitants truly are ... so much so, that I stood out like an ogre at the opera house.

As Gabrek is childishly inclined to point out, I am a man of modest height. Amongst Grabenites, I felt a certain sympathy with *Ambrose*, for not one over ten years of age was shorter than myself! A Grabenite's frame is tall, long-boned and rangy, fairly muscular yet too elongated to qualify as "stocky". Hands and feet are large, hips rather narrow, jaws squared-off and rugged. Many stand and walk with a habitual stoop, shoulders hunched against the perpetual winds. Men – *thin* men in particular – often appear as if their heads are slightly too large for their bodies. Grabenite women are more fittingly (and quite amply) proportioned, and most ladies whom I encountered struck me as unfailingly beautiful: an observation that, when I confided it to Bram Fischer, spurred him to quip of how his lusty sea-raider ancestors had abducted "only the best". A few Grabenites' limbs display the twisting effects of childhood rickets: a condition our Esteemed Brother Larnar attributes to poor nutrition and lack of sunlight. This might also explain the early age (30s) at which many Islanders begin losing their teeth.

I am unsure just how fair a Grabenite child might remain, were it reared in lands graced regularly by sunshine, but in the gloom of *this* isle they grow up pale as vellum. If not for a faint pinkish cast of blood beneath their skin, these folk might fade into invisibility against a snowscape. Incongruously, faces weathered by salt spray and hands callused by heavy labor remain as light as a Borcan noblewoman's, even as the texture coarsens.

### Sunlight

Due to Nebligtode's dense, unbroken cloud cover and their natural pallor, Grabenites who leave their homeland for brightly-lit realms are especially susceptible to sunburn. Whereas other fair-skinned folk risk taking nonlethal damage from prolonged, intense sun after 3 hours' exposure (*Sandstorm*), a Grabenite may succumb after only 2 hours.

Unacclimated Grabenites also suffer a -2 penalty to Spot checks in intense sunlight, for the first 30 minutes they spend in such dazzling brightness without any protection. Broad-brimmed hats or tinted spectacles suffice to negate this Spot penalty.

Both these penalties cease to apply after one month of living in a sunnier climate, as their sallow skin tans (albeit slightly), and vision acclimates to unmuted daylight. Lebedtod are not subject to either penalty.

Grabenites' hair is slightly wavy and of a white-blond hue, varying in shade only as it grows dirty, typically paired with eyes of a uniform faded blue.

Though their snowy complexions may fail to show it, most Grabenites work hard. I witnessed many examples of work-related injuries, both superficial and crippling, during my sojourn. Nor does emigration to a more forgiving climate necessarily spare the Island folk from pain. Having now seen their sort in their "natural habitat", I realize that a humbly-clad dock worker I'd strolled past in Armeikos had been a Grabenite, far from home ... and still acclimating to Liffe's clement conditions, as attested by his dreadful sunburn and the pained squint through which he surveyed the daylit world.

Females on Graben Island wear their hair very long, and in braids: two for young girls or one for women of marriageable age. Grabenite wives pin their lone plaits up in tidy loops, as will an unmarried woman who does not wish to be courted at present (for

## Graben Island

example, while awaiting a paramour's return from the sea). Tips of girls' and women's braids are often bound up with colored yarn, or adorned with ivory or silver bangles or imported ribbons. Cosmetics are only rarely available on the Island, but husband-hunting lasses fragrance their tresses with refreshing herb-scented oils.

Young Grabenite men wear their hair long enough to tie back in a tail. Those who wish to appear "dashing" occasionally plait slim braids at one or both temples and tuck these behind their ears, emulating the sagas' sea-raiding heroes of old. As modesty and maturity settle upon them, they trim their hair shorter, dispensing with tails or braids, and let their truncated locks hang loose an inch short of their shoulders. Middle-aged or older Grabenite men grow neat beards of modest length, trimming them to a rounded or gently-pointed edge. Moustaches of the traditional style are trimmed rather close, but the Fischers and other entrepreneurs of Graben-town have adopted the grand, waxed Nova Vaasan *mustachio* as a mark of their openness to novelty and foreign trade.

In a populace so uniform, truly exotic offshoots of Man ought to stand out luridly, yet I caught but a brief glimpse of a single example – a half-grown caliban, mucking

out cattle-barns in Kirchenheim – during my stay. Either such births are an extreme rarity here, or the conformity-minded residents, as in so many other cultures, fastidiously keep the results from public view. Amusingly, natives attribute caliban births to a strain of latent *troll's* blood coming to the fore in the afflicted, rather than the influence of hags.

For reasons I shall refrain from lengthy speculation on, the Vistani seldom venture to Graben Island. I am unsure if the bleak terrain and Grabenites' aversion to strangers make it unprofitable territory for the wanderers, or if there is some darker cause for the gypsies' seeming avoidance. Might they know something of its environs or inhabitants – or, perhaps, its *true* lord – that the Fraternity might find advantageous to investigate? Such in-depth inquiry, for now, lies outside the purview of this general survey of the region. Should any Brother be inclined to pursue the matter, I advise him to seek the family of the *raunie* Vincenzia: her caravan of Kamii tinkers and smiths *do* visit the Island from time to time, as the natives' demand for metal goods usually overcomes leeriness of Vistani magic and mannerisms.

### The Grabenite Hero

**Races:** The Island's native population is almost entirely human, plus a very few calibans (called "trollborn" locally) who are treated as second-class citizens. Immigrants to Graben-town should be designed using the guidelines for their homelands, not those for Grabenites.

**Classes:** Heroic classes are rare among the Grabenites, as adventurers are regarded as shiftless troublemakers and misfits. Most Grabenites are commoners, warriors (Yeomanry) or experts; aristocrats have no place in the Island's democratic social order, save the Grabens themselves, and adepts (wise women) have been discussed previously.

Of Grabenites who do adopt a PC class, rangers are most common, using their skills to meet the challenges of a harsh, uncompromising environment. Some Grabenite rangers live in the villages year-round; more often, they maintain a homestead or camp in untamed corners of the Island, returning to "civilization" only to trade or take shelter with others in the lonesome depths of winter. Scouts (from *Complete Adventurer*) lead similar lives on the Island, if used.

Though Graben Island is fairly peaceful, fighters still fill a respected role in this society, leading the Yeomanry and standing firm against the threats of sea monsters and piracy. Some of the Island's most renowned mariners of modern times have likewise been fighters.

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A strong bardic tradition has existed among the Grabenites since the days of the Anatal “skalds”, and bards are found in each of the Island communities. Music takes a back seat to epic poetry and historical recitation, for Grabenite bards, and members of the class function more as teachers and historians than entertainers. Still, bardic storytelling helps while away interminable winter nights, and a bard’s work-chants make backbreaking labor easier.

Despite their respect for their Anatal forbearers, contemporary Grabenites are too settled and conservative (i.e. Lawful) to revert to a genuine “barbaric” lifestyle. A Grabenite barbarian would be seen as an anachronism by his fellows: an eccentric “Don Quixote” figure, playacting in the role of a warrior-tradition that became obsolete centuries ago.

Grabenite rogues of the stereotypical (thieving) sort are more common in ports of Liffe or Nova Vaasa than at home, thanks to the local practice of exiling offenders. A rogue foregoing the cruder forms of crime, or who applies her abilities to non-criminal purposes, is readily accepted on the Island, as Grabenites appreciate cunning so long as they aren’t personally victimized by it.

No clerics of the Ascended remain among the Grabenites, but missionaries of Ezra, the Lawgiver, and Hala have sought converts on Graben Island since 750 BC. A Grabenite cleric of these or other faiths might be the first of his kind, tasked to spread the wisdom of his deity to his spiritually-bereft countrymen.

Sorcerers are rare on the Island, and most are uneasy, retiring souls ashamed of their “abnormality”. Grabenites consider folk who develop such powers cursed, avoiding them as if leery of contagion, but they do not actively persecute sorcerers: they are figures to be pitied rather than feared. If used, warlocks (from *Complete Arcane*) are treated likewise, although perhaps feared more and pitied less.

If wizards ever existed on the Island, both they and their knowledge vanished when it fell into the Mists. Years of searches by Meredoth’s agents failed to turn up a single page of cantrips here, leaving no way for Grabenites to learn the secrets of wizardry in their native land.

Druids, monks, and paladins are unknown in Grabenite society, though their respect for the land and cultural bent toward orthodoxy suggest they could be good at these classes.

**Recommended Skills:** Balance, Concentration, Craft (boatbuilding, scrimshaw, stonemasonry, weaving), Handle Animal, Heal, Jump, Knowledge (geography, local, nature), Listen, Perform (oratory, sing, wind), Profession (brewer, farmer, fisher, guide, herbalist, herd-keeper, hunter, lumberjack, miller, sailor\*), Spot, Survival, Swim, Use Rope.

[\* – Profession (sailor) may be used untrained by Grabenites, who sail as readily as they walk.]

**Recommended Feats:** Alertness, Ancestral Legacy<sup>R</sup>, Athletic, Blind-Fight, Cold One<sup>R</sup>, Combat Expertise (& derivatives), Deft Hands, Dirge of Woe<sup>C</sup>, Endurance, Eschew Materials, Great Fortitude, Hexbreaker<sup>H</sup>, Improved Shield Bash, Improved Unarmed Strike (& derivatives), Iron Will, Portents<sup>H</sup>, Power Attack (& derivatives), Self-Sufficient, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (balance, survival), Skywise<sup>C</sup>, Still Spell, Track, Voice of Wrath<sup>R</sup>, Warding Gesture<sup>H</sup>, Weapon Focus (axe [any], harpoon, shortbow, sling, spear)

**Grabenite Freeman Names:** Arlen, Bjorn, Canute, Einar, Harold, Ingmar, Johann, Jorn, Lars, Norville, Olaf, Soren, Sven, Torvald, Viggo, Yngvei

**Grabenite Freewoman Names:** Anika, Astrid, Brenda, Dagny, Freja, Gerda, Helga, Hilda, Ingrid, Karin, Lynnea, Mia, Ronia, Sigourney, Ursula, Yrsa

**Graben Family Male Names\*:** Abijah, Asaph, Bartholomew, Caleb, Ebenezer, Enoch, Hiram, Jebediah, Mordechai, Nahum, Samuel, Tobias, Yaphet, Zecharias, Zebulon, Zenas

**Graben Family Female Names\*:** Abigail, Asenath, Delilah, Elisha, Hannah, Hepzibah, Judith, Keziah, Lavinia, Mehitabel, Miriam, Nabila, Rebekah, Ruth, Sephina, Tabitha

[\* – A Graben’s name will follow either the archaic family tradition above, or that of a foreign-born parent (e.g. Colin Graben was named by his Mordentish mother). Grabens never select free Grabenite names, though the opposite – freefolk with “Graben” names – does happen at times.]

## Graben Island

### Outcast Ratings on Graben Island

Thanks to their isolation and conservatism, most Grabenites feel uncomfortable and awkward on meeting strangers, and foreign strangers especially. If a Grabenite has neither visited other lands nor lived for at least one year in (relatively) diverse Graben-town, non-Grabenite strangers suffer a +1 OR increase in the isolated Grabenite's perspective. This ceases to apply once the Grabenite gets used to the person in question, whether or not they actually *like* that person.

While their leeriness of strangers applies to nonhumans, Grabenite tales of the *huldu* tend to breed awe of such beings rather than hostility. Dwarves, elves or gnomes (which Grabenites are prone to confuse with one another) suffer half their usual base OR, in the eyes of Grabenites.

Whatever the reason, the scarcity of Vistani on Graben Island, and the marked distaste both traditionalist Grabenites and Kaldresh display for fraternization with other ethnic stock, would appear to make half-Vistani of *Grabenite* ancestry a practical impossibility. I am likewise discounting the presence of dwarves on this isle, unless and until Brother Lochspeare says otherwise: residents' tales of the *zwerge* are too vague and inconsistent to credence, lacking either physical evidence or observations to substantiate the tales.

### Clothing

Befitting their climate, most Grabenite garb is woven or knitted from native wool: not the rough-spun, itchy *wadmul* which is fast becoming commonplace among the lower classes of Arbora, but durable, insulating twills that resist dampness nearly as well as oiled linen. Imported cotton has greatly come into demand for lighter wear. Despite its warmth, Grabenites wear fur sparingly, as

pelts are more valuable as trade-goods and fur garb is regarded as antiquated. Flax and hemp are both grown on the Island, but with cotton's growing affordability, these are used mainly for bedding and rope.

Grabenites deal with the cold by dressing in layers, and wrapping themselves against the wind. For women, the distinctive Island "apron-dress" meets both needs: a sleeveless shift of quilted or pleated cotton underlies an ankle-length pinafore of wool, followed by an outer tabard woven in horizontal stripes. A snug-fitting long-sleeved jacket, tied shut with crisscross lacings at the bodice, and a quilted shawl – cut in an unusual "butterfly" configuration, to hug the shoulders rather than flap in the wind – top off the feminine ensemble. Long wool stockings, slippers of canvas or supple fish-skin, and a lightweight kerchief are worn indoors or on mild days. In winter, kerchiefs are replaced by snug, laced-tied wool hoods and slippers slid into sheepskin-lined boots; knit mittens protect ladies' hands from frostbite, and full-length wool cloaks, with double or triple shoulder-mantles, keep the winds and chill at bay.

Traditional Island male costume consists of padded shin-length breeches, two or more layers of knitted cardigans, heavy stockings, and sturdy, toggle-fastened leather boots. Conservative men's garb may also include a sleeved over-tunic with wide cuffs, starched up-turned collar, broad waist-sash and large, ornamental (but plain) buttons. Truncated, conical felt hats with down-turned brims are worn whilst outdoors; etiquette dictates that such hats be rolled up and tucked in one's belt-sash upon entering a house or shop.

This archaic style of dress is not universal, primarily seen amongst the Seeheimers, Meerdorfers, and reactionaries against the Fischers' policies. For Kirchenheimers and less hidebound Graben-towners, twill jackets in the Mordentish style have been favored for years, introduced by Mist-led sailors decades ago. Wide leather belts with large square buckles are sometimes worn *outside* the jacket, adding a "native" touch. Nautical-style sealskin overcoats are donned in inclement weather, and sheepskin gloves, eiderdown-stuffed woolen greatcoats, cross-



laced leggings that keep snow out of one's footwear, and knit mufflers are all bundled on top of their other garb in winter.

In terms of color, Grabenites' choices have historically been limited to the natural white or black of un-dyed wool, and such humble tints as indigenous herbs and minerals made available to them. Yellows, oranges, and pastel shades of blue and green are typical of young women's garb, while strong blues and reds are considered "matronly" hues. Such hues add flavorful highlights to alternating layers of black and white. Stripes or zigzag patterns at the lower edge of the "apron" of a Grabenite woman's costume provide clues to her family background, being passed from mother to daughter.

Grabenite men's wear is seldom dyed, save for belt-sashes and the outer rims of their gray felt hats. By tradition, a man's belt and hat-rim identifies his natal village (white for Graben-town, black for Kirchenheim, sea-green for Meerdorf, and buff for Seeheim). Aside from these, masculine clothing is for the most part drab, being predominantly tan, gray, black or brown. In recent years, local women have taken to sprucing up their wardrobes with imported kerchiefs, ribbons, and dyes, but such trappings are considered silly-looking on men.

For the entrepreneurial residents of Graben-town, clothes constitute political statements: the more elements of "foreign" garb worn, the greater the wearer's support of the Fischers' campaign. Conversely, stevedores or Packhouse-lasses tend to dress in simple, homespun garments for the day's work, in imitation of their immigrant co-workers, not wishing to ruin their better clothing.

As for the Graben clan itself, these nobles-in-all-but-name dress in staunchly traditional

fashions, save that they share a marked preference for all-black garments, with very dark blues or deepest (imported) purples for Graben ladies' tabards.

The signature ornament of Grabenites is the brooch, used to pin cloaks, sashes or shawls in place and to hang small items such as keys or sewing needles from ladies' tabards, as well as for decorative purposes. Silver is *the* favored material from which brooches are made, but pewter or etched seashells are more affordable to the average Grabenite. Abstract patterns of curling, coiled lines or stylized bears, ponies and marine animals – seals, whales, fishes or (in Meerdorf) octopi – are the usual brooch motifs. Other forms of jewelry, such as gem-inset rings or thin necklaces with pendants of scrimshawed ivory, are also worn by both sexes, albeit in moderation.

## Daily Life

Most Grabenites' lives are onerous, tested by the harsh weather, bleak landscape, and treacherous waves. Though spared the oppressive hands of feudal taskmasters or tyrants, Graben Island itself conspires to make subsistence as precarious and arduous as many a land-bound continental serf's. For farmers and hunters, back-breaking labor and miles of trekking over trackless snows are, respectively, the prices they pay. For fishermen, the chance of turning a substantial profit exists, and has lured many farmers' sons to "try their luck" upon the sea, but hazards of such work are constant. Seeheim in particular is a village of sea-widows and every Graben-town household has names of numerous kin inscribed on the cemetery mourning-path. Even the Grabens' own privileged hands are rarely idle: in the wake of their Manor's immolation, the founding family has been too cautious of treachery to replace those servants lost in the tragedy, so minor cousins of that abundant clan now work the estate's cropland and tend its livestock.

Despite the challenges of life – or, perhaps, *because* of them – Grabenites seldom fall into abject poverty. Tight-knit communities are solicitous of those whom fortune turns



against, giving such charity as can reasonably be spared to neighbors in need. Hospitality and mutual assistance are traditions adhered to by any Grabenite: to let a neighbor go hungry when one has spare food, or to deny a weary traveler shelter, is regarded as disgraceful.

This is not to say that the Grabenites are “pushovers”, as my students would put it; rather, such charity is part of a reciprocal support-structure that ensures survival for all. To refuse to aid one’s neighbor is to agree to *be* spurned in turn when one’s own fortunes might lag. As *every* household experiences inevitable “bad years”, all but the most disreputable of Grabenites take pains to meet such social obligations, knowing their generosity will be repaid in turn. Rare exceptions – shiftless freeloaders who grow lax in their efforts to be self-sufficient, expecting others to “carry” them – are harassed into either reforming or leaving the Island.

With utter destitution thus held at bay, and idleness a luxury beyond natives’ means, there are no true “social classes” on Graben Island. Much like in Kartakass or Verbrek, conditions are simply too rustic to sustain an “upper crust”: merely feeding the villages’ few artisans and merchants is a challenge. Historically, Grabenites’ ancestors *did* have a noble class of sorts, but the Island’s early settlers – free yeomen and proud of it – left such *jarls* behind when they migrated to this backwater refuge, and their determination not to fall beneath the heels of new masters leads them to shout down any of their own number who grow too ambitious.

While the Graben clan is respected and often envied, the Grabens are technically “landed gentry” rather than of noble blood. By law, their seniority upon the Island grants them a powerful authority over land-usage, but their reclusiveness and deliberate self-distancing from Grabenite culture leaves the villagers free to run their own affairs. If the Grabens had *not* been ensconced on the Island before them, I suspect that the Grabenites’ clannish tendencies might have precipitated power struggles, perhaps even blood-feuds. As it stands, no lesser family’s aspirations of a hypothetical Island “jarldom” can legally be advanced, in light of the Grabens’ vintage residency. Thus, the founding house’s very existence *does* have a pacifying effect, even if they never invoke such privileges as true nobility might afford them.

Life for Grabenites is centered upon the extended family, with several generations of the same clan sharing the same residence, and working the same farm, fishing-boat or workshop. All mature, able-bodied family members are duty-bound to ensure the well-being of elderly forbearers, ill or impaired siblings, and orphaned nieces or nephews, as surely as that of their own children. Elders contribute guidance and expertise, represent their household’s interests in assembly, and carry out the lion’s share of Graben Island’s home handicrafts.

Nominally, a Grabenite family is patriarchal, handing leadership down from father to eldest son. Still, as in any social grouping, persuasive relatives often sway the leader’s judgment, and a clan heir who antagonizes too many of his kin can be passed over in favor of some other, more accommodating scion. Clan-heads have sole authority to approve the adoption of new kin, and may disown family members who bring shame or trouble to their clan’s doorstep.

Surprisingly, despite their elders’ pervasive influence over other aspects of their lives, youths are left to their own devices in courtship. Parents can (and certainly do) express their opinions about besotted young Grabenites’ choices of sweetheart, but can neither compel nor deny a marriage once the pair have attained the



age of fifteen. This laxity is explained by the ease with which Island custom permits couples to divorce: either spouse need only proclaim a marriage over in front of witnesses to suspend it, without stigma or censure accruing to either partner. Hence, only the Grabens – and, of late, a few entrepreneurial families in Graben-town – dare arrange weddings for heirs who could annul any such pact (and thus, any economic or political alliance which was sealed by it) at will. Letting young lovers' attraction run its course, while it can hardly guarantee a successful life together, at least ensures the couples will make a sincere effort to build one. It also serves to limit the recriminations and ill feelings from failed marriages to the spouses themselves, reducing the chance of dragging their respective clans into conflict.

Between the simplicity of divorces and high mortality suffered in sea-faring families, it is not uncommon for a wife to return to her natal clan, bringing her children with her (sons under the age of six, plus daughters of any age, in the case of a divorce). Women retain their patronymics after marriage, facilitating such a return if necessary. Foreign suitors, or Grabenites disowned by or bereft of a clan, are often adopted into their fiancée's family before the

wedding ... assuming, of course, said family approves of such a disreputable betrothed! (While they cannot prevent a marriage, nothing obliges a Grabenite's kin to *endorse* it.) According to the Black Sheep's retired innkeeper, a male suitor without local family ties may be able to lessen his in-laws' reluctance by offering a "bride-price" – a bribe by any other name – to prove himself capable of supporting his intended.

Newlyweds typically live with the groom's parents, seldom moving into a home of their own unless a chance windfall or shortage of space makes that more appropriate. The later motive is more usual, as large broods are the norm, even allowing for the high rate of infant mortality. When a house becomes available, adult brothers and their wives will typically share the new dwelling, as most natives find close-quarters living reassuring and the household duties can be divvied up. Unmarried siblings may be asked to join, should more hands be needed, and children pitch in as soon as they are capable.

Most household handicrafts are strictly segregated by gender, and more finely than one might expect: rather than excluding either gender from tasks, specific facets of a multi-person job are traditionally assigned to



one sex or the other. For example, *men* are customarily the ones to spin wool into yarn, while women knit or weave it into fabric. Thus, no one's hands are left idle.

Graben Island lacks any formal educational system, so children depend on their families to teach them to read, work, and behave like proper little Grabenites. With so many kin living in close company, there is frequently a grandparent or aunt on hand who can spare the time to offer lessons. Informal as such sessions are, they're at least a step above the garbled, half-hearted efforts seen in many mainland backwaters. As a teacher myself, I made a point to listen in on such a lesson during my sojourn in Seeheim, and noted that cultural stories – mythic parables of the “Ascended” especially – are used to engage young minds, much as Kartakan education is conveyed through the *mora*.

Most Grabenites are at least semi-literate in their own language, and a new generation of Graben-town youths are now being taught enough of Vaasi script and arithmetic to ease future business transactions. Of *higher* education, the Island boasts not even a token trace; a few Graben-town merchants have begun sending their heirs to Liffe for schooling, but most natives see no need for such. The Grabens, as best I could discern, tutor their own children as they see fit.

Terrain and climate limit most Grabenites' opportunities to venture beyond their home villages. Summer's mud mires wheels and founders horses, and the sea winds' caprice extends all the way to the shoreline in bad



weather. Overland travel by sleigh was once practiced, in Kirchenheim especially, but the chosen draft-animals (domestic reindeer first brought back from Todstein in 641) have declined in number and vigor (inbreeding, I expect).

Travel by water is vastly preferred to cross-country treks, and Grabenites speak proudly of having the sea “in their blood”, even claiming that their blood is saltier than foreigners'. A Grabenite's vessel is as much an object of pride and doting affection as a Richemulouise's carriage or an Akiri's future tomb. By far the most abundant watercraft on Graben Island is the dory: a shallow-drafted boat with a collapsible mast, low-angled sides and a stern which tapers almost to a point. At first glance, such craft seem mere sail-equipped skiffs, yet my own journey with Bram Fischer demonstrated the dory's nimbleness and ability to withstand choppy waves.



## Graben Island

### The Graben Island Dory

*Bundin er bátleysur maður.* (A boatless man is tied up.) – Faroese proverb

For campaigns using the *Stormwrack* rules, typical Grabenite dories' statistics are as follows:

**Light Dory:** Large vehicle; Seaworthiness -1, Shiphandling +3; Speed wind x 10 ft or oars 10 ft (good); Overall AC\* 4; Hull\* 30 hp (hardness 5); Rigging\* 20 hp (hardness 0); Ram 1d6; Mounts –; Space 10 ft by 5 ft; Height 1½ ft (draft 1½ ft); Complement 4; Watch 1; Cargo 1000 lbs (speed wind x 5 ft or oars 5 ft if 500 lbs or more); Cost 100 gp.

**Working Dory:** Huge vehicle; Seaworthiness +1; Shiphandling +2; Speed wind x 15 ft or oars 15 ft (good); Overall AC\* 3; Hull\* 40 hp (hardness 5); Rigging\* 30 hp (hardness 2); Ram 2d6; Mounts –; Space 15 ft by 5 ft; Height 2½ ft (draft 2½ ft); Complement 8; Watch 2 plus 2 rowers; Cargo 1 ton (speed wind 10 ft or oars 10 ft if 1000 lbs or more); Cost 800 gp.

\* – A dory is too small to have distinct hull sections, so has only an Overall AC. It *does* have separate hp for its hull and its lone mast, so attackers may specifically choose to target one or the other.

Owning a dory is a mark of manhood among Grabenites, such that many native men who work entirely on land – indeed, many who can scarcely tell a flounder from a sardine! – commence to strut and preen, jabbering sea-jargon like “old salts”, on first acquiring one of their own. Personal pleasure-dories are distinguished from the Island’s omnipresent working-craft by their names (either sentimental or sardonic), their fine paint-jobs, and their excellent state of repair. The sturdier working-craft are partially decked at fore and aft and can handle short forays onto the open seas.

Larger craft typical of Graben Island waters include stout, inshore fishing smacks called “six-rings”, swift two-man riverboats (“four-rings”), and oar-equipped, sharp-sterned “knarrs”, close cousins to the familiar merchant’s cog. These ships are more often owned by an entire clan, so these grander vessels are paradoxically regarded with less affection than one-man dories. A brace of swift pinnaces, berthed at Kirchenheim and Graben-town, are collectively owned by the Island’s governing assemblies; most often dispatched to aid vessels hung up on the Kielbrecher, they are also suited to goading hostile ships into a fatal chase amidst those hull-rending rocks.

### Food

Grabenite cuisine is uncommonly rich in dairy products and makes scant use of bread or vegetables. Wheat cannot thrive in the brief Graben Island growing season, so barley, oats, and rye are natives’ staple cereals. Beans, carrots, peas, leeks, and cabbage are grown in kitchen-gardens; dried-and-split peas are ground into a crude flour-substitute when grain harvests run low. Apples, plums, pears and cherries are grown in orchards, and may be dried as shipboard fare or treats. Mushrooms, nuts and berries, gathered from the forests, round out Grabenites’ supply of vegetables and fruits. Honey, from hives both wild-found and domestic, is prized as a sweetener or for alcoholic mead. Pine-sap is likewise used for flavoring or chewed as taffy.

Herds of sheep and goats, horses and cattle (mostly in Kirchenheim), and near-feral pigs provide meats, supplemented by wild venison, hares, and plump marmots. Geese or ducks are the only poultry hardy enough to thrive in this climate, and are valued more for their eggs and feathers than for meat; wild waterfowl, grouse, pigeon or ptarmigan are consumed more often than domesticated birds. Cod, haddock, herring and plaice are seine-netted from the waves, and bream,

pike and perch are line-fished on frigid rivers. (Mad as I'd be to visit this isle in winter, I'll admit descriptions of locals' ice-fishing sparked my interest!) Lobster-pot buoys bob offshore, clams are dug from Schlamholme mudflats, and oysters and mussels pried from tide-lapped rocks. As food often runs scarce in this land, every last trace of edible material is gleaned from an animal, and meat not consumed immediately is smoked, salt-cured, rendered into sausage, pickled or dried for later.

Day-to-day meals on Graben Island are informal affairs. Reheated stews, oatcakes, or flatbread with fish or wild-berry jam are eaten at breakfast, and vegetable, mutton, or fish soups at midday. Spit-roasted game, soft cheese, roast nuts, *skyr* (a thick native yogurt), and stew or porridge are typical evening fare. Be warned, Brothers: many Grabenite dishes center on the preserved fish and mutton they depend upon during the prolonged winters. Thankfully, it was *not* the proper season to be serving these "delicacies": smoke-cured rams' testicles, seared sheep's heads, blood-and-fat pudding or (egad!) raw shark's flesh "seasoned" by months spent buried in peat. As for the one "local delicacy" I *was* invited to sample – *lutefiskur*, a loathsome jellied-whitefish bread spread pickled in lye – I held down my gorge and passed it over, as politely as I could. (*Sacre bleu*, what savages!)

Whey, buttermilk, or ice-cold spring water accompany each meal, with beer set aside for minor celebrations and mead for major. Neither proper tea nor wine are available,



save at the Black Sheep Inn (at exorbitant prices). Modest amounts of liquor are distilled from local cider, but quality is decidedly inferior; the native lager is far better. The exigencies of climate make hot drinks indispensable to Grabenites, who steep herbs or diced fruit in water or lamb-bone broths. In recent years, tiny samples of Vechorian coffee have found their way to Graben Island, and residents hail it as nothing less than a magical elixir for its invigorating and blood-thawing effects.

### *Language*

The Grabenite tongue bears a superficial semblance to Vaasi, using many of the same phonemes and diphthongs (a linguistic relief to the merchants of Arbora). This similarity need not imply common origin, however; Grabenite utilizes curious grammatical devices not found in any other Core dialect. (Those Brothers who have scrutinized the *traitor's* writings for clues to his present whereabouts may recall his commentary on Grabenite's use of *a*, *i*, and *u* for inflectional endings, in contrast to mainland languages' *e*.) If any tongue *but* Grabenite has a verb-tense used solely to express what one *wishes* were true, I have certainly never heard of it!

There is a written form of Grabenite, a script vaguely reminiscent of the runes I'd noted on the Shoreway Pillar, but hardly identical. However, few natives appear to have made much use of it, even when their realm was yet isolated. Some skaldic poems have been recorded in this obscure alphabet, and older grave-markers in Graben-town's cemetery are marked thusly, but writing in general was a rarity until recent times. Grabenites of today use a combination of Lamordian and Vaasi characters in their

missives, but fall back on the native script's curious habit of "circle writing" – laying out text in a spiral rather than linearly – on certain formal documents, or in sentimental love-letters.

Loan-words of Lamordian, Darkonese, and Low Mordentish have been incorporated into the Grabenite tongue – or, at least, that dialect spoken in Graben-town – but natives tend to elide pieces of these words, dropping the middle consonants from strings of three or more. Together with a habit of omitting the first sound of words in their own or other languages ("skerping"), Grabenites' speech sounds rather clipped or abrupt. I was told by an immigrant in Graben-town – a Nova Vaasan by birth – that Grabenites sound to him as if they are "in a great rush to finish talking to you".



### *Grabenite Primer*

#### *Social pleasantries:*

Good morning	<i>góðan morgun</i>	good night	<i>góða nátt</i>
please	<i>ger so væl</i>		

#### *Daily life:*

alive	<i>liva</i>	assembly	<i>ting</i>
ballad	<i>kvæði</i>	boat	<i>bátur</i>
bury	<i>jarða</i>	fantastic tale	<i>aevintyr</i>
fish	<i>fiskur</i>	harpoon	<i>skutil</i>
historical sagas	<i>sagnir</i>	knife	<i>knívur</i>
message or order	<i>boð</i>	porridge	<i>greytur</i>
storm	<i>ódn</i>	whale-hunt	<i>grindadráp</i>

#### *Geographic terms:*

bird cliffs	<i>fuglaberg</i>	coast	<i>strond</i>
harbor	<i>havn</i>	hill or burial mound	<i>heyggjur</i>
river or stream	<i>á</i>	island	<i>oy or oyggj</i>
tide	<i>sjóvarfall</i>	sea	<i>sjógvur</i>
tomb	<i>grøv</i>	village	<i>bygd</i>

#### *Folklore and threats:*

corpse	<i>ræ or lík</i>	die	<i>doyggja</i>
enemy or fear	<i>óvinur</i>	fey	<i>huldufólk</i>
ghost	<i>dreygur</i>	kill	<i>drepa</i>
monster or giant	<i>skrímsl</i>	revenant	<i>gjenganger</i>
troll	<i>troll</i>	wight	<i>draug</i>



Curiously, the majority of *place-names* on Graben Island maps do not actually translate into contemporary Grabenite. Just as oddly, numerous surnames in Graben-town (even “Graben” itself) have no precise rendering in Grabenite either. My inquiries about this discrepancy incited vague references to “Old Efram’s Speech”: a supposed archaic strain of Grabenite in which the town founder had allegedly titled the local landmarks.

Most Graben-towners and a few natives of in Kirchenheim understand a smattering of Vaasi, though traditionalists usually refrain from admitting it. Darkonese is spoken only rarely by ethnic Grabenites, as they find its pronunciation much more difficult than the familiar phonemes used in Vaasi. Sithican, a relative newcomer to the Island, is proving even more challenging for natives, but those immigrants hailing from the port-towns of Liffe all share this tongue.

### *Attitudes and Beliefs*

Grabenites, even the well-off, have few chances for recreation or ease. Summers are spent in harried labor, striving to stockpile

food; then winter’s snow forces them into shelter, there to perform handicrafts, teach their children ancestral sagas, and cope with confinement, uncomfortable and cramped quarters, petty animosities, and boredom. Stoicism and a grim-jawed determination to silently endure nature’s hardships and ‘cabin fever’ is as inherent to Grabenite character, as is pride in their sea-raider forbearers. A Grabenite never complains about difficulties that confront him, although he may well speak of previous adversities faced (and survived) with a wry, contrary pride. Slothfulness and fragility are not tolerated by these driven workhorses: lazy or overly-delicate individuals are either taunted into complying with expectations or depart their homeland for balmy climes.

After stoicism, strict insular conservatism is a hallmark of Grabenite culture. Most families on Graben Island have pursued the same professions, lived in the same houses, and handed down the same possessions, recipes, anecdotes and prejudices for six or more generations. What laws or liability fail to enforce, social pressure imposes relentlessly. A youth who balks at following



in his sire's footsteps, or a daughter who dresses too ostentatiously for her neighbors' tastes, is met with ostracism and crushing disdain.

Brothers, I cannot overstate the degree to which conformity is enforced in this culture, as even positive deviations are belittled as "showing off", or dismissed as displays of hubris. In every other land I've known, such terms as 'adequate' or 'sufficient' bear an implication of borderline failure: I daresay, not one of my students whose academic performance I judged "mediocre" were ever pleased by that designation! Here, *i so* ("enough") is generally considered a higher compliment than "superior". (A vindicating example for we Brethren, is it not, of why affairs of the world must not be entrusted to the ignorant masses, if resentment of their intellectual betters runs so deep?)

Yet, despite their lack of due reverence for excellence and intolerance of troublemakers, Grabenites' pride as a people is rooted in a cycle of epic myth-poems – the *Eddas*, or sagas – of ancestral heroes who demonstrate both these now-unacceptable traits: mighty warriors, temperamental chieftains (*jarls*), or freebooting explorers and pirates. Passed down by generations of storytelling *skalds*, in a folk tradition that passes for education, the *Eddas* relate events that – were they not colored by locals' ethnic pride – might be best described as "pillaging", "slave-taking", "assassination" and the like. As such low mayhem is the handiwork of their ancestors, Grabenites conveniently overlook the tales' barbarity, viewing their forbearers' savage deeds through the rose-tinted spectacles of "honor", "courage", and similar self-exonerating conceits.

Interestingly, although the Grabenites' own mariners have focused almost exclusively upon fishing and whaling in the last century, natives of the Island have a romantic fondness for the less-rapacious variety of pirate. Like the popular mainland image of the "dashing highwayman", Grabenites look upon pirates as modern reenactors of their ancestors' raiding exploits. More than one such buccaneering vessel has stopped off in Graben-town, Kirchenheim or Meerdorf and been met with a cordial (for Grabenites) welcome, so long as the freebooters have coin to spend and strictly refrain from taking liberties with locals' property or women.

It is from their sagas that most Grabenites' opinion of magic is derived; save for a few bardic illusions to engage young audiences, most never witness actual spellcasting. The wizards in such tales, alas, are invariably treacherous, cowardly caricatures: physical weaklings, who turn to arcane power so they might lash out at the strapping, manly warriors they envy, only to be sullied and disfigured by the energies they foolishly strive to command. A parochial and baseless attitude, indeed! Bards and divine casters are shielded from corruption by the respect they hold for the forces they coax into cooperation; for a wizard, who dares to demand Nature heed a mortal's will, shame and suffering are the inevitable price. (Note that this only applies to magic one employs oneself. "Found" magic, such as enchanted gifts of the *zwerge* or spells a "hero of old" coerces a mage into invoking, need not backfire.) For whom arcane power is thrust upon, there is (perhaps) still hope: a sorcerer who restrains his magic is no more feared than any other victim of fate.

Intriguingly, in addition to the sagas, the Grabenites also relate tales pertaining to the deity-figures of their ancestors, an ensemble of anthropomorphic divinities. Much like the historic tales, accounts of these gods are rather bloodthirsty and coarse, although trickery – typically non-magical – is lauded in many and wisdom in even more.



## Graben Island

Tales of their ancestral divinities are mainly recounted at children's bedsides, and actual worship of these deities is utterly extinct; nevertheless, one facet of their myths stands out as worthy of our consideration. With the possible exception of the chief "All-Father" figure, Grabenite tales attest that their deities neither rise from the Mists, nor breed among their own kind, but "Ascend" to divinity *from the ranks of mortals*, via spectacular deeds that prove their worthiness.

Though plainly over-romanticized and wish-fulfilling (for what beings of transcendent wisdom would admit hammer-hurling, ale-swilling *oafs* into the fold?), the Grabenites' past belief in divine Ascension could bear a distant connection to some genuine arcane process or procedure ... conceivably an intended function of that mechanism the *traitor* seeks to reconstruct!

Did some foul lich of old try to achieve such a transition (successfully or not), and word of its attempts leak out to the Grabenites' ancestors? Might their puerile mythology of cultural heroes' ascent to godhood be based on some meager, misinterpreted particle of fact? If so, the likelihood of locating our betrayer in this region is surely improved, and young Dirac's investigation of Todstein – the most likely site where such a long-ago attempt at "Ascension" could have taken place, given the great trepidation with which the Island's natives regard that lesser isle – becomes all the more imperative.

To inhabitants of Graben Island, of course, such implications of their old myths pass unnoticed. To Grabenites, the Ascended are entertaining hearth-tales, not true objects of worship. Their ancestral deity-tales are perpetuated and cherished as a thing dear to their forbearers, but are seldom taken for

### *The Ascended: An Unaccepted Pact?*

In many cases, religious practices of a new domain's inhabitants continue after their emergence in Ravenloft, perhaps adopting new doctrine to account for the Mists' ominous presence or that of previously-unknown nearby lands. Nearly as often, social trauma from their transition causes a loss of faith, leaving them godless, or making way for the creeds of Ezra or Hala. For reasons unknown, the Grabenite faith instead died a sudden death: from the day the Mists engulfed their land, the indigenous clerics found their prayers unanswered, be it with spells, granted powers, or the ability to turn undead. Whereas outlander clerics in the Land of Mists feel oddly "distanced" from their patrons, Grabenite clerics (*godi*) sensed they'd been cut off completely. Baffled, afraid they were being judged, some Island clergy attempted dangerous rites to regain contact, only to perish in the attempt. Others surrendered to despair and anger, renouncing their faith and encouraging laymen to do likewise. Within a single generation, native Grabenite religion was functionally extinct, although stories of the Ascended are still told out of fondness and ethnic pride. A handful of traditionalists go through the motions to venerate the hearth-deities, Fredar and Fredara, but as a formality rather than true belief.

It is unknown why the Ascended deserted their clerics. It may be that these once-mortals' link to their clergy was inherently different from those of other deities, and was severed by the Mists' barrier rather than muted. Perhaps stripping Grabenites of divine magic was a deliberate ploy by the Dark Powers, to better-suit Nebligtode to Meredoth's requirements or as a social experiment. Or perhaps the Ascended patron deities chose not to accept the terms of the Unspoken Pact, whatever these may be. But whatever their motives, the Ascended either could not, or *would* not, maintain spiritual ties to Ravenloft's *godi*. Lone outlander clergy from Meredoth's homeworld do retain their clerical powers, albeit under the usual limitations, but whether such an outlander could train a native Grabenite to become a cleric of the Ascended remains a mystery.



either literal or allegorical truth. Of the supernatural, Grabenites desire only to avoid its pitfalls; of the afterlife, they speak little, save to hope the souls of lost loved ones might yet find their way to familiar and comforting environs.

Despite the struggles of their day-to-day existence, the crushing conformity imposed by their society, and even their apparent desertion by the gods, few Grabenites are embittered. Most seem to take a deep, understated pride in their endurance of such adversity, and in the freedom from the “tyranny of kings” which their ancestors’ decision to colonize the Island bequeathed to them. Ironically, the very ones whom their realm challenges most harshly – the farmers who scabble meager livelihoods from cold, stony earth, and the fishermen who stake their lives on the sea’s uncertain favor – feel the strongest bonds of affection for the soil and waters that test their perseverance.

At heart, Grabenites who neither succumb to hardship nor flee to gentler realms are, ultimately, fatalists. If the sea or the storms see fit to take a man’s life, then that man’s time has surely come, whether death should claim him on shipboard or safe in his bed. The calm, stoic acceptance of Nature’s harshness which resignation fosters makes Grabenites appear grim and unimaginative, even devoid of feeling, to outsiders. Yet it also lets their people view the wind-scoured bleakness of their Island as an austere, chill, yet breathtaking form of beauty.

## History

### *The Age of the Sea-Raiders*

Discounting those tales of obviously mythic character (decrypting the Grabenites’ belief the world was molded from the flesh, blood, and Mist-breath of a slain giant is best left to more-fanciful scholars), my account of the history of Graben Island’s natives must begin with the Eddas: oral accounts of the Grabenite culture’s vibrant and aggressive forbearers. Inhabitants of a realm variously named “the north wild”, “northlands”, or “northern woods”, these coastal barbarians were called by a diversity of names, most commonly Anatal (meaning “borne [or possibly “born”] upon wave”). The Anatal subsisted day-to-day by fishing and farming, much as Grabenites do, but also engaged avidly in piracy, raiding nearby cultures for treasure, slaves, or to seize new land. Their usual prey were other barbarian tribes: the Eddas speak of a bewildering host of foes, including the Dunn, Hel-Dunn, Nölle, Sodjur and Eisalfar. The chronology of these ancient squabbles is painfully unclear, and it is possible some of these adversaries are, in fact, the same tribes under different names. Some of the raiders’ raiding-targets seem to have been other than human, yet distinguishing which is difficult, as many referred to as “human” are depicted as every bit as bestial and voracious as hob-goblins.

Such jarring inconsistencies are rife in the Eddas, particularly the most ancient. This



phenomenon is hardly unprecedented: many realms' historical accounts collapse under their own contradictions, as our own august founder, Father Ikonnas, documented at the dawn of our Fraternity. But the degree to which it afflicts Graben Island's history is unusually pervasive, as even the *physical laws* can be inconsistent from one Edda to the next! (That of Frota Frost-heart speaks of a terrible winter when "the stars on the evening horizons froze"; yet the saga of Alfrum's Journey ludicrously insists that its hero's homeland "knew not the dark of night, its solar eye unwinking".) Only on two points do the tales conclusively agree: the Anatal homeland was rugged and cold – even harsher than Graben Island, itself – and was dominated by numerous *jarls*, petty tribal warlords for whose snubbed pride or ambitions the Grabenites' ancestors were obligated to fight.

Whatever the true character of their ancient lands, the Grabenites' immediate forbearers were not mighty war-chieftains, but freeborn farmers and fishermen weary of bickering jarls' strife. Close examination of the later Eddas display a less-effusive tone toward those tribal battles which the older tales unconditionally exalt. The sagas' shift from reverence for their old chieftains to guarded contempt is coy, but telling. The ancestors of the Islanders had grown disillusioned by hereditary rulers' self-serving aggression, and how the spoils of battle (wealth, land, thralls) were apportioned to serve the jarls' political agenda, not their vassals' needs.

By the time sagas give way to documented history, the Grabenites' ancestors had largely abandoned sea-raiding, though jarls' commands still obliged them to send their sons off to war. As their foes' navies and battle-strategies had evolved over time, Anatal chiefs often found themselves overmatched by foreign adversaries, and increasingly focused their assaults upon one another. The waning Anatal culture was then confronted by a menace against which no jarl's warband (*hird*) could hope to stand. Details of these opposing forces' makeup and origins are inconsistent: some describe the invaders as subhuman goblin creatures, whereas others speak of malign wizards of

unprecedented might. The most fantastic of jumbled stories even tell of gigantic eagles bearing hordes of rapacious knights, or of sorceresses turning warriors into statues of blue ice from astride frost-spitting wyrms! The armies drove the jarls into retreat and the Grabenites' forbearers to take refuge on the waves.

### *Exodus to Graben Island*

The Anatal refugees were no match for the great *Óvinur Ódn* (literally "enemy-storm") which harried them from the North Wild. Their retreat was not a random rout: they followed a course laid down in one of their sagas: that of Svidi Full-Sails, a renowned sea-raider who, three centuries earlier, had discovered an island "shaped as unto a troll's betaloned hand" and founded a colony there. Svidi's colony did not survive long, but its ruined farms, burial mounds, and symbol-carved rocks are still found on Graben Island. (A complete account of Svidi's Edda is no longer in existence – a curious absence, given that many older tales have survived – so the route to the North Wild is lost to history.) The precise date of the refugees' Arrival is variously cited as March 17, 630 BC, or March 19 of the same year, depending on the bard asked.

To me, debates regarding the exact date of Arrival seem something of a moot point, for the refugees soon discovered that the Island was not so vacant as their tales portrayed it. Several years prior, a rich merchant from the south had independently discovered the Island and settled his family and retainers





thereon. This aging gentleman, community patriarch and clan-founder Efraim Graben, graciously offered food, fresh water, and the hospitality of “his” Island to these weary, bedraggled refugees: a display of kindness which – conveniently – led the Grabenites to gratefully acknowledge his clan’s seniority as the Island’s “first family”, rather than displacing or enslaving his household as their piratical ancestors would have.

The grateful newcomers’ presence promised to quickly tame the rugged isle’s desolation; moreover, the refugees’ stories of chaos and invasion convinced Efraim Graben that his isolated estate was vulnerable to outside threats. By granting the refugees sanctuary, he secured the Grabens’ security by enlisting them to the Island’s defense. Jarls’ abuses of authority still fresh in their minds, the new settlers balked at naming him *aðalsmaður* (nobleman), but they readily agreed to honor his family’s property-rights, on the same basis as their own rights to wild-claimed land were honored under Anatal law. While early negotiations suffered a few setbacks due to mistranslation – a fact that supports my belief that the Grabens and retainers were of some other nationality – the relationship between Graben clan and Grabenite colonist quickly became established Island custom.

## *Emergence*

Having secured the right to claim and farm property on Graben Island – now known by that name, rather than “Svidi’s Isle” – the newcomers soon established their own hardy communities. Graben (now Graben-town) was founded that same year, at a site where the Grabens’ own watercraft had originally

berthed. Kirchenheim was founded in 632, abandoned for years after the storms of 635, then re-populated after the construction of its seawall (651). Seeheim was created in 659 as a bolt-hole, should the other villages ever fall to sea-borne enemies. Meerdorf’s exact date of founding is uncertain, as Knammen Isle was first “settled” by hermits and misanthropes unwelcome in the other villages, but references to “Meerdorf” in ships’ logs date back to 657 BC.

Of course, it is not the dry histories of men that captivate our Fraternity’s interest. Alongside the founding of villages, one pivotal event transpired during the early years: Graben Island’s passage into – or creation from – the Mists. Frustratingly, the date of Graben Island’s emergence is almost impossible to pinpoint directly: thanks to its perpetually-overcast skies, no discernable change in its constellations or other celestial phenomena was noted, and early Grabenites so seldom sailed beyond sight of the Island that their realm could have drifted in the Mists for decades. No account of the Misty Border occurs in local records until 648 BC. Regular merchant trade to the Island did not begin until much later (658 BC), although a 651 Darkonian naval scout’s sketchy report of a possible Todstein sighting predates the first mercantile contact.

Lacking a tangible testament, I extrapolated an estimate from indirect sources. Firstly, in 636 BC, the old Grabenite calendar – which, curiously, depicted years of 336 *days*: a sign the “North Wild” year was shorter than our own – was found to have fallen out-of-step with the seasons, anticipating the seasons’ turning by an increasing margin. This would place their arrival in the Land of Mists in 635 BC, most



## *Graben Island*

likely in mid-winter, to judge by when their calendar lost step with Nature. This lines up with another notable event that befell the Grabenites that winter: the so-called "All-Father's Muting", in which their priests lost all of their former divine power. Given its immense social impact, this event (one day after the Winter Solstice) is very well documented.

### *Graben Island: Recent Events*

Most years that followed the Muting were comparatively peaceful for the Island's inhabitants. Todstein (so-named by Efraim Graben, in one of his last acts before his death in 644) was discovered in 640 and its finder, Lars Viggson, re-visited it twice in as many years, bringing back a dozen reindeer on his second voyage. Viggson's ship failed to return from its fourth foray, and his

discovery that the snow never melts scuttled any plan to establish settlements on the other isle. Viggson and his doomed crew are thought to have frozen to death when their knarr, *Óndskapur*, was dashed to pieces against an iceberg; many believe Todstein's waters are haunted by their spirits.

643 BC was also the first year with verified sightings of an unusual visitant : a dark-cloaked and wraith-like entity, variously known as "Aegir's Jackdaw" or "Skadi's Arrow" ( respectively, the Ascended deities of storm and snow). An infrequent caller, this creature flies at a great altitude without wings, black cloak flapping in the winds. Debate as to its nature and intentions wildly vary, and tales grow in the telling. Some claim Aegir's Jackdaw is a witch, others a monster, and still others insist it to be a ghost. Many of its appearances seem to correlate with terrible storms, landslides,

### *Dread Possibility: The Ship of Horrors*

Conventional Mistways take the form of paths through the Mists, but occasional variants have been documented. One such example is named the *Ship of Horrors*. Rather than a fixed location, it operates through an existing sailing ship. By means unknown, this vessel becomes subject to the Mistway's control, gaining the ability to Mist-travel between seas. As it navigates the Mists, the affected ship takes on the kelp-draped and rotting veneer of a wreck dredged from the deep, and the name on the bow is supplanted by "Ship of Horrors" in letters of dripping blood. It can still be piloted normally between Mist-journeys, but the vessel's course through the Mists is at the Mistway's sole behest, not that of its captain or crew.

It is uncertain how a ship is singled out for this dubious fate. The one constant is that the afflicted vessel must be traversing the same body of water where the previous *Ship* broke its link to the Mistway, and that its captain must have made at least three Powers checks while in command of the vessel. The *Ship of Horrors* has "recruited" many vessels to its service over the years, their captains ranging from penitent merchant-seamen to murderous pirates driven by bloodlust. So long as the vessel remains bound to the Mistway its captain is physically unable to leave the ship, and its crew (including new recruits) are incapable of moving more than 500 yards from it. The ship appears and functions normally when it is not Mist-traveling and may sail freely between ports-of-call, or even traverse other Mistways.

How a vessel or its crew can be freed from the Mistway's grip is unknown. If destroyed, through battle, accidentally, or deliberately, the ship re-assembles itself at dawn. Crew from the *Ship of Horrors* remain dead if killed, but if the captain dies, the corpse disperses into mist and re-forms (alive) at the ship's wheel. Possible means of breaking the link include running aground on the sands of Har'Akir via the *Jackal's Ruse*, snaring the vessel in the weeds of Saragoss, or making amends for whatever offenses left both ship and captain susceptible in the first place.



shipwrecks, and other disasters, but whether the Jackdaw is a prophetic harbinger of such events, seeks them out to observe them, or actively causes them to occur is unknown.

The most terrible storm on record struck the Island in the autumn of 737 BC, arising out of nowhere to sink more than a dozen major vessels. The Big Storm of '37 – the only name the bucolic Grabenites are inclined to give it – raged like a Rokushman typhoon for a full week, only to end as suddenly as it began. Vessels hauled ashore were flipped and smashed, several residences collapsed, and a great waterspout off Knammen's south shore deluged Meerdorf with rancid mud. Even sheltered Seeheim was not unaffected, losing two nearly-complete hulls from its shipyards. The only building to weather the gale

without at some degree of damage was the Black Chapel, the slate-hewn walls and roof of which escaped entirely untouched.

The death toll in the Big Storm's wake was well over a hundred, not counting foreign vessels or the brutal massacre at Graben Manor: a tragedy that preceded the greater catastrophe by less than 48 hours. Popular superstition holds that the outlanders who treacherously assaulted the founding family had violated Graben Island's very spirit, such that the great storm arose in outraged retaliation.

Grabenites now find their refuge pushed into world events, with the appearance of nearby islands and the coastline at the close of 750. In the past decade, more change has come to Graben Island than in the previous century, leading to a classic case of "culture shock": the foundations of their society now tremble at the impact of new trade, new faces, new ideas. The next few years will determine if the Grabenites maintain the conformity of their native customs, or are fated to become a mere cultural and economic appendage of Nova Vaasa or some other rising power on the Nocturnal Sea .



## Trade and Craftsmanship

The principle commodities exported from Graben Island are wool and saltwater fish, together making up the lion's share of this nation's contribution to Core economics. Graben Island wool is sold in three grades (wadmul, twill and shoddy) as well as in felt and yarn. *Wadmul* is a coarse, durable, but uncomfortable fabric, once used by the sea-raiders as garb for captured slaves. On an island of free men, the itchy fabric's use has dwindled, but its rock-bottom affordability has made wadmul a major seller in the poor markets of Nova Vaasa. The more tightly-woven and insulating *twill*s are worn in abundance by natives, as well as many expatriates who know its advantages well from Mordentish woolens. *Shoddy* is a mix of recycled sheep's wool and fiber from the coats of Island cattle; although hardy as wadmul and nearly as wearable as twill, this odd composition makes it a poor seller in foreign markets. Dyes are cheaper in other realms than on Graben Island, so most wool is exported in its natural hues.

Fishing the Nocturnal Sea is the single most dangerous profession on the Island, yet one Grabenites embrace with fearless dedication. Inshore waters provide modest amounts of plaice, herring and smelt, harvested with many-hooked lines or nets from large dories or "six-rings". For the open seas, the native fishermen typically set forth in a knarr laden with seines and light dories, then sail to the coldwater fishing-banks between the Island and Todstein. Deepwater fishes including cod, flounder, and the prized sturgeon: a source of precious caviar, and a sinfully-ugly fish I suspect is really a dire animal. Occasionally, curious items from the seabed turn up in the seine-nets, when fishing crews haul their labor's bounty into the light.

Though a relatively minor source of food, whaling is held in great esteem here, and a



harpoonist of proven skill is highly lauded. Whales of greater size are pursued from knarrs built for speed, while smaller species (such as the pilot whales I'd seen butchered in Seeheim) are herded inshore and trapped against the beaches. Prior to their realm's emergence in the Core, Grabenite whalers had been experts on cetacean migration and feeding habits. Since the geography shifted, the whales' behavior has been unpredictable, and dedicated whalers are among the few Grabenites who regularly venture to the far corners of the Sea. While whales' flesh and blubber have an honored place in Grabenite cuisine, inedible products of the whale-hunts are often more valuable, such as baleen, oil, ivory and ambergris.

While Grabenite farmers are reluctant to part with their crop, growing foreign demand for the Island's distinctive herb-spiced goat cheeses is leading more to reconsider their frugality about food-stocks. Salt, of course, is free for the taking, so a few industrious natives now "farm" salt along the southern mud-flats, letting leather-lined trenches fill at flood-tide and then dry up into salable encrustations of sea salt. A small but useful range of furs and decorative feathers are also gleaned from wildlife in the marshes and forests: items which the gentry of Liffe have taken a fancy to, to brighten up their garb.

Few local handicrafts are of foreign interest, but one byproduct of the sea-harvest has won wider appreciation: *scrimshaw*, the carving and etching of whale- and walrus-



## Graben Island

ivory. Knickknacks once considered petty decoration by locals have come into vogue at mainland galleries and shops. Even clans staunchly opposed to foreign influences may yet barter away an occasional scrimshawed comb or saltcellar.

In exchange for these products of sheep and sea, Graben Island (grudgingly) welcomes cargo of iron tools and a few steel weapons from the mainland, cotton cloth and thread from Vechor or Souragne, and flour, dried fruits, and vegetables from any realm more conducive to farming than their own. Most profits of the fishing-boom have not circulated among those who shoulder the bulk of its labor, but accrues to the Coopers, Stromms and Fischers who package and transport the product. Much of these entrepreneurs' newfound wealth is spent the way the bourgeois always squander such windfalls: fine houses and garb, expensive trinkets, and elite educations for their heirs. That this flies in the face of natives' usual sensibilities only proves that the Graben-town profiteers have adopted more of the habits of their Nova Vaasan neighbors than just their taste in moustaches.

Until recently, few Grabenites made use of currency in their daily lives: barter, along with an unwritten system of traded debts and favors, sufficed to track exchanges of goods or services. Since the fishing boom, demand for hard coinage has skyrocketed. Vaasi, Darkonian, and the occasional Vechorite or Souragnien coin are equally accepted in Graben-town. Foreign coinage also sees some use in Kirchenheim, though barter is still dominant there. Given a choice, most Grabenites prefer silver currency to an equal value in gold. This is partly a cultural bias – their sea-raider ancestors employed “hack silver” jewelry as a crude form of money – and partially a question of utility: many natives like to have their accumulated coins melted and re-cast into brooches, and gold is a bit heavy for such trinkets.

## Government

Lacking hereditary chiefs, leadership of the North Wild refugees initially passed into the hands of *godi*, but the loss of these revered priests' power left them deposed in turn. As such, village assemblies – advisory bodies to the *godi*, and civic forums where grievances could be aired – inherited their authority, a status they retain to this day.

As with most aspects of Grabenite society, these assemblies (*tings*) are conducted in accordance with strict traditions, practices, and unwritten laws. Each clan casts a single vote in one village assembly. Families with branches in multiple settlements must choose which to attend; typically, this will be the village where the head-of-household lives. Proxies are not allowed: if a family's leader fails to appear, that clan's votes count as abstentions. Formal assembly-meetings must be announced weeks in advance, to ensure as many clan-heads as possible can arrange to attend. Rare emergency sessions, called in times of crisis, may be held with 24 hours' notice, but all decisions reached must be reexamined at the next formal session.

Routine matters addressed at assemblies include criminal trials, lawsuits, municipal upkeep (roads, wells, and harbors), and maintenance of the Yeomanry. The power of an assembly is limited; it can impose no greater penalty for non-violent crimes than exile: a sentence that lost much of its sting in 750, before which it had entailed casting offenders into the Mists. Nor do assemblies have the authority to curb behavior (such as drinking to excess or welcoming foreign traders) that falls short of harming people or property. For bloodier offenses, a system of wergild is invoked, whereby those who do harm must pay a fine to the injured party or survivors of same; this resembles the Borcan system, though fines are based upon severity of injury or the familial ties between parties, not income. Clan-heads also usually disown serious offenders, both to save face and to exempt their family from paying heavy fines should a culprit flee.

Foreigners occupy a “gray area” in Island law, as the local policies accord outsiders no



## Graben Island

official legal standing. I'll admit, I never looked at Bram Fischer's impertinent smirk quite the same way, after he remarked that, technically, he was quite legally entitled to seize me as a slave after our contract for his piloting services expired! A jest, of course – the Grabenites haven't kept slaves since the days of the sea-raiders – but unnerving even so, to realize my only recourse under the law would be to appeal to a clan-head to speak for me, if charged with some offense.

To administrate day-to-day life, assemblies appoint civic officials known as "deacons": a Low Mordentish loan-word with liturgical overtones, emulating the old divine mandate of the *godi*. Deacons of various titles work to coordinate and levy tariffs on port traffic, maintain community property like wells and docks, advance civic projects, or lead and train members of the Yeomanry. A deacon is never a clan-head in his own right, as Grabenites prefer to keep authority as dispersed as possible; most are younger and more energetic than the assemblymen they answer to. Deacons in Graben-town like to present themselves as having a great deal of clout – Grabenites know of the imperious behavior of officials in other ports, and find it convenient to emulate this – but in reality, a deacon's authority is only as secure as the assembly's faith in his competence. Some deacons are content to serve their villages, while others view their work as a means to an end (such as to prove their worthiness to inherit their clan-head's position). Deacons receive a stipend for their service, paid from usage fees at docks and rivers, tariffs on foreign goods, and assets confiscated from convicts. Formal taxation is absent here, but assemblies may take up a collection among their members' families to fund more costly projects, such as harbor improvements.

Civil order and defense are the work of the Yeomanry, a freemen's militia to which all able-bodied males are obligated to devote at least one season of service every four years. "Service" does not entail full-time military enlistment, but rather a set number of hours of training, organized and led by a deacon-cum-officer with battle experience. Active Yeomanry members may be called to find and apprehend fugitives, man the pinnacles

that patrol the seas, rescue survivors of shipwrecks, or dispatch aquatic menaces that crawl ashore. Until the present generation, the Yeomanry's battles were limited to small skirmishes with pirates or sea beasts. Now, being more accessible to the outside world, veteran officers argue that the Island needs more than just amateur soldiers to maintain its autonomy.

A special mention must be made of the Graben clan's political status. Officially, the founding family holds no more authority than any other household; indeed, their lone seat in the Graben-town assembly has not been filled in years, owing to centenarian Colin Graben's ill health. Unofficially, the Grabens' influence is felt far more broadly: many Graben-town businesses owe sizeable debts to the clan, and far more occupy land or buildings owned by the Grabens. While the prolific family grew still more reclusive after the attack of 737, Josiah Graben's work as acting manager of his grandsire's affairs restored their public prominence: even the Fischers' vaunted Packhouse was funded with Graben money, making even the new tycoons dependent upon the founding clan's good graces.

Under terms of Efraim's original agreement with the refugees, all the unclaimed land on Graben Island (but not Knammen Isle or the Schlamholme) legally defaults to the Graben family. Only with the permission of Colin Graben (or his proxy, Josiah) may a Grabenite clear land for a new farm or lay claim to its natural resources. Luckily for Grabenites, the terms of Efraim's agreement also bar the Grabens from charging for land, or from turning down natives' petitions for new acreage without good reason. After a family occupies a tract for five generations, it becomes legally theirs, but until then, the Grabens hold proprietary claim to it. While the Grabens cannot evict its occupants, they have the right of refusal if residents seek to sell such land or bequeath it to their heirs. As Grabenites feel close attachments to their family homesteads, the possibility that such an inheritance might be denied is a terrible threat.

## Graben Island

While most families truly do own the small homesteads their forbearers held in the early 7th century, these same clans have typically grown since then, so have also acquired new property: a fact that keeps them subject to the Grabens' good graces. Curiously, these

additional land-grants are most often issued at the Grabens' instigation, and up to fifty or years in advance of a clan's fifth generation: an unusual bit of forward planning on the founding clan's part, more typical of elves than mortal men, even in so static a culture.

### Law Enforcement

As a part-time defense force, Yeomanry militia squads consist of experts coached by a smaller number of warriors. Statistics for both classes are provided below, allowing DMs to select either seasoned trusties, or green recruits as desired. Grabenites at sea are very much in their element, so the Yeomanry's capable sailors are also described below.

**Yeomanry recruit:** Human Exp1; CR 1/3; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d6, hp 4; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +0; Grp +0; Atk +0 melee (1d8/x3, spear) or +0 ranged (1d4, sling); Full Atk +0 melee (1d8/x3, spear) or +0 ranged (1d4, sling); AL LN; Sv Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +2; Str 11, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10.

*Skills and Feats:* Climb +2, Craft or Profession (any one) +7, Craft or Profession (any related one) +4, Knowledge (local) +4, Knowledge (any one work-related) +2, Listen +2, Sense Motive +4, Spot +2, Swim +2, Use Rope +2; Athletic, Skill Focus (Craft or Profession).

*Possessions:* Spear, sling w/ 10 bullets, leather armor, spare ammo (stones, 1d3 damage)

**Yeomanry trusty:** Human War1; CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d8, hp 6; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +1; Grp +1; Atk +2 melee (1d8/x3, battleaxe) or +1 ranged (1d6/x3, shortbow); Full Atk +2 melee (1d8/x3, battleaxe) or +1 ranged (1d6/x3, shortbow); AL LN; Sv Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 9.

*Skills and Feats:* Climb +2, Intimidate +1, Jump +2, Swim +2; Endurance, Weapon Focus (battleaxe).

*Possessions:* Battleaxe, shortbow w/ 20 arrows, chain shirt, signal horn.

**Yeomanry sailor:** Human Exp1/War1; CR 1; Medium humanoid (human); HD 1d6 + 1d8, hp 10; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +1; Grp +1; Atk +2 melee (1d6+1/19-20, cutlass) or +2 melee/ranged (1d4+1, dagger) or +2 ranged (1d6/x3, shortbow); Full Atk +2 melee (1d6+1/19-20, cutlass) or +2 melee/ranged (1d4+1, dagger) or +2 ranged (1d6/x3, shortbow); AL LN; Sv Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 12, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

*Skills and Feats:* Balance +4, Climb +4, Jump +3, Knowledge (geography or nature) +4, Profession (sailor) +4, Spot +3, Swim +5, Tumble +3, Use Rope +4; Acrobatic, Dodge.

*Possessions:* Cutlass, shortbow w/ 20 arrows, dagger.

Note that Grabenites can use Profession (sailor) untrained. Statistics for the cutlass may be found in *Stormwrack*; if that product is not available, replace with scimitars.

## Graben Island

### *Dread Possibility: Plans of a Prince*

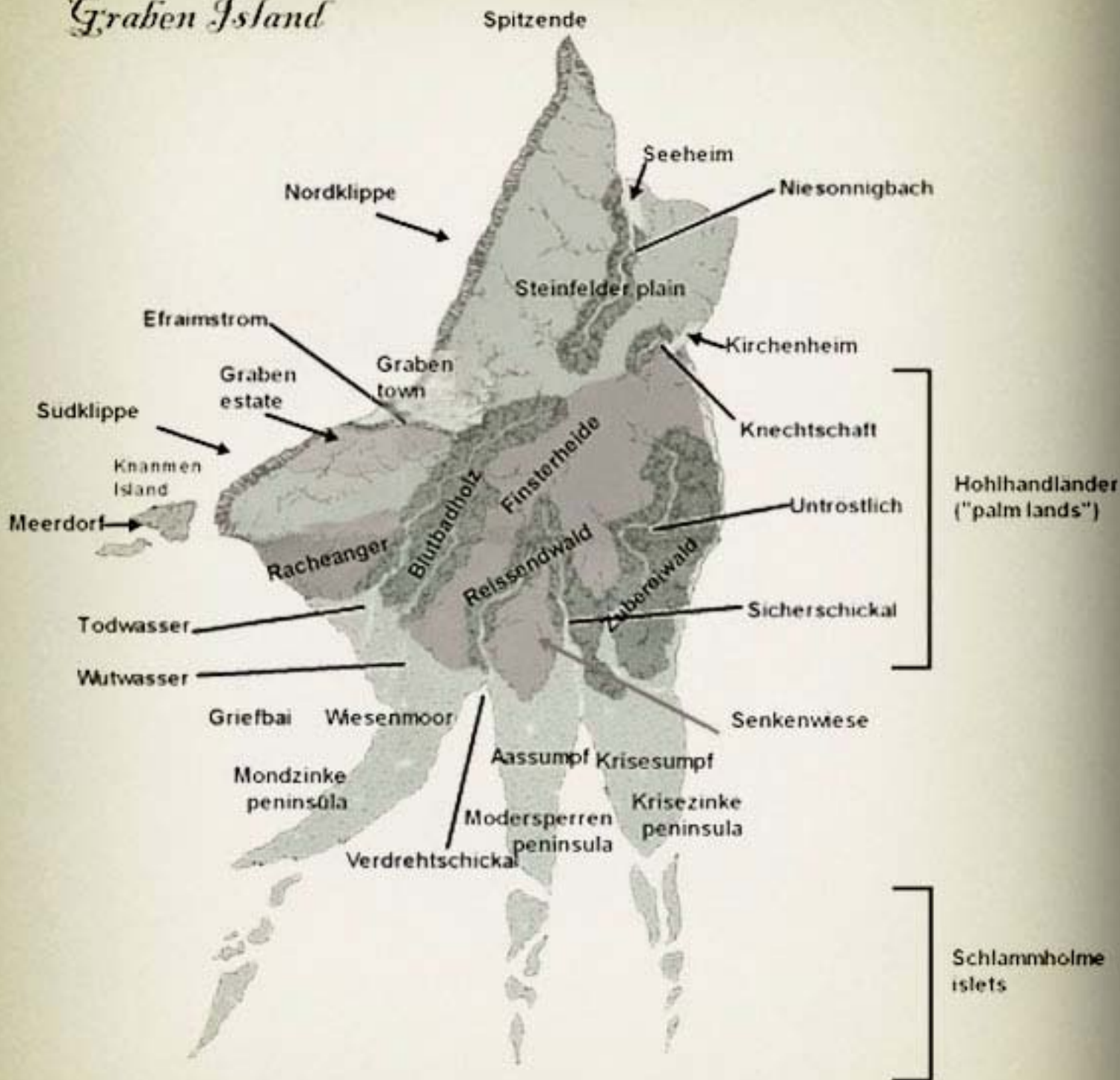
However secure Grabenites may feel in their isolation, they are vastly overmatched by the nations of Darkon and Nova Vaasa, either of which could effortlessly crush the Yeomanry. The former is unlikely to invade – Azalin has no wish to claim a land he can never visit in person, nor does he care to pointlessly antagonize Meredoth – but Nova Vaasa is another story. Unbound to the land and driven on by his own ruthless ambitions, Prince Othmar Bolshnik aspires to found an empire of the sort that Vaasans haven't known since the Ranging Epoch: one forged on the Nocturnal Sea's waves, even as their forbearers conquered the plains of Tygaam. As the fishing-boom is already turning Graben-town into an economic satellite of Nova Vaasa, Othmar has set his sights on Graben Island as his navy's first target.

Although not much of a prize, annexation of the Island would be a shrewd opening move. Ever since their isle emerged from the Mists, native Grabenites' heretical democratic politics and their refusal to be converted have been a nagging thorn in the side of the *Himmelsk Naeve* and the Iron Faith. Additionally, suspicious events in both Arbora and Egertus have roused the ire of the *Kunduktors*, who suspect a profane trade in human corpses is operating out of Graben-town. By subjugating the Grabenites and letting the Church impose its doctrines over them, Othmar can guarantee the Lawgiver's endorsement of future naval expansionism.

Adding further incentive, Ingemar, Othmar's son and heir, is now old enough that the Prince wishes to groom his successor: a dangerous task in Nova Vaasa, where other noble families will rebel against his plans to maintain the Bolshnik monopoly. Rather than rouse the other houses' wrath prematurely, Othmar plans to appoint Ingemar as governor of Graben Island so his heir can practice rulership out of immediate view. Should Grabenites prove to be truculent subjects, so much the better. To date, Ingemar has been a great disappointment: as spoiled as Othmar was at his age, yet lacking his sire's ambitions or aggression. The Prince hopes crushing an uprising will teach his lazy heir discipline.

Meredoth couldn't care less who governs Graben Island, so Prince Othmar's scheme to seize the island is entirely feasible, so long as the Grabens retain their prestige and ability to function as the darklord's supply-agents. Prince Othmar's plans to claim Todstein as a source of vital timber for naval vessels, on the other hand, will likely prove disastrous if the cantankerous sea-mage's fury against "spell-less barbarian churls" trespassing on his home is roused.

# Graben Island



Hohlhandländer  
("palm lands")

Schlammholme  
islets

-  Village
-  Graben Family Estate
-  Grazing Lands, Rocky Scrub
-  Prairie
-  Forest
-  Swamp, Marsh
-  Beach

## *Graben Island*

### *Domain Boundaries in the Nocturnal Sea*

Even to the few inhabitants of Ravenloft who know about “domains”, the borders between such realms in the Nocturnal Sea are very unclear. The overcast conditions which inhibit navigation make it all but impossible to map out a border’s geographic position, and open-water boundaries between these domains tend to fluctuate, either randomly or with various darklords’ tempers and preeminence. The border of Île de la Tempête, for example, has been known to expand outwards by up to a mile, when shifting tides bring about Monette’s transformations to werebat form, then shrink again as he reverts.

Neblightode’s border is particularly ill-documented, among NPCs in-the-know. Most assume that Todstein and Graben Island are actually different domains, given their geographic separation (in truth, a reflection of Meredoth’s misanthropy). Individuals falsely suspected of being the Island’s “dread lord” include the Flayed Rider, one or more native “wise women”, the (nonexistent) ghost of Efram Graben, a Zaubereiwald fey, or some malign force entombed beneath the Black Chapel.

## Graben Island

August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1760

Brothers,

Regretfully, I must report a delay in my return to Souragne. Not my doing, by any means – my investigations of Graben Island have gone swimmingly, permitting me to examine its culture and geographic features somewhat more thoroughly than those of Liffe – but rather, the fault of that impulsive layabout, Brother Dirac! Whether by ill luck or simple carelessness, the cheeky young whip has fallen entirely out of touch with both myself, and our venerated colleague on Vechor. Neither Master S. nor I have heard a word of his progress or status, since his departure from the Isle of Ravens. Divinations indicate that Dirac is still among the living, yet all of our efforts to communicate with the lad or scry upon his location have been in vain.

Whether our young Brother has imprudently stumbled into some danger, or has merely allowed his meeting with the Isle's proprietress to distract him (again) from his scholarly responsibilities, this has stuck me with the chore of carrying out the duty that Dirac has shirked. Yes, my friends, I've **another** island to investigate, like it or not! A visit to the uninhabited rock called "Todstein" is hardly the way I'd hoped to end this venture – Graben Island is more than chilly enough for my Dementlieuse blood, thank you! – yet certain clues I've come across, during my sojourn amongst the Grabenites, mark that desolate isle as a prospective bolt-hole for the one we seek.

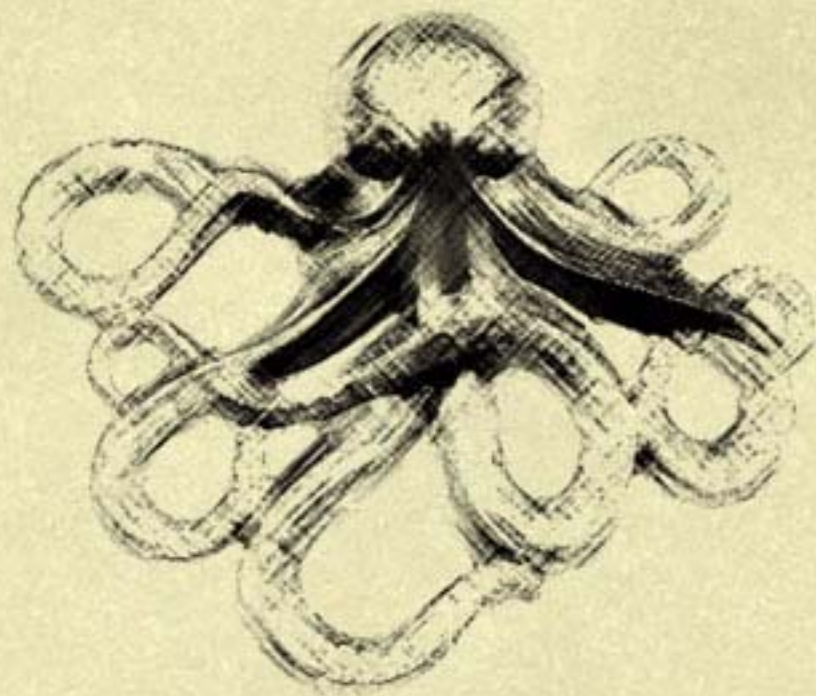
As much as I long to return to less-backward surroundings – or even Souragne, for that matter – I fear that Master S. is correct: one of us must examine the last of the Nocturnal Sea's islands, and if we should delay in hopes that Dirac will resume contact, the few remaining weeks of what passes for fair weather in these parts will be lost to us. Owing to Nature's tight timetable, I had no choice but to cut short my tour of Graben Island's southern marshes, and return posthaste to Graben-town, to tell Captain Howe of our revised itinerary. (Believe me, *Black Pelican's* master is no more delighted by the prospect than I!) Regrettably, Dirac's preparatory notes on Todstein are unavailable to me, although I remedied this dearth of background research as best I could, consulting a few Graben-town talespinners and my gracious hosts at Graben Manor.

Owing to the vagaries of travel in this, the most dangerous corner of an already-hostile sea, I now have not the slightest idea how soon I shall be able to rejoin you in Souragne. Rest assured that I shall contact you with that information at the first opportunity, once this concluding foray is over and done with, one way or the other.

Till then,

Viktor

PART VI



*Todstein*

# *Todstein*

*The Point*

*Mausoleum*

*Sorrow's  
Bay*

*Fogview  
Bay*

*Frozen  
Marsh*





*By Viktor Hazan, August 27th, 760*

Did I say this wasn't Vorostokov?

As I write these words, I can hear the strained creaking of the *Black Pelican's* shrouds, stiff with ice, and the fatigued shouts of the remaining crew as five men strive to do the work of eight. The extra labor is keeping them warm, at least. Myself, I must pause to stamp my feet and rub my hands every twenty minutes to keep blood flowing. Cold and frustration are taking their toll on my nerves. Last night, when I first set to documenting the setback that befell us on Todstein, I grew so distracted by anger that I forgot to lay the pen beside my cabin's tiny camp-stove when I retired. I could keep this damnable, ink-freezing chill at bay with ease, if the wretch hadn't taken my potions as well as-but no, I'll get to that.

Captain Howe - stiff-featured and bitter: he's lost men before, yet never like this, and he'd had high hopes for that lad - tells me the wind is with us this morning, and we should make good time back to Graben-town. Coincidence? Or are we simply of no further of interest?

### *Todstein in Short*

**Location:** Southeast Nocturnal Sea, Nebligtode

**Cultural level:** Renaissance-equivalent<sup>1</sup> (9) in Meredoth's lairs, Savage (0) elsewhere

**Population:** 1 human, ~400 Obedient Dead (mostly lebenttod & skeletons), ~80 constructs

**Main settlements:** None

**Religions:** None

**Languages:** Draconic, Grabenite, Aquan, Todsteiner

**Government:** Sham "magocracy" (virtually all residents are under Meredoth's control)

- 
1. Meredoth's homeland is highly developed, but uses advanced magic in lieu of technology.



## Geographical Survey

### Climate

There must be places on the mainland with conditions as bone-chilling as these: the high Balinoks or the Sleeping Beast, perhaps. But at sea level? In August? Plainly,, there can be nothing is natural about this climate. The Watchers in Shadow have crafted yet another of their anomalous mysteries here, atop this forsaken outcrop which the the Nocturnal Sea's curt sailors simply refer to simply as "the Rock".

The waves that gird the stark cliff-faces of Todstein hover in that slim margin between the freezing points of fresh and salt water, making even the briefest immersion a deadly event. Kirchenheim's stoic fishing veterans laugh at the thought of wearing life-jackets, knowing they'd freeze too quickly to drown. The same sea-wise shipmasters also speak of sudden "flash freezes" that cause the Rock's offshore waters to solidify into impassable buttresses of towering ice. I must confess

the physics of such an occurrence strike me as implausible, yet who is to say?

The same storms which regularly plague the region's other isles likewise batter Todstein, lashing its cliffs and churning its inshore waters into frigid froth. Snowfall is heavy, with flurries blanketing the island every few days, and blizzards blowing in as often as once a fortnight in winter. Freak hammering hailstorms occasionally strike "the Rock" as well, by way of variety, and the comparative warmth of late summer ushers in freezing rains, which coat both ships' rigging and the lonely pine forests in crystalline sheaths of ice: beautiful, but fantastically destructive of trees and sailcloth.

Winds are - thankfully - less constant than blustery Graben Island, and natural fog is blessedly uncommon in air too chilly to retain much water-vapor. In the iceberg-clotted surrounding waters, eddies of mist do rise from the waves, making the already-difficult task of navigating safely between the treacherous ice floes even trickier.

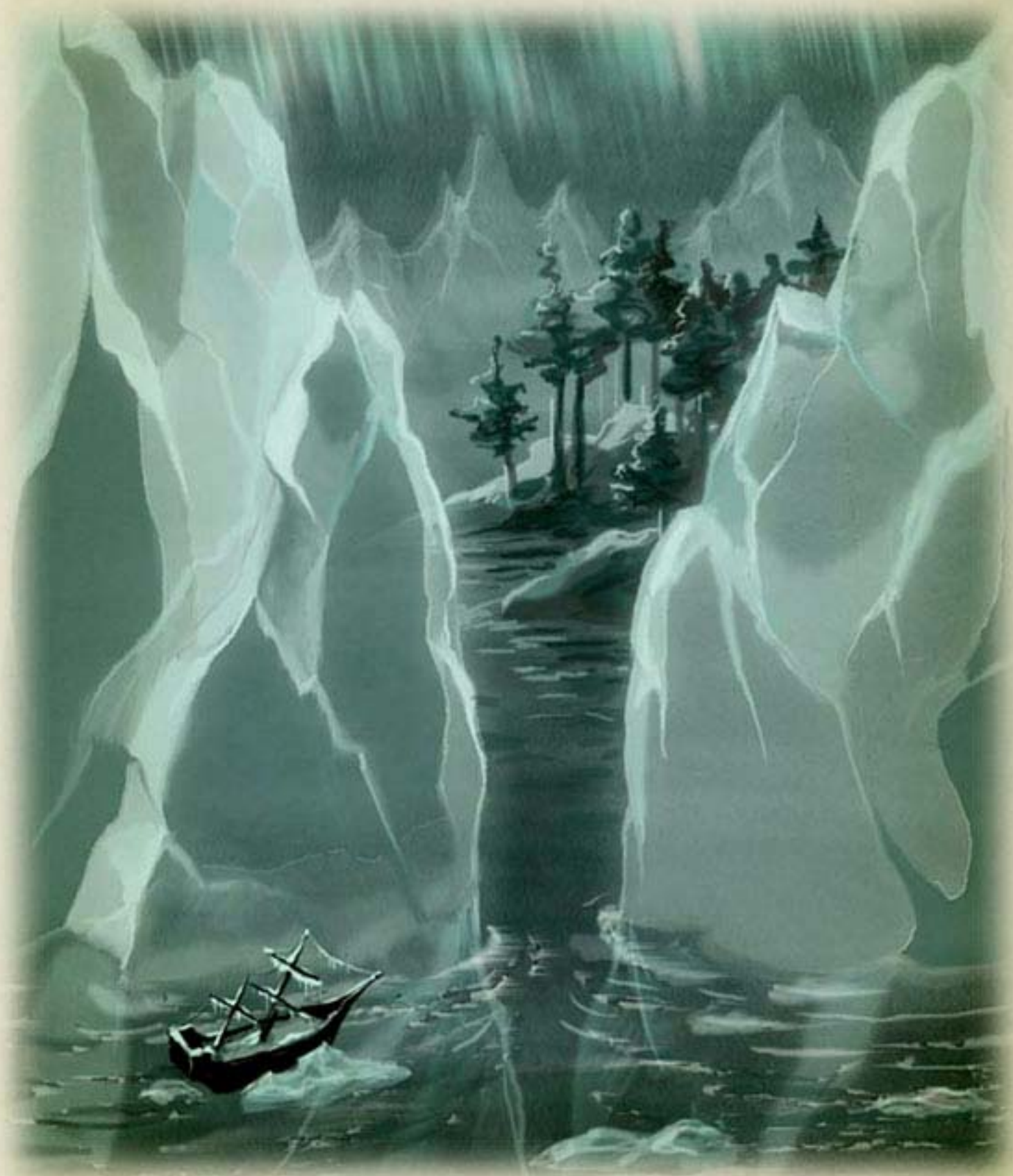
### Temperature

Temperatures on Todstein are harrowingly frigid, ranging from 40° F during the height of summer to a bone-cracking -60° in the winter. Most years, conditions vary from Cold (40° to 0° F) in late July or August; to Severe Cold (0° to -20° F) in March to mid-July, or from September to mid-November. Temperatures dip into Extreme Cold (-20° to -50° F) from late November to February, when even the Rock's hardy wildlife shelter in snow-dens and burrows. Winter's cold snaps can push conditions into Unearthly Cold (-50° F or less), as per *Frostburn*.

Average winds on Todstein range from 0 to 30 mph, fluctuating widely over the course of a day. Flurries fall about one day in four, year-round, and blizzards lasting two to five days strike Todstein every couple of weeks in wintertime.

Wind chill moves the effective temperature one step lower, for purposes of cold damage and needed protection. This applies to any living creature exposed to wind speeds rated "strong" or greater. Undead and constructs are unhindered by wind-chill, even if they are otherwise subject to cold damage.

Thanks to Neblightode's perpetual gloom, Todstein's temperatures don't significantly fall at night, as there is too little sunlight in the daytime to make a difference.



## Todstein

### *Icewalls of Todstein*

A misanthrope obsessed with his own privacy, the darklord of Nebligtode has been granted the ability to seal Todstein off from the rest of his domain, encircling his home island with ice, much as Strahd von Zarovich uses his choking fog to isolate Castle Ravenloft. When engaged in secret research or fed up with the distractions posed by his wider realm, the sea-mage causes huge walls of jagged ice to ascend from the waves, blocking off all passage in or out.

When raised, the Icewalls are over 200' thick, rise some 80' above the high tide line, and extend downward to the seabed. Attempts to climb or fly over these obstacles are not totally impeded, but freezing rain and driving winds make traversing these slick, razor-edged barricades extremely challenging. When the necromancer lowers the barrier, the Icewalls break apart into icebergs that drift off in all directions: a silent, unpredictable menace to shipping.

Brought up in a culture saturated with magic, Meredoth's concept of security also encompasses protection against arcane intrusion. Scrying directed at his isle discerns only dense, silent fog, similar to the spell *Mordenkainen's Private Sanctum*. Teleportation in or out automatically fails, and Meredoth intuitively senses when an attempt is made to bypass this effect. The defenses drop when the Icewalls are open, and do not foil scrying or teleportation by persons already inside the barrier. They cannot prevent intruders from being dropped off on the Rock by the caprice of the Mists, so Meredoth's research is often interrupted by outlanders or Mist-led adventurers.

### *Frostburn*

For DMs with access to the *Frostburn* game supplement, Todstein should be regarded as highly susceptible to dire weather. Acid sleet, blood snow, death hail, razor sleet, and rust flurries all take place several times each winter. Negation flurries - a frequent bane of Meredoth's early years of darklordship - also strike erratically, dispelling spells and ongoing magical effects. Such flurries have an uncanny habit of striking Todstein just as the necromancer is preparing to test a newly-modified spell effect or item on the surface.

The Howl of the North effect (a.k.a. the *dráp dreygur*) also occurs on and near Todstein. Hearing the *dráp dreygur* incurs a DC 12 Fear save (DC 15 to Grabenites), in addition to the usual consequences of the Howl of the North.

As with their tall tales of "flash freezes", the more garrulous of Graben-town's seamen spoke of other curious weather phenomena occurring in Todstein's vicinity: snowflakes sharp as blades, that cut sails and skin, pitch-black hailstones that wither flesh on contact; or howling winds that rupture eardrums and shatter teeth with their eerie wailing. The Grabenites refer to the latter phenomenon as the *dráp dreygur* ("ghost that hunts"), and believe it to be the spirit of Lars Viggson, calling out to the wandering spirits of his failed crew. Were it not for my almanac's dates, mutely mocking my preconceptions, I'd dismiss such accounts as sailors' taking customary liberties with fact ... but, gazing up to the snowdrifts that line the cliff-tops in August, I wonder.

## Topography

The waters around Todstein are filled with drifting chunks of ice, some man-sized, others as huge as the ships they imperil. Such floes make approaching the isle risky in all but the mildest weather. Nature, alas, was not so accommodating to the passage of the *Black Pelican*, for the skittish winds fluctuated wildly until we drew quite near to the Rock, making it hard for Captain Howe to steer a steady course. Even with Paulo's keen eyes at the prow, we had numerous close calls as we sailed into the questionable shelter of Sorrow's Bay.

This shallow cove on the west side of the isle, and its counterpart on the opposite side (Fogview Bay, so-called because the Misty Border lies within eyeshot of its beach) divide Todstein into an unequal, bi-lobed shape, like the body of a violin. Save for the twin beaches abutting the paired bays, sheer, unbroken precipices of dark-colored stone ascend out of the surf. Rising some 50 yards above the high-water mark, encrusted in ice, and treacherously steep, the cliffs present an ominously bleak face to all comers; seabirds and seals shy away from resting along their fringes or on the beaches, leaving Todstein's wildlife confined to the escarpment above.

## Cliffs

Attempts to scale the cliffs of Todstein pose a base DC 25 Climb check, +5 where the ice covers their surface. The igneous stone of the escarpment is exceptionally hard: setting a single piton in the cliff-side takes three minutes instead of one, with a 20% chance a piton breaks before the rock does.

Although the cliffs, themselves, are no threat to seabirds, Meredoth has snared so many of their kind to use as zombie 'carrier pigeons' for his lebendtod spies that these birds now instinctively avoid them.

The wide beach at Sorrow's Bay is a rather peculiar sight. Its slopes are comprised of coarse sand: white sand, unlike the darker stone and gravel of which both Todstein and the adjacent seabed are composed. Lighter and more adhesive when damp than normal sand, its odd texture sparked my curiosity. A pocket hand-lens revealed its particles to be more splinter-like than granular, and a few larger fragments - their past configuration still evident, despite the surf's grinding force - confirmed an eerie suspicion. Unnerved, I realized I stood upon a shore comprised of untold billions of wave-pulverized bone-shards.

(Needless to say, I did not mention this eerie observation to Captain Howe or his crew.)

Espying no sign of animate life on the sands - not even seashells - I resolved to dare the escarpment's heights first thing in the morning. I decided to bring a few crewmen as escort, the disturbing nature of the beach-sand having reinforced my reluctance to probe this Rock's mysteries unaccompanied.

Wishing to ascertain the isle's layout for myself, I slipped away from Howe's landing party and took to the air, beneath an illusory overlay of a ravenkin that observers below would mistake for a common bird. Making haste before my absence could be noticed, I ascended to a height well above the treetops, and set to work memorizing all conspicuous clearings or odd landforms for the morrow's investigation.



## *Todstein*

Todstein's interior is fairly flat, with a slight rise at the heart of its small northern lobe, and a sunken, sparsely-vegetated area - a frozen lake or marsh - lying perhaps half a mile due south of Sorrow's Bay beach. The Fogview Bay beach is of the same off-white, dull hue as our landing site, and marginally more sheltered from the waves. The isle's interior blanket of dark conifers is virtually unbroken; several tremendous boulders were visible as iced-over gray masses within the forest, as were a few gaps I deduced must be tiny clearings, sumps or springs. A crooked trail between the two beaches links the shore to a large, circular clearing in the north lobe of the isle. Another slender gap between the trees runs northeast from the clearing, and on toward a deep cleft in the northern cliff-face, that opens onto the sea.

I was sorely tempted to investigate the latter gap - another, undocumented path, perhaps? - but the winds were rising fast. Leaving off before the weather could become any worse, I sped back to the beach. As I descended, gray aerial shapes near a jutting spit of land to the north wheeled earthward and settled, as well: the first birds I observed anywhere on Todstein.

The twin paths connecting the isle's beaches to its interior plateau ascend the

cliff-sides at uncomfortably-steep angles. In returning to the beach via the western path, I made note of Todstein's geological makeup: basalt and other igneous stone, laced with a few veins of obsidian, much like that of the volcanoes Brother Dossevisky described in his lecture on the Burning Peaks. Rough stairs had been hewn into the naked rock at each of the path's half-dozen switchbacks; each such turnaround lay some twenty feet below the previous one. The ledges I traversed were rather narrow: three feet wide for most of the way, but reduced to a foot's breadth in numerous places, by crumbled rims or thick, accumulated ice on the rockface.

I discerned no specific style or architectural affinity in the hewn stairs; their crafting was too crude for that. I did observe an unusual distribution of tidewater barnacles girding the stone, when I reached the bottom: the crumbling, spent husks of inshore varieties encrusted low-lying surfaces now populated by deeper-water species, the dead creatures' shallow-water descendants having migrated several feet higher up the rock-face. I am uncertain if this phenomenon had an organic explanation, or if Todstein's relocation to the Core has caused tidal forces to increase, driving the local tide-line higher.

### *Gargoyle Point*

Intolerant as he is of living beings' organic weaknesses, Meredoth considers gargoyles' ability to exist without food, water or air intriguing. Deeming them a 'missing link' between biological life forms and constructs, he has collected several "wings" of these creatures on Todstein, occasionally testing their physical endurance or experimenting with undead or enhanced variants.

The gargoyles are not permitted inside the darklord's various lairs, but have their own refuge in a cave buried in the cliff-face on Todstein's northeast edge. Once the hiding place of one of Meredoth's cloned bodies, this squalid outpost's furnishings and other contents has been ruined by the gargoyles' vandalism, but most of its security-spells and locks still function.

Todstein's gargoyles are permitted to prey on intruders on or within flying distance of the Rock, so long as they leave the bodies in the Boneyard afterwards. The necromancer has scrying-links to dominant members of each "wing", allowing him to monitor their battles and assess their opponents' abilities and possible value to his research.

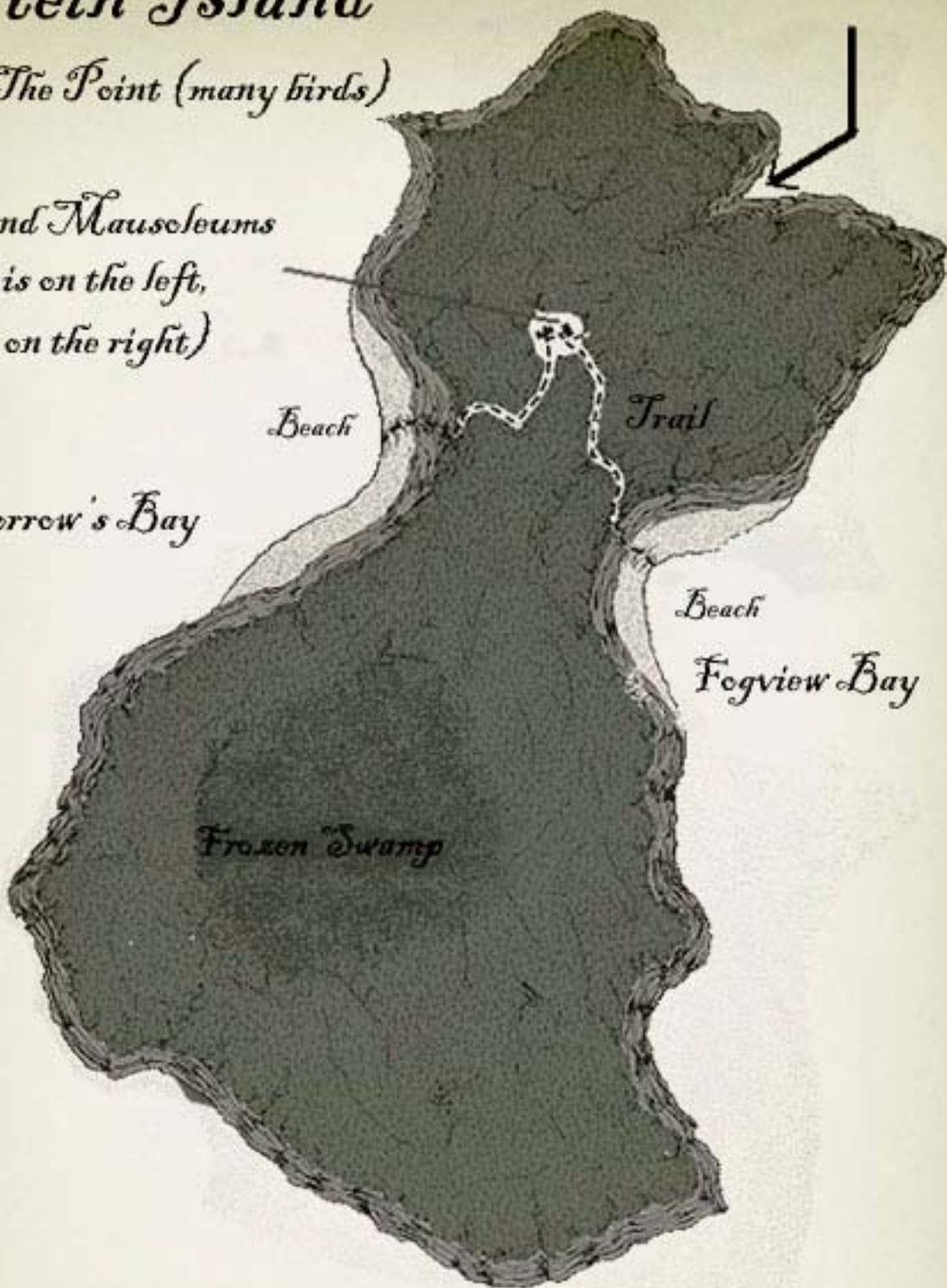
# Todstein Island

Serpent's Staircase

The Point (many birds)

Clearing and Mausoleums  
(Danar's is on the left,  
Stymar's on the right)

Sorrow's Bay



Beach

Trail

Beach

Fogview Bay

Frozen Swamp

## Flora

Save a few clearings, the entire escarpment of Todstein is heavily forested with conifers, in contrast to its barren cliffs and beaches. Towering varieties of pine (red, white, and jack) are by far the dominant species. Trees growing on the rim of the isle or the edges of

clearings are generally the tallest, able to drink up the dim light on their exposed sides and thus ascend for seventy or eighty feet; their shade-stunted neighbors in the dense interior seldom attain fifty. Seedlings have little chance to thrive, shaded and starved by their elders if not crushed by snowdrifts or devoured by famished wildlife.

*Dread Possibility: Dead Stone's Demise*

After Nebligtode joined the Core, Meredoth discovered that his isolated island's sea level lay somewhat higher than it had in the past, such that both beaches are now completely inundated at flood tide. The impact of waves against the cliffs has grown somewhat more violent, and most of the surrounding shoals of rock now lie more deeply submerged, no longer posing a threat to intruding ships' hulls. The necromancer found this last alteration irritating, and one of his more recent undead creations, the Horror (*Quoth the Raven #9*), was designed to shore up this gap in Todstein's anti-ship defenses. Still, true to form, he wasted no further thought on the matter.

As ever, the darklord's disinterest is premature. Todstein is sinking into the sea.

In every year since 750, Meredoth's home has subsided another two feet into the waves. So far, this process has escaped the darklord's notice, yet it is inexorable: bit by bit, the necromancer's vaunted "impregnable sanctum" is dissolving away beneath him. It will be well into the next century before it wholly sinks beneath the icy waters; however, Meredoth fully intends to be alive for centuries to come and, when he realizes his refuge is doomed, will be livid at this latest encroachment on his privacy ... by the forces of nature he despises, no less!

Precisely why the Rock is submerging is unknown. Has Meredoth's disdain for the world around him led Nebligtode to begin collapsing in upon itself, much as Sithicus had, when the Black Rose lost interest in his domain? Is the misanthropic necromancer's uncaring evil too dispassionate to hold sway over such an immense Core domain, much as Daclaud Heinfroth proved unworthy of Gundarak? Is its subsidence the deliberate handiwork of some dark force dwelling undersea, one that Meredoth has disdainfully dismissed as unworthy of his notice? Or might Todstein's slow collapse be an omen of some fell disaster yet to come ... or one already come to pass, in realms beyond the Mists' boundaries?

Broadleaf trees, including oaks and a few elms, survive only at the very edge of the escarpment and within the frozen marsh to the south. The dull, black soil is frozen solid a mere eight to twelve inches beneath the surface, and this permafrost inhibits growth of such deep-rooted trees. Small vegetation is likewise scarce: in sheltered places bare of snow, patches of needle-carpeted earth were exposed, but very few shrubs or wildflowers ever dapple these temporary voids. Save for occasional tufts of spindly grass, Todstein's underbrush is dominated by drab gray, green or orange lichen, and toadstools, puffballs or similar fungi. I had my escorts - three of Howe's men, our avid young lookout among them - collect specimens of the latter for me. If they harbor any exotic mycotoxins, documenting the sailors' ailments following exposure will be a welcome diversion from boredom on our return trip. Paulo's keen

eyes were of particular help in spotting such finds... that is, when he wasn't being teased by the others. (Something about a Grabenite lass, head and shoulders taller than himself, in whose company he'd pleasantly spent his Graben-town furlough.)

Save fungi, botanic discoveries on Todstein were few. The one shrub that seems to thrive here is a dark green rhododendron-like bush, which sprouts in the lee of boulders or large trees and bears clusters of globular lavender fruits an inch in diameter. I went to harvest a sample, but one of the sailors - a doughty, Grabenite-blooded deckhand named Oleg - pulled me back with a vehement curse. The juices of the plant, he warned, were toxic to the mind, destroying the imbiber's spirit by inches. Intrigued, but unwilling to alienate the men, I resolved to collect some later.



## Todstein

### *Crimson Mold and Tsongha Bushes*

Meredoth considers himself to be "at war" with the natural order, beating the laws of reality into submission by brute arcane force. As if it returns his hostility in kind, the wilderness of Todstein continuously sprouts a few kinds of vegetation seemingly designed to antagonize him.

In the frigid temperatures of Todstein, creatures of the plant type tend to become torpid, passing into a state of suspended animation. Night twists and other vegetative hazards remain inactive and snow-covered for much of the year, but grow dangerously alert - and hungry - during the brief summer thaws ... or when campfires, spells with the fire descriptor, or the close approach of warm-blooded creatures heat the surrounding air and rouse them from this stupor.

### *Crimson Mold*

This blood-colored lichen germinates beneath the outer layer of a tree's bark. If an infected tree is cut, carved, bumped, or falls down naturally, a cloud of bright red spores is released in a 10' radius around its trunk, remaining dispersed for up to ten minutes in still air. It is extremely difficult to tell which trees are infested, making the collection of either timber or firewood a risky proposition all over Todstein.

Crimson mold spores, if inhaled or touched by exposed skin, immediately begin eroding the creature's skeleton. In the first round of infection, the spores inflict 1d4 points of Dex damage, followed by 2d4 points of Str damage next round. A DC 15 Fort saves is required to resist each round's effects. Corporeal undead and flesh-based constructs suffer a -4 penalty to this save. This is increased to -8 for creatures whose bones are directly exposed to air, such as skeletons or bone golems. A *Remove Disease* spell halts the spores' damage. Creatures without bones are immune.

**Crimson Mold Patch:** CR 4; hazard, touch trigger; automatic reset; cloud; never miss; onset delay (1 round); spores (DC 15 Fortitude save resists, 1d4 Dex/2d4 Str); Search DC 22\*; Disable Device DC 20. [\* - Rangers or druids can detect crimson mold, despite its high Search DC.]

### *Tsongha Bushes*

These shrubs bear a lavender fruit known as "tsongha", a potent and highly-addictive narcotic. In Meredoth's homeland, tsongha bushes were cultivated for their juice, to which thousands of aristocratic spellcasters were addicted. Those grown on his native world required constant, meticulous tending, but Todstein's variety sprouts like a weed, despite the icy climate and Meredoth's best efforts to eradicate it. The necromancer's pathological aversion to life's organic weaknesses arose, in part, from witnessing this drug's scourge first-hand, and he hates the plants with uncharacteristic passion. He routinely sends his Obedient Dead to uproot all the tsongha bushes they can find, to sate their need to destroy life and thin the plants' spread.

To finance some of the darklord's costlier projects, the Grabens occasionally sell tsongha-juice to jaded Vaasi aristocrats through a chain of lebentod intermediaries. Meanwhile, Meredoth has not let his own revulsion for the drug stop him from distilling tsongha-juice into a mind-crippling poison. Tsongha bushes bear fruit year-round on Todstein, but this vegetative drug can grow or be cultivated nowhere else in the Land of Mists.

**Tsongha, raw (drug):** Ingested DC 17, 300 gp/fruit or dram of juice, Addiction rating: High (see *Book of Vile Darkness*)

Fresh-picked tsongha may be consumed as uncooked fruit or juice, making alchemy unnecessary to prepare it. A DC 10 Craft (alchemy) check is necessary to preserve the juice for long-distance transport. Preserved tsongha fruit is non-narcotic and harmless.

*Initial effect:* 1d2 points of Wisdom damage and a +2 enhancement bonus to Charisma.

*Secondary effect:* 1d4 points of Intelligence damage.

*Side effect:* Consumers of tsongha in its raw state experience a state of relaxed, anxiety-free bliss and contentment, leaving them unable to worry about anything. Effects are functionally identical to the Madness effect "Depression" (*RPHB* p. 84-85), although the experience is pleasurable.

*Overdose:* A second dose in 8 hours results in triple the initial ability damage and a second Fort save against addiction at a -10 penalty.

**Tsongha distillate (poison):** Ingestion DC 20, Initial damage 2d4 Wis + 1 Wis\*, Secondary damage 2d6 Int + 1d2 Int\*, Price 1200 gp



*Mature leaves*



*Young leaves*



*fruit*

## Fauna

Waters off Todstein are remarkably prolific, teeming with fishes and other marine life. While the beaches themselves are shunned, icebergs and scattered rock outcroppings are home to temperamental seals, flightless (and raucous) great auks, or formidable walruses. Curious, whistling cries among the ice floes sounded like warbling birds, but were in fact the voices of a sociable breed of portly white whale. I had hoped to spy one of the bizarre 'horned' whales of which Josiah Graben had spoken, but these fanciful creatures proved far more elusive than the vocal belugas. I did glimpse the black-and-white forms of an orca pack, coursing just beneath the surface with high-military orderliness and menace.

Nearer the isle, these cries and sightings of sea predators petered out, and the captain advised me to reel in my fishing-line. He avowed I'd not catch anything desirable, as creatures he referred to as "ice serpents" will have devoured any catch worth having ... and the seals, too. Realizing the belugas had likewise fallen mute as *Black Pelican* closed in on the bay, and imagining the likely girth of a snake that could swallow such corpulent prey, I heeded Howe's advice.

Animal life is eerily absent from the cliffs or beaches, but the pine forests' drifted snows bore tracks from a variety of wild game. Small mammals such as lemmings, ermine, porcupine, tundra foxes, and



snowshoe hares predominated. The snares set by crewman Miklos bagged several such hares for the pot; the comically big-footed creatures were still shedding tufts from their dense winter pelts. (No doubt, they'd be losing their thin brown summer pelts for a fresh covering of white, almost as soon as the former grew in.) To large animals, unable to burrow deeply, Todstein is far less forgiving. Small herds of spindly reindeer - cousins to the thin-blooded stock on Graben Island - forage on the lichens and meager shrubs, and I saw a solitary moose browsing upon the tips of conifer branches. These giants made use of the same paths as us, lumbering down to the beaches to lick precious salt from the tide-washed rocks.

Mundane predators of a size to threaten men are a rarity. Twice, our party caught sight of snowy-furred wolves, their demeanor more one of diffident curiosity than of menace. Tracks of some feline

## Sea Fauna

Inside Todstein's Icewalls, the frigid marine habitat is filled with arctic-sea fauna. Game statistics for several arctic animals can be found in the *Frostburn* game accessory. Use penguin statistics for great auks. For beluga whales, advance Monster Manual statistics for porpoises to 6 HD, and raise their natural armor bonus to +5 due to thickened hide and blubber.

For narwhals, use belugas advanced to 8 HD. Male narwhals sport tusks that increase their melee reach by 5 feet and inflict 2d6 piercing damage; they do double damage on a charge. Among Nocturnal Sea sailors and whalers, narwhals have a morbid reputation for eldritch powers and calculated malice, like shadow unicorns' ill repute on land.



creature marked the recent traverse of a stealthy lynx. Coming upon the carcass of a half-grown moose calf, we spotted the squat, muscular form of a wolverine, alternately gnawing its find and warning off a thieving tundra fox. At the conclusion of our second day's explorations, we discovered a set of tremendous paw-prints leading inland from the surf-line, to circle our vacant dinghy before returning to the waves. They marked the paces of a sea-going frost bear, perhaps come ashore after mistaking our boat for a whale carcass.

Birds (at last) made an appearance: crooked-beaked crossbills, levering seeds out of pine cones; ravens, stealing tidbits behind the wolverine's back as it postured for

the fox; ptarmigan, as round and white as snowballs, exploding from a sheltered nook in the lee of a boulder. A snowy owl, even grander than Father de Casteelle's magnificent specimen, snatched a vole from the broad clearing at the path's end, as we arrived there. Inland, avian life was flourishing, in frozen isolation from the desolate basalt cliffs.

As for Howe's fabled "ice serpents", we are profoundly fortunate to have avoided direct encounters with those frightening beasts. I am convinced that they exist, nevertheless: on several occasions, we came upon curving scale-marks where their furless bellies has slithered over the snows, or signs that one had burst from beneath the drifts to seize an unsuspecting reindeer calf or snow grouse. I collected a few scraps of molted belly-scale from the low branches of a pine - complete with cloud-like tufts of fur at their edges - and was duly impressed by the width (nearly twelve inches) of each band. When Captain Howe informed me that the serpent's total girth was likely five times that of its belly-scales, I was even more grateful we'd never confronted such a monster firsthand!

Aside from the infamous ice serpents - also known as "hoary death", "white-fangs", or "winter's bite"; everyone I asked seems to have a different name for them - reptiles are wholly absent from this frigid environment. Nor are other cold-blooded organisms much in evidence, above the surf-line: for once, I was spared the attentions of mosquitoes.



## Todstein

### Encounters

Todstein's native wildlife is sparse, and only a few species of living monsters (mostly plants or magical beasts) maintain breeding populations on the Rock. On the other hand, exotic undead or constructs are surprisingly commonplace, Meredoth being something of a 'collector' of oddities. Singular monsters he has brought to his home - imported, created, raised in captivity or gated in with no way to return - can potentially crop up there, contrary to ecological expectation.

These entries include marine species, as several oceanic creatures are found solely in the ring of frigid water surrounding Todstein, the rest of the Nocturnal Sea being too warm for them.

### Encounters: Wildlife

CR 1/10: Bat <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1/6: Great Auk (use Penguin <sup>Fro</sup> stats), Raven <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1/4: Albatross <sup>Sto</sup>, Arctic fox <sup>Fro</sup>, Owl <sup>MM1</sup>, Weasel <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1/3: Hawk <sup>MM1</sup>, Reindeer (use caribou <sup>Fro</sup>), Seal <sup>Fro/Sto</sup>

CR 1/2: Eagle <sup>MM1</sup>, Porpoise <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 1: Lynx (use leopard <sup>MM1</sup> stats), Wolf <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 2: Bat swarm <sup>MM1</sup>, Beluga Whale (advanced porpoise <sup>MM1</sup> stats), Dire Hawk <sup>MM2</sup>, Dire Weasel <sup>MM1</sup>,  
Moose (use bison <sup>MM1</sup> stats), Walrus <sup>Fro</sup>, Wolverine <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 3: Dire Wolf <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 4: Dire Wolverine <sup>MM1</sup>, Megaloceros <sup>Fro</sup>, Polar Bear <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 5: Orca <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 6: Baleen Whale <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 7: Cachalot Whale <sup>MM1</sup>, Dire Elk <sup>MM2</sup>

CR 11: Dire Polar Bear <sup>Fro</sup>

### Encounters: Monsters

CR 1/3: Skeletal Bat <sup>DoD</sup>, Crypt cat <sup>DoD</sup>

CR 1/2: Snow Spider, small <sup>Fro</sup>

CR 1: Carcass Hound <sup>DoD</sup>, Fearweed <sup>DoD</sup>

CR 2: Crimson Bones <sup>DoD</sup>, Dread Guard <sup>MM2</sup>, Vargouille <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 3: Aquatic Remnant <sup>DoD</sup>, Automaton <sup>MM2</sup>, Bloodroot <sup>DoD</sup>, Branta <sup>Fro</sup>, Cryoskeleton,  
Ghast <sup>MM1</sup>, Giant Owl <sup>MM1</sup>, Ice Toad <sup>Fro</sup>, Ice Mephit <sup>MM1</sup>, Jack Frost <sup>DoD</sup>,  
Sahuagin Lebentod <sup>MM1/FoSNS</sup>, Wight <sup>MM1</sup>

CR 4: Athach Zombie†, Choker Boneless <sup>DoD</sup>, Dread Wight <sup>DoD</sup>, Gargoyle <sup>MM1</sup>,  
Graveyard Sludge <sup>MM5</sup>, Mist Ferryman <sup>DoD</sup>, Serpentir <sup>MM5</sup>, Stitched <sup>VRGWD</sup>

CR 5: Arayashka <sup>DoD</sup>, Boneclaw <sup>MM3</sup>, Mud Zombie <sup>DoD</sup>, Reaver Lebentod <sup>DoD/FoSNS</sup>, Snowflake  
Ooze <sup>MM3</sup>

CR 6: Athach skeleton†, Chraal <sup>MM3</sup>, Grave Ooze <sup>DoD</sup>, Greater Dread Wight <sup>DoD</sup>, Icegaunt <sup>Fro</sup>, Sea  
Zombie <sup>DoD</sup>, Wax Golem <sup>DoD</sup>, White Pudding <sup>Fro</sup>, White-fang <sup>FoSNS</sup>

## Todstein

- CR 7:** *Flesh Golem* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Frost Salamander* <sup>MM2</sup>, *Grim Reaper* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Invisible Stalker* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Nimblewright* <sup>MM2</sup>, *Remorhaz* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Skeletal Golem* <sup>FoSNS</sup>
- CR 8:** *Blackwing* <sup>MM5</sup>, *Deadborn Vultures* <sup>MM5</sup>, *Drowned* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Living wall* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Mohrg* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Nethersight mastiff* <sup>Mm2</sup>, *Shield Guardian* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Shredstorm* <sup>MM3</sup>
- CR 9:** *Ice Golem* <sup>Fro</sup>, *Winterspawn* <sup>Fro</sup>
- CR 10:** *Bone Golem* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Bronze Serpent* <sup>MM2</sup>, *Entombed* <sup>Fro</sup>, *Gargoyle Golem* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Quickwood* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Snow Golem* <sup>DoD</sup> (see sidebar), *Runic Guardian* <sup>MM2</sup>
- CR 11:** *Alchemical Golem* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Devourer* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Grimweird* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Juggernaut* <sup>MM2</sup>, *Stone Golem* <sup>MM1</sup>
- CR 12:** *Cadaver Collector* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Frost Worm* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Mud Golem* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Night Twist* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Zombie Golem* <sup>DoD</sup>
- CR 13:** *Charnel Hound* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Dragonflesh Golem* <sup>MM2</sup>, *Iron Golem* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Hangman Golem* <sup>MM3</sup>,
- CR 14:** *Mist Golem* <sup>DoD</sup>;
- CR 15:** *Grisgol* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Ice Weird* <sup>Fro</sup>, *Snow Weird* <sup>Fro</sup>
- CR 16:** *Greater Stone Golem* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Tempest* <sup>MM2</sup>
- CR 18:** *Chilblain* <sup>Fro</sup>
- CR 20:** *Ancient Night Twist* <sup>MM3</sup>;
- CR 23:** *The Horror* <sup>QtR9</sup>

**Variable CR:** *Boneless* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Composite Walking Dead* <sup>VRGWD</sup>, *Dread Elemental* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Elemental* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Elemental Lich* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Frostfell Ghost* <sup>Fro</sup>, *Geist* <sup>DoD</sup>, *Ghost* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Ice Beast* <sup>Fro</sup>, *Lebendtod* <sup>FoSNS</sup>, *Lich* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Skeleton* <sup>MM1</sup>, *Storm Elemental* <sup>MM3</sup>, *Spellstitched* <sup>MM2</sup>, *Zombie* <sup>MM1</sup>

Nearly all corporeal undead on Todstein are under Meredoth's control, either as his own creations or (in the case of liches) because he holds their phylacteries hostage. Free-willed icegaunts have been known to roam the escarpment, having risen into undeath after perishing from the elements, particularly the draining effects of death hail.

Virtually any construct on the Rock will likewise be the necromancer's handiwork: clean-lined and efficient, with organic or statue-like affinities of design, never mechanical. Mist golems are exceptions, as such creatures sometimes arise as accidental byproducts of Meredoth's construct-crafting projects; such enigmatic entities have been sighted haunting the beach that overlooks Fogview Bay, sometimes in the company of Mist ferrymen or other breeds of Mistborn.

Cryoskeletons - an idea the necromancer plagiarized from Radaga's work - are identical to the pyroskeletons of *DoD*, save that they retain their immunity to cold and hurl *Otiluke's freezing sphere* effects instead of fireball. Note that athachs (<sup>MM</sup>) are not known to be native to the Land of Mists; however, Meredoth had several such creatures' carcasses stockpiled as raw materials when he and his isle entered Ravenloft, and animates them as needed.

Other creatures appropriate to Todstein may be found in sources such as *Libris Mortis*. Corporeal undead, arcane constructs, and animals or feral monsters native to arctic wilderness are suitable for this isle. Meredoth has been experimenting with weird designs for well over a century and he has a fondness for low-level magics, so a complete range of bizarre, unliving creations could hypothetically be found here, of any Challenge Rating up to the low twenties.

### *Snow Golems*

As their original inventor, Meredoth creates his snow golems through conventional arcane means rather than 'dark desire'. The snow golems of Todstein lack the "dread golem" template, so the effects of that template should be removed from their statistics in *Denizens of Dread/Darkness*.

Despite the impairment to his creativity imposed by his darklordship, Meredoth recently realized that the unnatural "dire weather" of Todstein provides potential raw materials for unusual variants on his golem creations. This makes the following salient abilities available to his snow golems:

**Acid grasp (Ex):** This golem's slam attacks are delivered with fists of frozen acid. Any target struck by one of the snow golem's blows takes an additional 1d6 hp of acid damage.

**Blood touch (Ex):** The golem's slam attacks are delivered with fists sculpted of poisonous blood snow. A target struck by one of the golem's attacks must pass a DC 16 Fortitude save or suffer 1d2 points of Con damage and become nauseated for 1 round.

**Death-hail grip (Su):** Life-draining death hailstones are embedded in this golem's hands. If a golem with this power grapples a victim, it inflicts 1d2 points of Str and Con damage every round the grapple is maintained. A DC 16 Fortitude save averts this ability damage for one round.

**Razor fists (Ex):** With fists molded from razor sleet, this snow golem inflicts an extra 1d8 hp slashing damage with each blow, in addition to normal bludgeoning damage. The threat range of its attacks also increases, as if it had the Improved Critical feat.

**Rusting hands (Ex):** This golem's hands were sculpted out of exotic rustsnow. Its attacks affect metal items like a rust monster's antennae; magical metal items are permitted a DC 12 Reflex save to avoid destruction. Striking the snow golem does not cause metal weapons to rust.

Meredoth would like to construct golems sculpted entirely of these exotic forms of precipitation, but his minions are still in the process of collecting the requisite raw materials. He hopes using supernatural snow exclusively in their creation will create golems with even more unique powers, such as a razor-sleet golem that breathes blade barriers instead of cones of cold.

### *Locales of Interest*

The morning after we dropped anchor in Sorrow's Bay, our party set out to explore the island, seeking out those sites marked on an old map I'd bought in Graben-town. Our exploration party numbered five: myself, Howe, and three of his crewmen (Miklos, Oleg and Paulo), chosen for their skills and regional knowledge. Snowshoes would aid our progress, but the thick forests still impeded travel, so I kept our forays off the isle's trails as short and direct as possible.

### *Graben Family Tombs*

Situated in the largest clearing on the Rock, perhaps forty paces across, this matched pair of austere buildings was discovered in 641 BC, on Lars Viggson's second voyage here. Like those rough-chiseled steps which link the escarpment to the beaches below, these structures' origins are still undocumented. Historically-minded skalds have surmised they were erected by the equally-mysterious builders of Kirchenheim's Black Chapel, based upon their unadorned, monochromatic design and lack of windows.

## Todstein

In 675, the Graben family's then-patriarch, Ezekiel, laid claim to the empty buildings in the name of himself and his sister, Marietta. That year, the mortal remains of Marietta Graben's son Styamar (twelve years dead, by appendicitis) were re-interred in the eastern tomb. Ezekiel's second son Danar perished with his wife in a riding accident in 672, so the patriarch soon had the couple's remains moved to the west tomb, adjacent to his nephew's. For some six decades, deceased Grabens from both branches of the Island's founding clan were laid to rest within their respective crypts on Todstein. This tradition ended abruptly with the 737 massacre, since which the founding house has buried its own in strictest privacy on the family estate.

Initial inspection revealed each tomb to be a boxlike, rectangular structure some 15'

high and twenty yards long, with a set of double doors that faced the center of the clearing. Both roofs were laden with drifts of snow as tall as a man. Alas, *Knock* failed to open the sealed doors; I'd need to return the next day, with spells more suited to breaking in, to learn what secrets lay within.

Paired solemn statues, their towering forms sculpted into a rough reproduction of heavy medieval armor, flanked the tombs' doors as 'guardians'. Like the edifices they adorned, their material appeared to be the finest white marble, save their carven gauntlets, which showed hints of other shades: pink for one pair of molded hands, ashy gray in another, greenish in a third, and ebon flecks on white in the final effigy. Symbolic, no doubt, but of what, I hesitate to guess.

### *The Mausoleums*

Constructed using transmute snow to stone and guarded by golems and complex magical locks, Todstein's twin tombs were drawn into the Mists with their creator. Their morbid architecture was originally the necromancer's heavy-handed attempt at a cruel taunt to the superstitious, but with the Grabens' aid, he later found a way to exploit their funereal design.

Until the debacle of 737, the lebentod Grabens hired unsuspecting mariners to deliver corpses to their "family vaults" when Meredoth required them, claiming the stolen cadavers were deceased relatives. When this strategy disastrously backfired, the darklord ordered that this practice be abandoned: now, bodies for experimentation are delivered covertly by the Grabens themselves, and Meredoth has re-set the locking mechanisms to poison anyone who tries to manually unlock the tombs. His unliving minions are immune to the white-fang venom of the mausoleums' needle traps, and the sea-mage has his guardian snow golems open the doors for him.

Todstein's mausoleums also serve as camouflaged entrances to two of Meredoth's purpose-built lairs. The western structure, called Danar's Tomb after its first Graben-clan resident, provides physical access to the House of Bones under the northern end of the island. The eastern structure, Styamar's Tomb, contains a command-triggered teleportation circle to the Hall of Flesh, carved into the bedrock of Todstein's eastern flank. Each access-route is sealed inside one of the vaults at the rear of its mausoleum, and is inaccessible without either bypassing or suffering the lock-mechanisms' venom. Corpses delivered by the Grabens are left in these niches, where the snow-crafted crypts' refrigerator-like temperatures preserve them for Meredoth's use.

Further information on the mausoleums and the House of Bones appears in *Ship of Horror*.



### *Serpent's Staircase*

Northeast of the main clearing, I'd hoped a disturbed area of forest I'd seen from aloft would be another trail. Instead, we came on a shallow, rocky crevice in the escarpment, which deepened as we followed it towards the coastal cliffs. Exposed to the elements, the canyon's walls were weather-worn and crumbling, eroded by fierce annual assaults of thaw and ice. I could see the igneous stone pocked by ancient magma-bubbles and channels of streaming lava. (Hadn't Brother Dossevsky mentioned "lava tubes" in such regions, some of them large enough for a sure-footed man to navigate? A future line of investigation for young Dirac, assuming the daft lad hasn't gotten himself killed.)

At its end, a thin trickle of meltwater flowed from the gulch into a pinched fjord on the northeast edge of the isle. We looked down on what the seeping water, combined with regular freezes, had achieved: a breathtaking "waterfall" of crystalline ice, pouring down the cliff like flowstone in a cavern. Its icicle 'stalactites' and curtains descended a good hundred feet down, from the gulley's lowest point to the fjord's churning waves. Had the skies not been as overcast as ever, I'm sure it would have glistened like diamond.

I was ruing the fact Kristoff wasn't there - if any sight would've eased his bitter distaste for wintertime scenery, this was it - when Miklos shattered the mood, tugging my coat urgently and pointing at the ground. There were numerous belly-scale tracks in the exposed mud near the ice-falls' crest: proof the fearsome "ice serpents" have been using its spires as a ladder to and from the sea.

Clambering back up the west side of the gulch to safety, I spied the largest iceberg I'd yet seen drifting past the fjord's mouth. Big as the Maison, its interior was darkly shadowed in a shape that, from a distance, resembled a ship. I shuddered, wondering if some vast whale-swallowing snake might be swimming from berg to ice-falls, even now.



### *Dread Possibility: Doom of the Óndskapur*

History tells that Lars Viggson, renowned discoverer of Todstein, and his crew perished in 644 BC, when their knarr, the *Óndskapur*, collided with an iceberg. This is only half right. Viggson's crew actually survived the impact, but their vessel was inextricably lodged in the gigantic floe's flank. Unwilling to desert his beloved ship, Viggson drove his men to try to free the *Óndskapur* even after their efforts had plainly proven futile.

Food supplies dwindled and their limited stockpile of firewood ran out, yet Viggson kept them chipping away at the entrapping ice with tools, daggers, or bare, frostbitten hands. Realizing that the captain's fanaticism was consigning them to a frozen death, the desperate crew mutinied and hurled Viggson overboard. Only then did they discover he had chopped holes in the lifeboats, and cast all the carpentry tools into the sea, making repairs impossible. As their captain's body drifted away, already frozen solid, the crew could have sworn his stiff features were smirking.

Today the *Óndskapur* is still lodged within its iceberg, which has grown to encase the entire knarr in a perfect, crystalline state of preservation. Most of the vessel is ice-locked, but interior spaces like the cabins and holds remain as open pockets within the berg. It is haunted by Lars Viggson and his crew of eighteen. The crewmen have become wraiths, hungry for the warmth and vitality of life, while the captain himself is a powerful spectre. The incorporeal sailors act out their old shipboard duties in perpetuity, unhindered by the ice and seemingly oblivious to what they have become; they will "defend their ship" with relentless determination. Viggson is the only man not to have died on board, and hence is the only spirit free to leave the iceberg. He is fully aware of the truth, but will stop at nothing to keep knowledge of his misdeeds from his crew ... or from the living Grabenites, who still laud him as a hero.

The *Óndskapur*'s iceberg drifts in circles around Todstein, and never seems to melt. Having little interest in incorporeal types of undead, Meredoth simply lets it float free as a trap for trespassers.



### Watchposts

Heading westward along the cliff's brink, we discovered the first of several disturbed patches, all positioned at the escarpment's fringes. The snow-covered glade had been cleared by human hands, and contained a ramshackle sentinel's station: a one-man watchpost perched some fifteen feet in the air, atop a stout pole. Pieces of plank were crookedly peg-affixed to the pole, forming a crude ladder; the watch-station at the top was little more than a hunter's blind of bark and thatch, with a canted roof to shed snow, and canvas flaps to cut the wind's bite. Indeed, I'd've thought it was a hunting blind - some solitary ranger's work, perhaps - had it not faced out to sea rather than inland.

Judging by its shoddy state of repair and the snow blanketing the sentinel's seat, it had

not seen use for many seasons, save perhaps by perching wildlife. It could not have stood intact for more than a dozen-odd years - not here, in the teeth of this sea's storms - so it must have been constructed well after the tombs had been built, most likely after their usage by the Grabens had ceased. As best I could determine, every bit had been built of common sailcloth or local forest materials, offering no clue as to its crafter's origins.

A perplexing puzzle indeed ... more so, in that we came across a similar watchpost farther along the cliff's rim, and Howe's spyglass later caught sight of a third atop the point north of Sorrow's Bay. Whoever had built them had been busy, and determined to keep an eye upon the waves. (A castaway watching for rescuers, mayhap?)

### Secret Society: The Niflhounds

Meredoth's temporary demise and cloned resuscitation were humiliating to the darklord, who has no wish to repeat the experience. Furious at the adventurers who'd been his undoing, yet unable to pursue them, he has spitefully taken a deferred revenge on others of their sort, by making such "vagabond interlopers" the solution to his perennial problem of intruders. The necromancer dug into the Hall of Flesh's stockpile of fallen trespassers' corpses and rebuilt the spell-mangled cadavers, replacing body parts beyond hope of repair. He then converted these erstwhile "pests" into protectors, so the next adventurers to threaten his privacy will have to fight their own kind.

The darklord currently maintains half-a-dozen "active duty" lebendtod adventuring parties on or around Todstein. Called "Niflhounds" in a snide reference to Grabenite tales of a frozen afterlife (Niflheim) and to their dog-like obedience, they patrol the escarpment when their master wishes not to be disturbed, and keep watch for incoming ships. Tireless and immune to damage from exposure, these undead adventurers retreat into hidden bolt-holes under the snowdrifts during the fiercest of storms, or when Meredoth bids them let intruders pass undisturbed. Most Niflhounds are stealthy ambushers, endowed with the Trackless Step salient ability; their designated leaders employ the Mind of Many salient ability to coordinate their bands' maneuvers (*VRGttWD*).

Currently animated Niflhound "adventuring parties" include:

**Aelfhounds:** This all-elven band of rangers and multiclassed NPCs guards the isle's north end. A mix of Darkonians, Sithicans and outlanders, they yet work together like a well-oiled machine, methodically stalking interlopers like wild game. The seven Aelfhounds' leader is a beautiful druid who dresses in white; the wings of her albino dire bat companion are sewn onto her back (Ghastly Wings salient ability, *VRGttWD*), but she removes them if she needs to appear 'normal'.

## Todstein

**Glasishounds:** These fifteen Grabenites and foreign sailors crew the pinnace *Ice Biter*, a magical *folding boat*. Operating from a concealed sea cave south of Fogview Bay, they maintain a façade of gung-ho whalers. If their tales of desolation, natural hazards, and man-eating ice serpents fail to discourage trespassers, the Glasishounds - experts, warriors and rogues, led by their bardic "navigator" rather than their nominal captain - send men underwater to sabotage intruders' craft from beneath. In a pinch, the "navigator" issues a magical summons to the Horror (*QtR9*).

**Hamhleypar:** An experiment on Meredoth's part, this six-member band of barbarians, fighters and scouts (*Complete Adventurer*) consists entirely of undead lycanthropes. They retain their shapechanging powers, but their ability to transmit lycanthropy has yet to be tested on the living. Most Hamhleypar are werewolves from the southern Core, but their designated leader - to the wolves' perennial disgust - is a Rokuma sorcerer and snow-tiger from the slopes of Mount Frost. The isle's southern forests are their patrol zone and hunting territory.

**Muspehounds:** Mid-level wizards, sorcerers and clerics comprise this team of eight, who act as laboratory assistants and troubleshooters more than guards. They reside in Wright's Hollow and cast spells outside Meredoth's repertoire to aid his projects, while providing backup for the other Niflhound bands. The necromancer lets this group choose its own leader, and allows its members certain privileges (such as the right to address him without being bidden) in recognition of their spellcasting talents. When other Niflhounds encounter a problem they can't resolve, most contact the Muspehounds first, before disturbing their ill-tempered Master. This team's name refers to a realm of fire from Grabenite myth, as most are highly skilled in fire-magics.

**Nidhoggar:** Meredoth's only guard-force of living beings, this band arose after he activated the genie-summoning ring of another slain adventurer. The qorrashi (*Frostburn*<sup>1</sup>) that appeared was unable to return to its plane, and Meredoth has browbeaten it into indefinite servitude. The ice-genie patrols Todstein in the deepest winter, when the weather becomes too hostile for lebentod, escorted by a pack of trained frost salamanders (*MMII*<sup>1</sup>) the sea-mage acquired as hatchlings.

**Trowhounds:** A stealthy force of rangers, rogues and monks, this team of sahuagin lebentod pre-date Meredoth's temporary demise, having been created nearly 80 years ago to monitor the waters around the Rock. The ten members and their zombie shark companions usually split up to patrol, but are occasionally sent to investigate undersea activities in the guise of living sahuagin. The Trowhounds are led by a spellcaster, but their leader, a young cleric lacking confidence in herself, usually leaves command decisions to their barnacle-encrusted chief ranger.

Additional bands of dead adventurers are stored in the Hall of Flesh. Already subjected to *gentle repose*, *minor salience*, and *Rary's telepathic bond*, they need only *animate dead* to rouse them<sup>2</sup>. Note that Meredoth automatically senses when any of his undead Niflhounds are destroyed.

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1. DMs without access to these creatures' game-stats should use statistics for efreet and behirs, converting all fire- or electricity-based powers or immunities to cold-based ones and reducing the behir's size to Large. As a Lawful Neutral outsider, the qorrashi has no phylactery or reality wrinkle.
  2. *VRGttWD* states that *veil* is the spell required to give lebentod the ability to hide their undead nature. However, illusion is one of Meredoth's prohibited schools, making *veil*'s effects unavailable to him by any means short of a *wish*. As the master of Todstein is the original inventor of the lebentod-creation process, *minor salience* (also from *VRGttWD*) is a more fitting spell to serve this purpose.

## Geographic Oddities

While our explorations were limited by the rough terrain and perpetual dim light, we visited several other clearings I had noticed from above. Most were innocuous glades or hollows, but a few proved interesting.

The low-lying area south of Sorrow's Bay is an ice-locked marsh, open in patches, and dotted by squat, leafless trees with eerily-twisted limbs. Their warped configuration reminded me of Souragne's bayou, but their bark was a sickly indigo in hue, quite alien to those green, healthy wetlands, and garish against the whites and grays of Todstein's snows and stone.

Given the brittle ice's thinness, we hazarded only a single, brief foray into the swamp's fringes, on which I noted that several of the weird trees' trunks were badly fire-scarred. Even that short venture was admittedly a bit unnerving, as the sound of the wind amidst the twisted, bare branches was ghostly in the extreme. We left in some haste, as the men were growing quite uneasy.

A more appalling sight awaited us just east of the icefall gorge, where our emergence into yet another clearing was heralded by the croaks of bickering ravens. One of the great taiga moose lay dead in the snow, forelegs and mighty chest sliced to ribbons by sharp-edged ice. The "clearing" was, in truth, a small lake, coated in thin ice and thick snow, which the animal had unwisely tried to cross in summer's thaw. Its error, and struggles to escape the frigid water, had spelt its doom.

Nor was it the only creature to have fallen prey to this peril. Circumnavigation of the treeless patch revealed numerous other pairs of antlers (moose and reindeer) jutting up from the snow, and the ice-encrusted bones of a wolf that must've dragged itself ashore, only to die of exposure. The sheer number of bones accumulated at this natural death-trap was disheartening: a dismal waste.

One final topographical anomaly I would like to report is a curious phenomenon I noted after we returned to the *Black Pelican*. Captain Howe proposed we sail around the isle, to try to spot any additional watchposts along the cliff's edge. A veteran seaman, I

## Wardens of Wright's Hollow

Meredoth's largest lair, Wright's Hollow, lies beneath the frozen marsh of the night twists (*MM III*): evil sentient plants whose morose, hypnotic songs can encompass the entire island, once roused from their torpor. Kept sluggish by Todstein's chill, the range of these evil trees' song is limited to the wetland itself, and creatures which hear their song gain a +4 circumstance bonus to Will saves to resist its effects.

The necromancer maintains a grudging truce with these malignant plants: they guard the entrance to Wright's Hollow and stay mute in his presence, and he refrains from having his unliving minions burn them down to the roots. However, they are treacherous allies at best: if intruders manage to destroy one of their number, the other night twists will let them pass unmolested into the darklord's "secure" stronghold, in hopes that they'll be powerful enough to rid "their" island of the cantankerous and volatile wizard.

suspect he was concerned some unfortunate soul might yet be stranded, and felt duty-bound to assist a fellow sailor in trouble. (I did not begrudge him this sentimentality, as I needed to inspect Todstein's fringe myself, and his altruism afforded an excuse.)

As we rounded the point to the south end of the Rock - a sheer basalt slab, quite dull and featureless - I spied something glittering on the rock-face's surface. At first, I thought it was a vein of obsidian running through the drab bedrock, but a flash of lightning from the south revealed the truth. There were slim lines of liquid - I cannot say "water" with certainty, for some appeared brownish, rust-colored, even green or black - trickling down the escarpment's side. A second flash revealed that the rivulets did not usher from the cliff's rim, but seeped from crevices at various heights. There were at least a dozen, some little more than drips, others slow but steady trickles, and a few gushing like full-fledged streams.

### *The Boneyard*

Before Meredoth claimed the isle, this shallow pond posed only an intermittent hazard to wildlife, but the necromancer has put it to use as an impromptu feeding and bone-cleaning station for his Hungry Dead minions. Ghouls and their ilk are of scant interest to the darklord - they are too unruly, too destructive of his necromantic "raw materials", and too prone to the biological needs he seeks to eliminate - but their ability to paralyze living experimental subjects comes in handy too often for Meredoth to entirely dispense with their services.

All of Todstein's Hungry Dead are lebenttod-spawned ghosts, subject to Meredoth's will. Their claws are clipped, their jaws muzzled, to prevent "accidents" if particularly delicate specimens must be taken alive. This bars them from using bite attacks or spreading ghoul fever, and limits their claw attacks to nonlethal damage, plus paralysis. A few of their kind have been modified to carry out specialized duties. The current leader of the pack, Ichabod Graben (CE male ghastr Rog4/Ftr2), has the Memory Drain salient ability (*VRGttWD*), and Meredoth has used his power to extract information from so many devoured corpses that this debased, half-mad creature is as well-informed about current events around the Nocturnal Sea as his despised Uncle Colin.

As the ghosts' Cravings cannot be trusted near his research supplies, Meredoth cages them in a secure, isolated annex of the Hall of Flesh until needed, then turns them loose in the "Boneyard" to gorge on animal carcasses and any cadavers he needs stripped down to skeletons. This lets him sate their grisly appetites before he deploys them against experimental subjects, and averts their inconvenient habit of eating one another if not fed.

My experiences on Île de la Tempête had not curbed my interest in spelunking, and the outflow I beheld offered proof that lava tubes do, indeed, lie below Todstein's frozen surface. However, I could discern no sign of an opening large enough to enter: the liquid bubbled forth through tiny cracks, and their constant outflow would hamper exploration, even if a wider passage was found. Any further study of these springs - most likely melt-water from the escarpment high above, interestingly discolored by minerals in the rock - would have to await a colder season, when their channels lay dry and empty.

Once *Black Pelican* swung around to the far side of the island - the shadowed face of the escarpment, so late in the day - even Howe had to concede that his search was futile. Rather than risk dropping anchor in Fogview Bay, in uneasy proximity to the

Mists, the captain ordered a return to the familiar anchorage of Sorrow's Bay for the night.

The crew seemed grateful, for all that our day's foray ashore hadn't been a particularly dangerous one. Indeed, the beaming Paulo chattered enthusiastically of how confident he was I'd find a way into the strange tombs tomorrow. Not wishing to disappoint such an avid pupil, I bookmarked the page of my traveling grimoire which bore the *passwall* spell. Come the morning, I'll ready it twice over. Hopefully, I'll soon discover for what purpose the tombs' mysterious builders had erected the twin crypts, before the Grabens took possession. For now, my evening has provided time to document my discoveries, my cabin's reading-lamp dutifully refreshed by our eager young lookout.

*Arcane Pollutants*

Though infamous for his necromantic work, Meredoth is also a devoted crafter of magic items and constructs. Wright's Hollow, the sea-mage's largest and most heavily-secured lair, houses his forge and his alchemical and mechanical workshops, as well as dozens of works-in-progress he has yet to imbue with power. Its facilities generate a considerable amount of waste, which he allows to drain down disused lava-tubes and into the sea.

While most realms within Ravenloft are too magic-poor to generate arcane pollutants, like alchemical fogs and necrotic miasmas from *Cityscape*, Meredoth's vile researches could well produce such effects, potentially contaminating ships sailing past below. A cesspit ooze could congeal from such arcane residues and Todstein's ambient evil. Sea creatures that swim in or breathe the eldritch sludge might spontaneously (de-)evolve into broken ones, become homicidally violent, or acquire the pseudonatural template. Ships passing through a slick of this residue might suddenly become animated objects with a malign intelligence, or fade to an ethereal state with no way to return.

*Sacre bleu*, what a fool I was.

*Right under my nose*, by the Watchers!

Now, looking back, I could swear that the monster-hunting text which Brother Buchvold salvaged last October even mentions the possibility...

Stop it, Viktor. What's done is done, and regret solves nothing.

Tell it now - every last outrage - and get the fury out of your system. Hasty retaliation makes for a poor revenge: you'll have your chance.

(Brothers, at this point I must break from the formal summary of discoveries and rough relation of events. I feel the following events are best described in greater detail, and pray you excuse the shift in style.)



It was snowing heavily the next morning, scuttling Howe's plans to continue searching for the possible castaway. He might have risked it anyway, but Paulo pointed out that he could not reliably spot the ice floes under such conditions. Regretfully, Howe offered to accompany my party back to the tombs, hoping that the watchpost-builder might yet rendezvous with us on shore. I admired his determination to rescue a fellow-seaman - one who might not even exist - and was doubly glad I'd never mentioned Monette to the captain.

The clamber up the path's switchbacks was difficult in snow, even with *spider climb* and my escorts' experience in ships' rigging. Under cover of snow, one of the notorious "white-fangs" might easily have drawn near, to ambush our little band; still, the easy outing of yesterday had left us complacent, and both Paulo and Miklos were particularly animated: the former, eager to explore the tombs; the latter, to discover what his snares had trapped overnight. Careless or not, we reached the Graben tombs unmolested.

Miklos gathered three hares from traps along the way; at the clearing, he brushed snow from an old tree stump as a seat and began skinning them for our lunch. Howe turned up his collar to ward off the falling flakes, rubbing his hands and glowering at the inhospitable skies; he, too, had no taste for historical research. Oleg was showing

signs of anxiety - by his build and complexion, some of his ancestors owed their lands to the Grabens' hospitality - but glumly kept any reservations about our activities to himself. Paulo had no such concerns, but set gamely to work, shoving the loose snow away from the nearer of the twin mausoleums, Danar's Tomb, to give us clear access. He chattered non-stop about "hidden treasure" the tomb's builders might've left there, unlikely though it seemed that the Grabens could have failed to unearth any such find.

I advised Oleg to keep an eye on the four statues and waved young Paulo aside, shed my gloves for spellcasting, then examined the edifice's walls in greater detail than on our first visit. Once surface flecks of snow and frost were brushed away, I saw that it was not marble at all, but something lighter and more porous: colder than the air, rough to the touch, too shimmering and granular to be stone. An explanation lay all around us, confirmed by a hasty divination: the vault was imbued with transmuting energies, akin to that of spell-petrified mud. Some arcane hand had formed the tombs from fused and hardened snow, not rock ... and a powerful hand it must have been, as well, to squander so much precious magic on architecture!

As intrigued as Paulo now, I cast my spell to open a passage through the artificial stone. My fingers tingled - perhaps because the wall was magical stone, or perhaps because its creator was plainly formidable - but not to an uncomfortable degree. The un-stone felt as cold as the flakes it was made from, and my palms' warmth melted its thick coat of frost, before it drew aside.

Rousing Paulo from his daydreams, I bid the lad precede me into the narrow interior. Our whale-oil lamp revealed a row of sealed vaults, bearing symbols encrusted by similar rimes of frost. These symbols were neither Grabenite script, nor runes such as I saw in Graben-town, but pictograms of stylized and unfamiliar design: a sunburst, a snowflake, a pine tree, others. Brushing or scraping frost from the symbols proved futile, but the heat of my bared palm slowly melted away the obscuring crust. Paulo drew closer to peer



over my shoulder, and reached out, as if to add his hand's warmth to that of my own.

It took only seconds for me to realize that the young lookout's touch was not melting the frost at all, but by then, the lad's other arm had snaked round me from behind, palm clamped over my mouth.

Panicked instinct took over. Too blindsided even to boggle at treachery from such an improbable quarter, I smacked the oil lamp against my attacker's brow. Paulo's hold did not break, but his grip upon my mouth loosened. Pushing off the wall, I staggered backward and let the lamp drop, frantically incanting one of my most practiced spells. Unable to aim, I squeezed shut my eyes and unleashed the spray of rainbow light straight into both our faces. I saw a flash of brilliant red through my eyelids. My assailant's grip - strong, too strong for a growing youth's frame - still did not yield, but the hand that strove to seal my mouth anew began groping clumsily, as the other snatched ineffectually at air. Not stunned, then, but blinded.

The fallen lamp extinguished and spots still dancing before my eyes, I could barely make out the entrance myself. Paulo still clinging to my back, I staggered toward it; stumbling, I jolted my shoulder against the temporary portal's edge. Taking advantage, I adjusted my angle and did it again, lurching to ram the lookout's skull into the wall. Blinded to the threat, he did not know to duck, and he yelped aloud at the impact. I felt his weight slide off of me, his clutching hand tugging at my collar, then felt something give as his body slumped heavily to the crypt floor. My moment's elation at freeing myself from his grip, alas, was short-lived.

When I burst out of the tomb, I discovered the clearing was surrounded ... by the dead. Skeletons - dozens, scores of them! - now encircled the paired mausoleums, either

emerged silently from the wood or arisen from beneath concealing shrouds of snow. Some were armored, or bore ill-tended, yet deadly weapons; most were naked, the ivory of their bones hard to distinguish from the whiteness of the snowdrifts. A few glittered beneath form-fitting sheaths of ice, cracked and splintering around the joints. Human remains predominated, but here and there I spotted the sturdier frames of dwarves, the bird-frail armatures of elves, the asymmetric skulls and limbs of calibans.

At first glance, the morbid tableau seemed quiescent - the only motion, that of falling snowflakes - as if their skeletal frames were not animate at all, but props in a grotesque diorama. Then I heard a sailor's shout, and turned to see Captain Howe, hemmed in on all sides by their undead ranks. Miklos, skinning-blade brandished like an Invidian knife-fighter's, was rushing to his superior's side. I've no idea what use he'd thought a common knife could ever be against such abominations, but the sailor never even had the chance to try.

The voice, now that I think back upon it, was not very imposing at all: an old man's whining wheeze. But something dark in the speaker's words seared my ears with bile. I saw Miklos' steps falter, his legs and arms contorted and straining against stiffness, as if rigor had claimed them in an instant. His head was thrown back, to shoot a nightmare look at the sky, as a mirthless, rictus grimace spread across suntanned features suddenly blanched pale as paper. The seaman's form jerked once, twice, then collapsed full length into the snow. His neck was wrenched to turn toward me by the fall, features affixed in death before he'd landed. One open eye lay half-buried in snow, the other - widened in pain and incomprehension - showed tiny trickles of blood at the corners, vessels burst by an unspeakable utterance that had snuffed out his life like a candle.



Necromancy! By themselves, the skeletons could have been some age-old protection for the tombs, but Miklos' demise had been no mindless bones' handiwork. As Captain Howe bellowed in outrage, I whirled to look behind me, whence the killing words had sounded. For a fleeting, wrenching moment, I feared I would behold the Traitor standing there; but no. A figure cloaked in the colors of midnight - stooped, yet still far too tall for Van Rijn - stood above us on the roof of Danar's Tomb, one hand extended toward Miklos' fallen corpse in a clenching gesture. The murderer's frost-pale beard and bent posture bespoke great age, yet he perched with an airy ease upon snow too soft to bear a man's weight. His face was hooded, his features obscured from sight.

Another, moaning voice drew my attention to where I'd left Oleg, to keep watch over the statues. Watchful or not, the stalwart deckhand had been seized from behind by one of those statues - correction, golems - and now dangled in the air, wrists grasped in

the construct's ash-gray hands. Oleg's pale, wide eyes were fixed on the cloaked figure atop the mausoleum's roof. Not until hours later would I recognize the gasped Grabenite word he'd spoken: "Jackdaw..."

Whether legendary ill-omen or degenerate carcass-caller, he was plainly more than I could handle. I'd selected my day's magics for archaeology, not battle! I began softly uttering an invisibility spell, sorry I'd never learned the Traitor's trick of invoking spells in silence.

As I began incanting, a clinging presence - dimly felt since I had slipped the lookout's clutches - sprang into unnatural movement. The crawling thing clambered up my coat-collar, thrusting hook-curved digits into my mouth. Sputtering and spitting, my half-cast spell disrupted, I reeled away from Danar's Tomb, seized the scrabbling monstrosity and hurled it into a snowdrift. It was Paulo's hand: torn loose when I broke free, yet still replete with unnatural vigor and malice!

Even as I cast the vile appendage aside, its owner emerged from the mausoleum: Paulo, yet no longer Paulo. Whatever illusion had veiled his state must have shattered, when I dashed his brains against the crypt's wall. Now, the junior seaman's flesh showed the mottled marks of three days' decay; it hadn't been the arms of some Grabenite beauty he had lain in, on furlough, but a shallow grave. His hand was gone, of course, and his vacant eyes showed flash-burns from my spell. Yet neither death nor blindness slowed the lad's approach. Hideously, he still walked with the same carefree gait, and his withered lips parted in a familiar, gap-toothed grin.

It was unbearable. I'm a philosophy professor, not some damn-fool adventurer! A half-recalled fact penetrated my swelling fear, and I recalled one of the few defensive spells in my repertoire. I cast it in haste as I backed away from Paulo, then turned and fled. Sure enough, my dim memory of the constructs' traits was true: as I dashed past the golem, a wave of killing frost gushed out from its sculpted helm. My protective spell flared to life, and a shielding screen of violet flame sprang into being around me, catching enough of the frigid blast that I emerged, chilled but alive.

Alas, its protection would not be enough for the other three statues. I skidded to a halt, boxed in by the first golem's counterparts. Nor was flying an option; even if I could elude the constructs' breath, their master's killing spells could smite me from the sky.

Seeing but one avenue of escape, I readied a desperate spell to incapacitate the hostile mage. It was a gamble, but if I succeeded, his servants might fall inert, letting us slip away to the *Black Pelican*. The dark-robed death-dealer had descended from the roof to stand at lifeless Miklos' side, gazing mutely down at the body as if expecting it to move (ghastly thought!). With the tip of a long, spiral-carven staff, he poked at our trapper's remains, with the precise, clinical manner of forensic inquiry.

Paulo's corpse was nearly upon me now, but I finished the spell in time. Yet even as I hurled it, its seemingly-preoccupied target

paused, spun round ... and caught my spell, even as a child might catch a toy ball! His crabbed hand snatched the arcane energies from the air, claw-like fingers curled into configurations of arcane significance. It wasn't any spell I'd seen or even heard of, though his gesture was vaguely reminiscent of dispelling. For an instant, I could almost see my enchantment writhing in his grasp, as he held its energies captive for inspection.

Then, the wretch snorted contemptuously, and *threw it back at me*.

Were I not versed in the Fraternity's mental defenses, I have no doubt that Brother Dirac (wherever that laggard ran off to) would be writing this report, as I drooled witlessly in some abominable sanitarium! As it was, I felt a haze of vacuous fuzziness wash across me, smothering my intellect, but only for a few seconds. Drawing upon all my training as an Esteemed Brother, I fought my way through the dull clouds and successfully re-asserted the primacy of the mind over all. Cogito ergo creo, Brothers... or, in this case, cogito ergo cogito.

Reviving, I realized that I lay supine upon the snow, and that the dark form of Miklos' killer now stood over me. Having reclaimed my wits, I heeded their advice and did not react to his proximity, but let my eyes drift aimlessly, feigning lax idiocy. The strange wizard poked me with his staff, prodding me with the same inquisitive coldness as he had, Miklos' corpse. I dared not let my gaze rise to his face, but I did glimpse the edge of the man's robe: the finest night-black silk, hems embroidered in a pattern of crashing waves and storm clouds - their motif, similar to the symbols from the mausoleum's vaults - as well as exotic, flowing script in some wholly unfamiliar language, and ominous mystical sigils of great potency. Not Hazlani or Akiri in style, by any means, yet something in the embroidered markings seemed evocative of a similar antique sophistication and arcane ascendancy ... to say nothing of pride, or perhaps hubris.

Despite its grandeur, the old man's silken robe was stained and rumpled, in dire need of a wash.



The murderer snorted disdainfully again, and straightened, shifting the staff to his left hand. Sneaking a direct glance, I saw that the latter was crowned by a serpentine head that seemed to fix its carven ivory gaze upon me. Startled, I forced my eyes to go bleary and unfocused, even as the clatter of bone approached. Skeletal hands unfastened my coat and patted down my body from collar to boots. They lengthily probed at the large waistcoat-pocket where I normally carried my traveling grimoire (currently aboard the *Black Pelican*); implications of this pointed search were starting to dawn, when the aged necromancer sharply snapped his fingers.

The golem holding Oleg lumbered forward, and I was hauled to my feet. Other walking bones dragged Howe to join us; the captain offered no resistance, still gazing in numbed disbelief at Paulo. The lad had regained his sight and dug his hand out of the snowdrift. Whistling through bloodless lips, he strove clumsily to fit the appendage back in place. The dark mage's wave beckoned one of the skeletons forward, shedding fragments of ice from its encrusted limbs. It stopped beside Howe, lifted up its foot as the other undead bent the captain's leg into the same position. Their master peered from fleshed limb to skeletal, shook his head dismissively, then snapped his fingers again. I could view the long, ragged nails of his frost-pale hand more clearly this time, stained by alchemical residue and tinted a sickly lavender hue.

The skeleton - a rather tall human one - clattered to the golem's side, and Oleg went

wild in the construct's grasp, kicking and cursing a sailor's polyglot buffet of oaths. The death-mage snorted again, and hooked a finger at another of the golems; it lurched forward and laid its sculpted hand on Oleg's arm. The sailor howled in horror, then went limp in the golem's grasp. The tall skeleton stepped near, holding its leg beside Oleg's for the murderous wizard's inspection.

Brothers, I must confess that my dawning realization that the corpse-herd was testing our body proportions against the skeleton's - verifying which of our physiques was the right size for some ghastly necromantic purpose! - proved too much for my harried nerves. I abandoned my pretense of idiocy, twisted from the skeletons' grasp, and raced for the tree line, heedless of what foul spells might yet be flung in pursuit. I am not Erik: I would not forfeit life for any such vile "resurrection", without struggle.

A hideous stench - worse even than Paulo's unveiled rot - stole the breath from me as I ran, and I stumbled before ever reaching the clearing's edge. Another figure, rag-clad and rusty-stained, pounced on me from the roof of Danar's Tomb. The last things I saw were Paulo's body, his lost hand reattached, retrieving Miklos' hares from behind the old stump with a boyish grin - a last, ludicrous gift of flesh, for the lookout's new master - and the gray-skinned, muzzled features of my final attacker, whose feral touch stole motion from my muscles even as its fist's impact struck consciousness from my being.

**Graben** features...

If Oleg's Ascended gods ever did exist, they had deserted him. It was he who was missing, when Howe and I regained consciousness on board the *Black Pelican*.

It could have been worse. The poison Paulo had slipped into the galley stewpot, before we five set off, could have been lethal. The necromancer's minions could have left the crew to freeze where they fell, rather than confining them within the shelter of the ship's hold. But, recalling poor Oleg's desperate struggles, I cannot believe that mercy had been the slightest factor in why "Aegir's Jackdaw" had spared their lives. Todstein's master (for who could dispute that now?) had a purpose for them, as well.

He must have known I could not fly all the way to Graben Island on my own.

When I awoke - still clad in my hiking clothes, but lying on my own cot - my carefully hidden papers had been scattered about the compartment, with no sign that their security-wards had ever activated. Slim, curved fragments of ice, like those the necromancer's skeletal minions had shed, bespoke of why my poisons had failed to protect the documents: bony hands had rifled my things at the murderer's bidding. My notes on Liffe, Île de la Tempête, and Graben Island had been thoroughly examined, as had my personal correspondence with Anthony and the others.

Worse yet, my copy of the *Oathes and Compacts* - the very copy entrusted to me at my initiation, by Father von Lovenhorst's own hands! - lay opened upon the floor. Granted, it offered only the merest tyro's perspective on our philosophy, being couched for Initiates' eyes; even so, I dreaded to think what disciplinary action would await me, for such an egregious breach of secrecy. At least my Fraternity ring was still in place. My traveling grimoire, alas, was not so fortunate: when I dug it out of the scattered papers, nearly half the contents were missing.

Flipping through the ragged pages, I felt my teeth grinding in outrage. Butchery! That wretched corpse-caller'd not even bothered to clip the spells from their

bindings, he'd just torn them loose by the handful! Mockingly, he'd left the illusion-spells in place: a brazen insult to my favored school, if not the Fraternity itself, that he'd deem them not worth stealing. And the fact he'd left me any magic at all made it plain he thought me powerless to retaliate for this violation.

Fuming, I drew my spectacles from my waistcoat to peruse the damage and see what might yet be salvaged from this calamity. I donned the tinted lenses....

*Soaring on air, miles high, amidst tremendous drifting masses of levitating rock, each great floating monolith crowned with ornate mansions, towers, gardens...*

*Rugged snowscapes glittering under sapphire skies, across which a liquid ribbon of fire arched impossibly from peak to peak, between smoldering twin volcanoes...*

*Banner-draped vessels, bows engraved with the proud crests of noble houses and carven into the likeness of fantastic beasts, gliding like swallows in an aerial regatta...*

*The brightly-shimmering curve, glimpsed greenly through seawater, of a crystalline dome enclosing a city of men, built far beneath the waves...*

*An open-air arena overlooking a vast sphere of scintillating force, within which two figures in flowing robes hurled fire and thunder at one another in lethal contention...*

*Another city, vast enough to swallow Pont-a-Museau in but a single neighborhood, streets arrayed like the facet-lines of a jewel, its grand vistas a-swirl with flying carpets, chained elementals, architectural impossibilities and works of arcane artifice...*

*A tiered assembly-hall, its very air saturated with concentrated power, in which dozens of stately, self-important men and women sat in sober council, each clad in the ornate robes of an arcane master, as hundreds of additional seats stood vacant, awaiting further arrivals...*

*An orb of blues and greens and wispy whites - could it be a world, as they exist beyond the Mists? - shattering like blown*

*glass, coruscating magma glowing redly  
along gaping fracture-lines, till its fragments  
split asunder to drift outward in silence  
through the star-flecked depths of an  
unfathomable black void...*

And all along, as visions of unbound magic's wonders and terrors unfolded, the grating voice of Miklos' killer jeered in my mind:

Call yourselves "wizards", do you? 'Esteemed Brother', yef? **HAH!** Cringing cowards, the lot of you, hiding your power from ignorant drudges who rightly should BEG to lick your boots! Aping science in your practices, of all fool things: are you **ASHAMED** of your magic?

Look upon **MY** world, dabbler, and behold how arcane might **TRULY** rules! Not craven conspiracies lurking in shadow, but **POWER!** Not wheedling schemers' paltry dreams of usurpation, but **CONQUEST!** A real wizard doesn't let reality frighten him away from true power, he frightens **REALITY** into heeding his bidding! The power to bend worlds, to own them, to destroy them, is his to **TAKE**, not covet in impotent envy.

So timid a will does not deserve magic's full bounty. I have relieved you of what you never earned, pretender; flimsy spells of falsehood are all you deserve to keep.

Tell your spineless masters your turncoat "friend" is not here. If he were, rest assured that I would have leashed him by now: he, at least, had the courage to seek power worthy of a mage's effort, and might have made a useful fool.

The dead of Nebligtode do as they're told. The living emulate or join them.

Learn from their wisdom, mageling ...  
and

LEAVE

ME

**ALONE!!!**

And with that final, shrieking insult, and that cataclysmic image of a world fracturing like crystal, my mind and senses became my own again ... and the paired, tinted lenses of my spectacles and the signet-etched silver buttons of my waistcoat burst, as one, into dust.

Such is the message of Nebligtode's master. (Nebligtode? An old word, by which the Grabenites called their Mist-bound stretch of land and sea before it joined the Core.) It is not for me to judge the wisdom of our Fraternity's leaving that loathsome wretch to his solitude, but I for one believe his claim that Van Rijn is not to be found in these waters. Not because I dispute his capacity for treachery or deceit - Paulo proved that, all too well - but because he plainly thinks far too little of myself or our brotherhood to be bothered with any such pretense.

To that one, we were either messengers, or meat. Better, I think, to bear the message.

If there is any mercy to be had, in a world beneath the Watchers' scrutiny, Oleg is dead now. And frustrating though it may be, I realize now that there is nothing I can do to avenge him. Not even armed with my strongest spells could I challenge such a formidable foe, and returning to his isle would spell my end at best, if not some hideous new existence. Even revealing his presence to the inhabitants of Graben Island would accomplish little more than to spread useless panic: if our assailant was indeed "Aegir's Jackdaw", he has seen fit neither to facilitate relations with the living Grabenites, nor to quash rumors of his visitations. Hence, he cannot fear their hostility, any more than mine.

Nothing to be done to even the score, be it for Howe's men or myself.

Save, perhaps, one small thing....

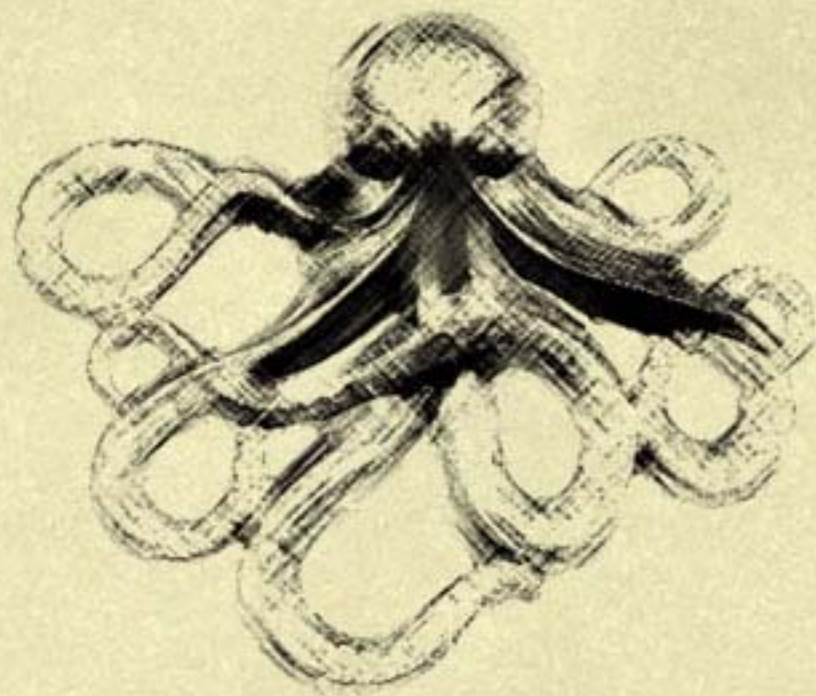
*Note to self:*

*Place an order for twelve (12) bottles of Chateaufaux '11 - the red, not the white - to be delivered to La Maison Soulombre, then shipped out again to Mr. Josiah Graben at Graben Manor, care of "Peter Ash". Also, write to Ambrose and tell him to leave off feeding those black widow spiders in my terrarium, while he awaits the wine's delivery: the more irritable they are when he encloses them in the wine-crate's packing straw, the better.*

*And also, come to think of it, ask Anthony if he might spare a dozen vials of that holy water he always keeps stashed about the place. Fool me once...*



PART VII



*The Drowning Deep*

11-237

# *The Drowning Deep*

A faint, embossed illustration of a ship's deck, possibly a sailing vessel, with various objects and a small figure. The illustration is centered on the page and is surrounded by a decorative border. The title "The Drowning Deep" is written in a stylized, gothic font across the top of the illustration. The number "11-237" is visible in the top right corner of the page.

## The Drowning Deep

By Viktor Hazan, Early October 760

I am writing these lines from the Sailor's Hearth Inn in Egertus. I have been in Nova Vaasa for the last six weeks now. My emotions during those weeks have varied from awe to horror. First, I am filled with sadness to announce that I fear Brother Paul Dirac is now lost forever at sea. Second, I discovered with excitement and renewed horror that a new and unexpected chapter must be added to this report. There is more to the Nocturnal Sea than is usually believed—much more, in fact, if this new evidence is eventually found to be correct.

I now regret the harsh words I wrote about Dirac in an earlier section of this report. How could I know then *where* Dirac was, and with *whom*? What Paul went through is simply nightmarish.

But without getting too lengthy or emotional, I will try to recap for the readers the past month's surprising events. As I wrote earlier, at the end of August, I received a *sending* message from Master Shadowcloak. He informed me that he too had lost all contact with Dirac. So, as you know, I took the decision to embark to treacherous Todstein after covering Graben Island. Now again, if the ice wizard of Todstein could slowly rot in loneliness and oblivion...but that chapter of my life is now – thankfully – behind me.

Leaving Todstein, the mood on board was grim, and I killed time by helping the sailor's work, as their burden of more work because of their missing comrades was made even heavier by their grief.

Captain Howe had to make one final stop at Graben-town, for a sail that was left there for repair. It wasn't ready when we had to leave for Todstein, and Howe needed to return to Graben-town for an hour or two to get it. I didn't mind this last stop there as I thought it would give me the chance to drink a last native lager at the Black Sheep Inn – I needed it – and see the people of Graben-town one quick last time for this survey. I was also curious to see if I would be spied upon while in Graben-Town, as I suspected.

But as we approached Graben-town, we found Dirac clinging to a rock near the harbor! Howe noticed a movement on the rocks and saw an unfortunate man on one of them, and brought the *Black Pelican* about to rescue him. I've told him more than once that being courageous and chivalrous will someday lead him to disaster. But I'm glad he did this time, having found out the stranded man was Dirac. Howe swore he also saw black, glossy shapes in the water around Dirac's rock, which he said was probably seals. (I'm now inclined to believe these shapes were *something else*.) And, for the record, I think I also have an idea as to why the sail was to be ready only *after* our return from Todstein.

Brother Dirac was near unconsciousness, his cold fingers gripping feebly to the rock. He would not have waited for us much longer there. When the crew retrieved him from his rocky shelter, I didn't recognize our Brother at first: his face and limbs were bloated as if his body spent a very long time in the water. His eyes were opened but he didn't show any other facial expression. In fact, he seemed close to being catatonic.

But when his eyes fell on me, I identified him at once. For the first time since he came on board, his expression changed as his eyes narrowed on me, in recognition. I shivered as then he let out a horrible madman's laughter. I noticed the crew was afraid of him. It's never a good omen to have a fool on board. But before they made any gruesome decision about the rescued man, I asked Howe to see that Dirac be carried below and cloaked in warm blankets. He immediately felt asleep, sleeping very profoundly. He was totally oblivious to the room's activity and our conversation didn't prevent him from resting. While I was checking his clothes and pockets for clues to this new mystery, I noticed he was breathing very strangely, filling his lungs to the maximum and holding his breath as long as he could, then exhaling and filling his lungs again.

His pockets were empty, except a few personal items and a notebook in a water resistant pouch. All but the first pages were ripped off the book by clawed hands which had made deep marks on the book cover. I

could identify Dirac's writing at a glance. The pages contained preliminary notes on Todstein, gathered from his stay in Graben-town and from other literary sources (the preliminary notes were quite accurate, by the way), and normal traveling notes – his last entry was when he left Graben Town for Todstein on the *Valiant Explorer* boat on August the 25<sup>th</sup>.

In his preliminary notes, I found something Dirac heard in the Graben Island streets. That threatening tale is probably one of the charming ploys from that old carcass of a wizard skulking in Todstein to make sure he is left alone.

Howe and his crew came back with the repaired sail, and the *Black Pelican* left for an unplanned mainland destination: Egertus. The trip was uneventful, but Dirac had a few hysterical crises and had to be tied up for his own safety. During the entire trip, he didn't say a word. When not in a crisis of fear, his face and gaze showed impressive calm (or resignation).

Father Winter lives out deep in the Nocturnal Sea. He lives on an island surrounded all year long by wintry storms. It is from that island that winter flows over the land every year.

Eventually Father Winter gets tired from blowing the fierce winter wind all winter long and returns to his island to go to sleep. It is said he sleeps in a palace made of blue diamonds. Even one of the diamonds is worth a fortune, but if someone were to ever to go there and steal one of the diamonds, Father Winter would not return to his sleep until the thief was harshly punished and the diamond recovered.

Were someone ever so foolish to do so and hide the diamond well, they could doom the land to continuous cold winter forever.

- Tale told by a Darkonese bard



## The Drowning Deep

We treated Dirac as we best as we could during the trip to Egertus. His body was weak, and he ate little; he was often shaking from cold, and his left shoulder showed nasty claw marks, like those made by a large and angry sea cat. That wound quickly became infected and took on an ugly purplish color, and I didn't like the way it looked.

In Egertus, I left Howe and sincerely thanked him for his excellent services. Our parting was full of grief, as we looked at each other's eyes in silence, and then wished each other the best of fortune. I wanted to tell him about young Paulo, how terribly sorry I was, but I wasn't sure how the old Captain would react. He then told me he would try to locate Captain Arberlsson of the *Valiant Explorer* and talk with him, to learn more about Dirac's fate. I thanked him for his efforts. After shaking hands, we agreed to a later *rendez-vous* later this year to carry me back to Souragne, or elsewhere.

I needed at least a month to have Dirac put in a clinic for mentally ill people and to follow his treatment, so I admitted Brother Dirac to the clinic of Dr. *Gunnar* Illhusen (nephew to the famed Dr. Gregorian Illhusen). The young Dr. Illhusen built his own establishment in the shadows of his uncle's former clinic, now abandoned since the strange disappearance of staff and patients.

Dr. Illhusen treated Dirac with the best techniques, some new, as well as the tried and tested ones. By that, I mean that he wasn't "treating" his patients with trepanning or other ice-pick butchery, but used observations of the patients, as well as calming drugs and hypnosis. I also tested Dirac with a variety of detection spells: he didn't appear charmed or controlled at the time. But, oddly, *Detect Thoughts* never gave any result: it seems his mind was blocked by something. I hoped Dr. Illhusen would be able to unlock and access his mind.

While Dirac was treated, I renewed friendship with Mayor Kaia Bolshnik, a graceful woman I haven't seen for a while. It was a pleasure to frequent her home again for this period of time. Among other things, I

have to thank her as she completed the information on piracy I used in the second Interlude of this report.

Also, during this wait, I received all the notes on Vechor and Isle of Ravens that Dirac sent to Master Shadowcloak before his vanishing. I'm very grateful Master Shadowcloak also added a copy of a few spells that were *borrowed* from my traveling spellbook, as you know. Still, I feel naked without all my spells, and I'm looking to get back to Souragne to recover my complete spellbook.

Meanwhile, I also completed my notes for this report and checked on Dirac's conditions every day, and met him a few times per week in his cell. Nothing could induce him to talk about what happened to him before we found him, or simply to make him his old self. He spent his days mute, calmly waiting in his cell, looking out through the barred window, or seated appearing to think sternly about something. But he never opened up to any of the stimuli or suggestions we tried with him. Nothing of his past life seemed to make him talk or open his mind to us. He had a few anxiety crises at night when he first arrived at the clinic, but this phenomenon stopped after a few days. He ate and drank normally, except fish, which he didn't touch.

Dr. Illhusen worked hard on Dirac's case and hired a very competent nurse while Dirac was treated. Her first name is Lucretia (alas, now I realize I forgot to ask for her last name!). She was a foreign beauty who seemed somehow familiar to me, but whose origins I found very difficult to pinpoint. She said she was from Liffe and worked in the main hospital of Armeikos. Dr. Illhusen said her knowledge of healing wounds and normal illness was stunning, and her first diagnosis of some of the patients was accurate. Her patients' physical recovery was swift, so she and the doctor made a great team. When I met Nurse Lucretia, she seemed to me a little aloof, but indeed very brilliant. I have to say I found reassuring that she became interested of Dirac's case as soon as she heard of it by Dr. Illhusen. She spent a lot of time tirelessly trying to help Dirac recover from his feebleness, and to

## The Drowning Deep

treat the deep claw marks on his shoulder, which healed slowly.

I wasn't there the night when the final crisis occurred. Dr. Illhousen told me he suddenly demanded a pen and paper. It was late at night. He quickly supplied Dirac with a small pen, safe for himself should he become self-destructive, and an ample supply of paper. The good doctor thought Dirac was going to draw things, as many of his patients do, but to the clinician's surprise, he started writing feverishly. From that moment he got what he requested, he didn't answer to any of the Doctor's questions, except a quick nod when Illhousen asked him not to destroy what he wrote. This reassured the clinician Dirac was at last emerging from his aphasic state.

It was late at night, so Illhousen went to bed, expecting results with Dirac for the next day. The night warden was to frequently pass in front of his cell to watch him. This man said Dirac wrote energetically for about three hours, never stopping for anything. Then, when he passed the last time, about 2 A.M., he found Dirac's barred window broken, and our friend gone. I'd like to note I do not believe that the physical feat of breaking the bars was something Dirac could have done alone; I suggest the possibility he may have gotten outside help. (I won't guess from whom he might have gotten it for the moment.) A pile of paper was neatly placed on his bed, with the pen on it. The warden looked outside, but no trace of Dirac was found.

Dr. Illhousen was awakened, and he asked the warden to fetch me at the Sailor's Hearth Inn. We searched for Dirac through the sleeping town, accompanied by town guards; we didn't see the escapee, but eventually found someone who saw him. A sailor who had awakened early to mend his nets at the port told us that he saw someone he described as a "young foreign gentleman dressed in good dark clothes" appear on the quay, walking quickly and steadily toward the sea. Before the sailor could speak or act, the young man walked into the sea, neither slowing nor staying as the waters closed over his head. On our showing him a sketch of Dirac, he was certain that he was the young

man he had seen. We searched the harbor in small boats, but found nothing.

That sailor is in fact the last person to have seen Dirac. I stayed in Egertus for another two weeks while there was a search, but for nothing. Dirac wasn't seen again, and his body never found. If he is dead, I fancy his soul to be resting in peace, but now I fear the worst for him.

I spent these days in wait by reading what Dirac had written during the last night in his cell. I had to use many *Comprehend Language* spells, as what he wrote was in a language alien to me, or to anybody I showed it too, and at first seemed completely without sense. Even the alphabet is like nothing I have seen in any other place.

Also, when she had the time, Nurse Lucretia often helped me in deciphering the writing, and reviewing what I had interpreted, as she hoped too that it might explain the disappearance of one of her more interesting patient. Her devotion is unexpectedly charming.

Having completed my translation, I am shaken by what it reveals. What I first conceived as thoughts from Dirac's mad mind—it seems like a story written by someone else—now have a dark, frightening import, and I will never look at the sea in the same way. Even more disturbing than the implications of the discovery of this new text were the occasional interjections, written in Dementlieuse, from Brother Dirac. Whatever fate he has suffered, I count all of my trials but lightly when I consider what is revealed by what he wrote here.

Following this brief report on what happened leading up to the revelation of this manuscript is a word-for-word translation of Dirac's last writings. I will keep my hypothesis and conjectures for myself for the moment, but what I read in Dirac's text is fascinating and worrisome too. Until we decide what to do with these revelations, I suggest we keep this chapter for the highest Fraternity eyes only, and that we discuss this and its implications on our next Fraternity Meeting.

I have endeavored to reproduce the text written by Dirac as accurately as possible,

including such stylistic oddities as the author's capitalizing all personal pronouns referring to himself, while taking into account the difficulties of translation and the fact that both authors—for I feel sure there were two—tended to repeat themselves and to digress from their themes with some frequency. The author "Virundus" seems to have learned of the standard format used in previously published surveys, possibly from conversation with Dirac, and to have followed it fairly closely in large portions of his description of that strange country he calls Hadalpelagos. Where remarks of Brother Dirac's seemed pertinent I have placed them at the beginning of the appropriate section in script.

I have, of course, preserved the originals and will include them in the materials I bring in person for the perusal of the assembled Umbra. Where I have deemed it necessary (usually where Virundus has little or nothing to say on a subject of interest to our Fraternity) I have interjected my own opinions on what is written; all such passages are marked in the *Borcan* typography.

Finally, as I was deciphering the text, I found a piece of paper well hidden in Dirac's tobacco lighting kit. It was unusable from a lengthy stay in water, and I was going to throw it in the garbage when I noticed the wooden cover had a slightly loose piece. Under it was a piece of paper tightly folded so ink would not get blurred. On this paper, I was very shocked to read a few tiny coded words written by Dirac for me!

So when he was abducted and held prisoner, Dirac knew it was highly probable we would meet again...

Esteemed readers, I present Dirac's last writings:

### Viktor

Virundus craves respect and can be manipulated by it. It is the main flaw in his character.

Use it!

Even magically enhanced vision revealed but little at that depth, but it seemed to me that I had been brought near to the edge of a pit. My captors had departed, and I found myself alone in the watery abyss, surrounded by the ruins of that fabled city--now no longer fabulous, but a reality cold and hard in the most literal sense.

Suddenly a cloaked figure arose from within the pit, standing to the height of a man or more, apparently as steady in mid-water as was I on the pavement.

KNEEL.

It was not a voice; I cannot even say that I heard it, in any ordinary sense, but I understood it. I knelt, and was glad to do so; I was so afraid I feared I might otherwise have fallen.

ABASE YOURSELF.

I did so, lying at full length upon the stone.

WHY HAVE YOU COME, WIZARDLING?  
WHAT ERRAND BRINGS YOU TO  
LOST SHAY-LOT?

"I have come...to discover...the nature and character...of the lands above your own."

YOU THINK TO MAKE YOURSELF RULERS?

"Not of any territory of yours, Your Majesty."

THAT IS WELL FORTO SUCH AS YOU, I AM A GOD.

SEE NOW HOW THE GODS REWARD HUBRIS SUCH AS YOURS.

Raising my eyes, almost against my will, I saw that the chamber had been illuminated by the glow of a million worms, and worse things, and the hooded figure moved, lifting its head and opening its cloak to reveal ... a maze of hooks and suckers and puckered flesh.

It was not a human form at all, but the tip of a tentacle...

## The Drowning Deep

**H**ear now the Word of He who speaks from beneath the wave, Ruler of the Deep, Master of Xalot, Tyrant of all where Ocean rolls, Emperor who was and is, God who is and will be. That My Name be known, and my works done, I reveal to you who read great treasures of knowledge, even My history, the work of My hand, and the source and aim of My powers.

I am last and greatest of the Emperors of Parathalassa, paramount among nations, jewel of the Great Sea, descended in body and in spirit from the first gods who placed the solid earth in the firmament of Heaven and who poured out Ocean without measure around it. On the night of My birth the stars flung themselves into the sea, in token of the Divinity now entering the world; and a great wave washed the shore like a cleansing hand, that My kingdom should be prepared for My coming. Therefore I am named VIRUNDUS, the Man of the Wave; and at My Naming, there came many of the noble and wise to pay obeisance to the Emperor now come.

Among those who came was a great sea-witch of the tritons, a female much respected among all her people (who were and will be my slaves, as they were of the Emperors before me), who rejoiced greatly when she saw me, and declared the following doom:

*Now see the destroyer of many,  
The liberator of many;  
All Earth shall be spread below him,  
All Sea above him.  
His is the sea, he is the seas .  
The scepter of might shall not be taken  
from his grasp,  
And he shall rule in his father's house for-  
ever.*

All these things have come to pass, or will come to pass; ye who see, bear witness!

I grew to manhood knowing this my fate to be forewritten, and I was strengthened by that knowledge in all I did; I warred on My forefathers' enemies and brought them beneath My sway, rewarding My friends generously and wreaking destruction among any who opposed Me. I set My foot on the heads of many kings and lords, powerful men brought to bow before Me and do Me

honor in My own place, the hall built by the old gods themselves in past days, that My forefathers might have a fit place to receive them.

In all these conquests I forgot not the old gods; I poured out most bountifully to them of the wealth gained in My conquests, gold and silver, orichalcum, bdellium and admantium, jasper, jade and other precious stones, cunningly wrought and desirable to the eye of man; all these things I offered to the bosom of the deep, and I was prospered therein.

But all these things I reckoned cheap; and resolving to give a better gift, I poured out the very sea-water of the veins, the red tide within man that gives life, returning it to its father and mother, that great World-Ocean; yea, from thousands and tens of thousands I ordered it spilled out, until the salt springs of the great temple ran red with the abundance of My offering. And seeing that I did so much in the pursuit of sanctity, and remembering the signs which had been given at My birth, and recalling the prophecies (only the smallest part of which signs and prophecies have here been transcribed), I came to understand that I was to stand among the gods, take My place at their head, and become ruler of Sea-Ocean, Sky-Ocean, and Star-Ocean, as I had already been ruler of the dry land, from rising to setting sun.

But even the gods may know jealousy of One so munificent, so blessed, and so powerful; and fearing at last the power they themselves had wrought, the old god (whose name will not be written here, nor spoken by any tongue within all My demesne, that name which has been chiseled from all stone and corroded from all metal, wheresoever it has been or will be found) and his brothers and sisters took council together against Me, resolving thereby to betray Me even as I sought to do them the greatest honor ever yet offered by Man to his forebears and makers, thereby taking among them My rightful place.

The blood of slaves and captives was spilled like water, and all those who had served Me well gathered together before the palace of My forefathers and sang My praise,



## The Drowning Deep

garlanded in holy flowers, richly caparisoned in jewels and fine raiment, and all other things which My generosity had seen fit to bestow upon them; they sang and prepared the magics which would render me Master of Land and of All Oceans.

But the hand of envy forestalled them; even as I stood in my forefathers' hall and prepared to take My place on high, the old god, exerting himself to the utmost against Me, gathered the last of his power and struck at My high place. Taken unaware by so great a treachery from one whom I had always befriended by the offering of many gifts and sacrifices, and whom I expected to receive me with gladness, I could do nothing.

All that great country of Parathalassa, its thousand isles and hundred cities, even the great city Xalot, in which thousands of thousands paid obeisance to Me, all its buildings finely built, its streets paved in marble, its temples crowned with orichalcum, its pleasant places and its strength of arms were destroyed by the gods' malice in the space of an hour, earth-shaken, collapsed and drowned! I, and I alone, was strong against their rage and cursed them, and called the Power within Me, yea, and on other Powers, to withstand them; and I withstood, and lived. But as I did so all those who had bent the knee to Me, friend, servant and slave alike, turned to Me and begged My aid; and unwilling to see those who had served so faithfully destroyed, I stretched forth my hand to deliver them, and beneath My hand they were changed, that they too might withstand this great end of all things, and serve Me still. So when Xalot, with Parathalassa and all its thousand isles, were drowned at last by the evil of the gods, I yet remained, and My faithful servants with Me.

But the gods had not ended their evil work, binding My land in a cord of Mist, that I might not come face to face with them there in Ocean and repay them in blood for their evil-doing. By this, and by all My other works, I give them despite, and declare Myself King, Emperor, and Master, who shall be God hereafter.

### *The Drowning Deep in short*

**Location:** Nocturnal Sea

**Ecology:** Deep-ocean and ocean floor

**Environment:** Cold ocean

**Darklord:** Virundus, the God Below

**Year of Formation:** 600 BC (?), 750 incorporated into Nocturnal Sea

**Cultural Level:** Classical (3)

**Population:** 14,000 (100% other, see below)

**Main Settlements:** Shay-Lot (Xalot) 10,000

**Religion:** The God Below

**Language:** Xalote, Aquan

**Government:** Despotic theocracy

**Money:** None

## Geographical Survey

The city Xalot<sup>1</sup> is the center place, seat of My power and dominion over all the Deep; from this place the waters prevail upward two thousand five hundred fathoms [*Viktor Hazan: 15,000 feet, or roughly 4500 meters*]. From the center place extend the Four Great Rifts, which together comprise Hadalpelagos, the Deep Below the Deep; from the floor of all these great valleys the waters prevail upward not less than two thousand fathoms. The rifts are known by the following names:

*Achlos*, the Mistdeep, extends to the north and east some seven leagues. All of this territory I have given into the hand of Xenodeimos, polemarch of all the East.

- 
1. "Xalot" is apparently best pronounced "SHAY-lot"—a fact which cannot fail to strike the informed reader as significant in the last degree.

## The Drowning Deep

*Gnophos*, the Stormdeep, extends to the north and west some ten leagues. All of this territory I have given into the hand of Arcaetethys, polemarch of the Northern Reach.

*Zophos*, the Gloomdeep, extends to the south and west some seven leagues. Here those who love me come to make sacrifice to the waves and the storm, as was done in days of old when that great city Xalot stood beneath the sun. All of this territory I have given into the hand of Andricthys, seventeenth of his line, He Who Watches the Waves, polemarch of the West.

*Skotos*, the Helldeep, extend to the south some two leagues. Here are found the Thermopylae, the Hot Gates, where the living earth spills forth her molten blood into the Deep; all this territory I have given into the hand of my servant Xanicthys, polemarch of the Southern Reach.

Rising from Hadalpelagos and the chief seat of my power one then comes into the Great Abyssal Plain, running from Mist in the south to Mist in the north, Mist in the east to the Western Wall and the true uplands, the dry-lands and sun-lands<sup>1</sup>. Of this little need be said; here there is none to oppose Me, and but few who serve; over all this territory the waters prevail upward some five hundred fathoms. South of the center place may be found Mons Necros and Mons Phobos<sup>2</sup>, with their foothills and lesser peaks; lying to the north and west are Mons Korone<sup>3</sup> and Mons Thyella<sup>4</sup>, and beyond these Mons Xamenos<sup>5</sup>,

1. By this the author apparently refers to the coast of Darkon and Nova Vaasa.
2. "Mountain of Death" and "Mountain of Fear", respectively; probably Todstein and Graben Island.
3. "Mountain of Crows", presumably the Isle of Ravens
4. "Mountain of Storms", presumably Ile d'la Tempete
5. "Mountain of the Lost", presumably Liffe

all of these being dry-lands and sun-lands, though surrounded by My dominion; to the north is Mons Xenos<sup>6</sup>, like the Western Wall a dry-land and sun-land in its own right, its back to the Mists rather than to My territories. The saddle between Mons Xamenos and Mons Xenos, like the saddle between Mons Xamenos and the Western Wall, rise to so great a height that the waters prevail upward only some fifty fathoms, and as few as ten in some places; all these are sun-lands, though they are not dry-lands.

The Kaindelphi Waste, likewise a sun-land but not a dry-land, lies at the far end of Gnophos, which rises into broken land riddled by caves and fissures of lesser depth than the four great rifts; here whale and dolphin sing their strange songs, and die by dozens in certain seasons of the year, beaching themselves in strange transports of pain or ecstasy, or pierced by the harpoons and lances of the ice-warlock's slaves<sup>7</sup>. Here my servants hunt, as well, among the corals and the broken stones.

### Settlements

*It was a nightmarish place, Viktor! I saw only a little of it, but enough to know it was surely a great city once. How small my spell-light gleamed in those empty streets, so vast and ruinous! We plunged downward, ever downward, past toppled towers and wide promenades broken up and scarred by their descent into the abyss. It seemed to cover leagues of ground—more spacious and more opulent than any city I had ever seen or even heard of—yes, more than Il Aluk itself!—and yet it was almost as thoroughly claimed by the hand of death as that metropolis has been.*

6. "Mountain of the Strangers", presumably Vechor
7. This seems to refer to the Selbstmorde Reefs, where whales are known to beach themselves. The literal meaning of "Kaindelphi" is "Dolphin-Killer".



## The Drowning Deep

### People

**Shay-lot (city):** Monstrous; AL NE; CL 3; 20000 gp limit; Assets 850000 gp; Population 10000; Monstrous (Other 100%)

**Authority Figures:** Virundus, the God Below; Basilikos Hierarch (LE male anguillian Clr11), Pausanius Strategos (LE male reaver Rgr8)

**Important Characters:** Stavros Isballos (NE male sahuagin Div9)

### Shay-lot (Xalot, the Drowned City)

The center place, that great city Xalot, seat of my power! How low her thousand isles have been laid by the hand of malice! How little remains of all its grandeur, and yet how great the grandeur that remains! Here I make my seat, in the palace in which My forefathers ruled over the empire they bequeathed Me; here too is the temple in which My faithful servants make obeisance, and the fountain which flows with heart's-blood continually, sign of My power! Here there are still thousands who heed My word and hasten to obey My command, who house themselves in the great buildings whose foundations were set when Xalot was blessed by the sight of sun and moon, and who traverse the avenues paved in dressed stones brought from far islands and ornamented in precious stones and shining metal.

Of all these places let he who visits note the House of Sand, where those who bear arms in My service house themselves; in days of yore it was the abode of gladiators who slew one another for the amusement and edification of the populace, and lies but a score of furlongs from My own abode. Let him also observe the House of Glass, where the magi who counsel Me house themselves, half a league from My abode. The temple of which I have spoken houses the priests and priestesses, not a furlong from where I abide; while those who carry out My work in far places make their homes where it seems good to them to do so.

Some are piscine perversions of the human form; obviously my original captor was human enough to deceive me. Some are brutal, heavy, razor-scaled; some more slender; one of these has interviewed me several times, and is a wizard of some ability. Some are not human at all, but blasphemies against Nature—or perhaps Nature herself is, and has always been, corrupted, and only here in her dark heart does she reveal herself. Merciful Ezra, save me. There is a thing here like a leech grown to the size of a man's arm; I woke to find it on me. All living things seem to be but eyes and mouth and teeth.

Those who serve Me are of five castes, each with its peculiar physiognomy, its blazons and marks of merit, its sociality, customs and mode of life. Most numerous are those known merely as *ichthymorphoi*, least of My servants, who pasture and tend the flocks and herds on which My people subsist, and who perform such menial labor and artisan's tasks as chance may supply.

Less numerous but far more doughty are those of the *thorakoi*, the soldiery of the people, strong arms, fierce in combat, but limited in understanding and in prudence. These qualities are supplied in full measure by the counselors and advisors known as *magi*, those whose visions and communications with familiar spirits inform the management of My affairs; these are further divided into two groups, the *peripateioi* and the *hydromagi*, the former of whom direct those of My affairs which take place in the dry-lands, the latter of whom reside with Me in Hadalpelagos.

Last and nearest to Me are those of the *hieroi*, who stand in My presence and do Me worship in the manner in which their fathers have done before them. I have other servants, mighty in valor and in cunning, who serve me in other places; but time would fail to list each and all, their several virtues and the power each lends to the works to which I direct them.

## The Drowning Deep

### Encounters in the Drowning Deep

Those suitable for terror tracks marked (T); those always aligned with Shay-Lot marked (SL); and those sometimes working with Shay-Lot thralls marked (SSL).

#### Wildlife

**CR 1/3:** Stingray<sup>Sto</sup>

**CR 1/2:** Barracuda<sup>Sto, QTR9</sup>; Eel<sup>Sto</sup>

**CR 1:** Shark<sup>MM1</sup> (SSL); Manta Ray<sup>MM1</sup>, Octopus<sup>MM1</sup>; Squid<sup>MM1</sup> (SSL)

**CR 3:** Barracuda, Dire<sup>QTR9, Sto</sup>; Dire eel<sup>Sto</sup>; **CR 5:** Swarm, Jellyfish<sup>Sto</sup>; Whale, Orca<sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 7:** Whale, Cachalot<sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 8:** Octopus, Giant<sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 9:** Dire Animal, Zeuglodon<sup>Fro</sup>; Dire Shark<sup>MM1</sup> (SSL); Squid, Giant<sup>MM1</sup>

#### Monsters

**CR 1/2:** Merfolk<sup>MM1</sup>; Elf, Aquatic<sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 1:** Ghoul, Lacedon<sup>MM1</sup> (T) (SL); Ixitxachtl<sup>MM2</sup> (SSL); Sea spawn, master<sup>DoD</sup>

**CR 2:** Anguillian<sup>Sto</sup> (SSL) (T), Elemental Grue, Water (Vardigg)<sup>CAr</sup>; Sahuagin<sup>MM1</sup> (SL) (T); Skum<sup>MM1</sup> (T) (SL); Sea Zombie<sup>QTR9</sup>; Triton<sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 3:** Vampiric Ixitxachtl<sup>MM2</sup> (SL); Lycanthrope, Wereray<sup>DoD</sup> (SL) (T)

**CR 4:** Blackskate<sup>Sto</sup> (SSL), Elemental Swarm, Water<sup>PIH</sup>; Lycanthrope, Wereshark<sup>FRMoF</sup> (SSL) (T); Nereid<sup>Sto</sup>; Reaver<sup>DoD</sup> (SSL) (T)

**CR 5:** Morkoth<sup>MM2</sup> (SSL) (T); Sea spawn, master<sup>DoD</sup> (T)

**CR 6:** Aquatic Ooze, Reekmurk<sup>FiF</sup>; Kopru<sup>MM2</sup> (SL); Pudding, White<sup>Fro</sup>

**CR 7:** Aboleth<sup>MM1</sup> (SL); Chuul<sup>MM1</sup> (SL); Malasyne<sup>Fro</sup>; Seryulin<sup>MM3</sup> (SL); Spectre<sup>MM1</sup>

**CR 8:** Beholderkin, Eye of the Deep<sup>LoM</sup>; Drowned<sup>MM3</sup>

**CR 9:** Caller From The Deeps<sup>Sto</sup>, Golem, Coral<sup>Sto</sup> (SL); Kelp Angler<sup>FiF</sup>; Soulless<sup>QTR9</sup>

**CR 10:** Kelpie<sup>FiF</sup> (SSL); Langoir<sup>QTR9</sup>

**CR 11:** Dragon Eel<sup>MM3</sup> (SL); Megalodon<sup>MM2</sup>; Octopus Tree<sup>FiF</sup>

**CR 12:** Kraken<sup>MM1</sup> (SSL)

**CR 13:** Scyllan<sup>Sto</sup> (SL)

**CR 17:** Elemental Monolith, Water<sup>CAr</sup>

**CR 23:** Meredoth's Horror<sup>QTR9</sup>

**CR varies:** Elemental, Water<sup>MM1</sup>, Elemental, Corrupted (new monster proposed by JWM) (SSL), Fiendish Creature<sup>MM1 p 107</sup> (SL), Ghosts; Ice Beast<sup>MM2</sup>; Lycanthrope, wereoctopus (new monster proposed by JWM) (SSL); Spectral creature – template<sup>SaS p12</sup>

## The Drowning Deep

### The Abyssal Hero

Unless they are Sea-claimed (see DM's appendix), the inhabitants of the Drowning Deep are not well-adapted to any ordinary Ravenloft campaign. If the Dungeon Master desires to include natives of the Drowning Deep in a primarily sub-aquatic campaign, the other races available include aquatic elves and tritons (both hostile to Virundus and his minions), as well as wererays, wereoctopuses, reavers, sahuagin, anguillian, and locathah (all of whom are usually Virundus' willing servants or slaves).

Others there are who serve me not, in the borders of the sun-lands abutting the dry-lands, but these are of but little consequence; they too will worship, or be thrust to the wall. Among these are those who call themselves "elves of the sea" and the tritons who were my slaves in Parathalassa and who will serve me again. Any who works against such, rebels and heretics, shall earn in full measure My reward for their service.

### Daily Life

You cannot imagine it. The dark, the cold—it is another world. They are not human, though some claim they once were. The guardsman told me. Nothing from our world can remain sane here for long. I am hungry for light. I find myself pressing against my eyes to the point of pain to see the rainbows it produces. It is better when the mage comes; he brings a light, and we converse, as if he, the fish-thing, and I were two Brothers together.

There are monsters in the deep, worse even than my captors; they hunt and are hunted. The mage says that inferiors—servants or slaves—farm the fishes on whom all subsist and do all heavy labor.

The soldiers—the "armored ones"—range near and far, hunting

all who do not acknowledge the God Below (thus I learned there are peoples in the deep who do not worship Him). They kill many whales, and subsist on their flesh; all these creatures hate and fear the whales and the dolphins.

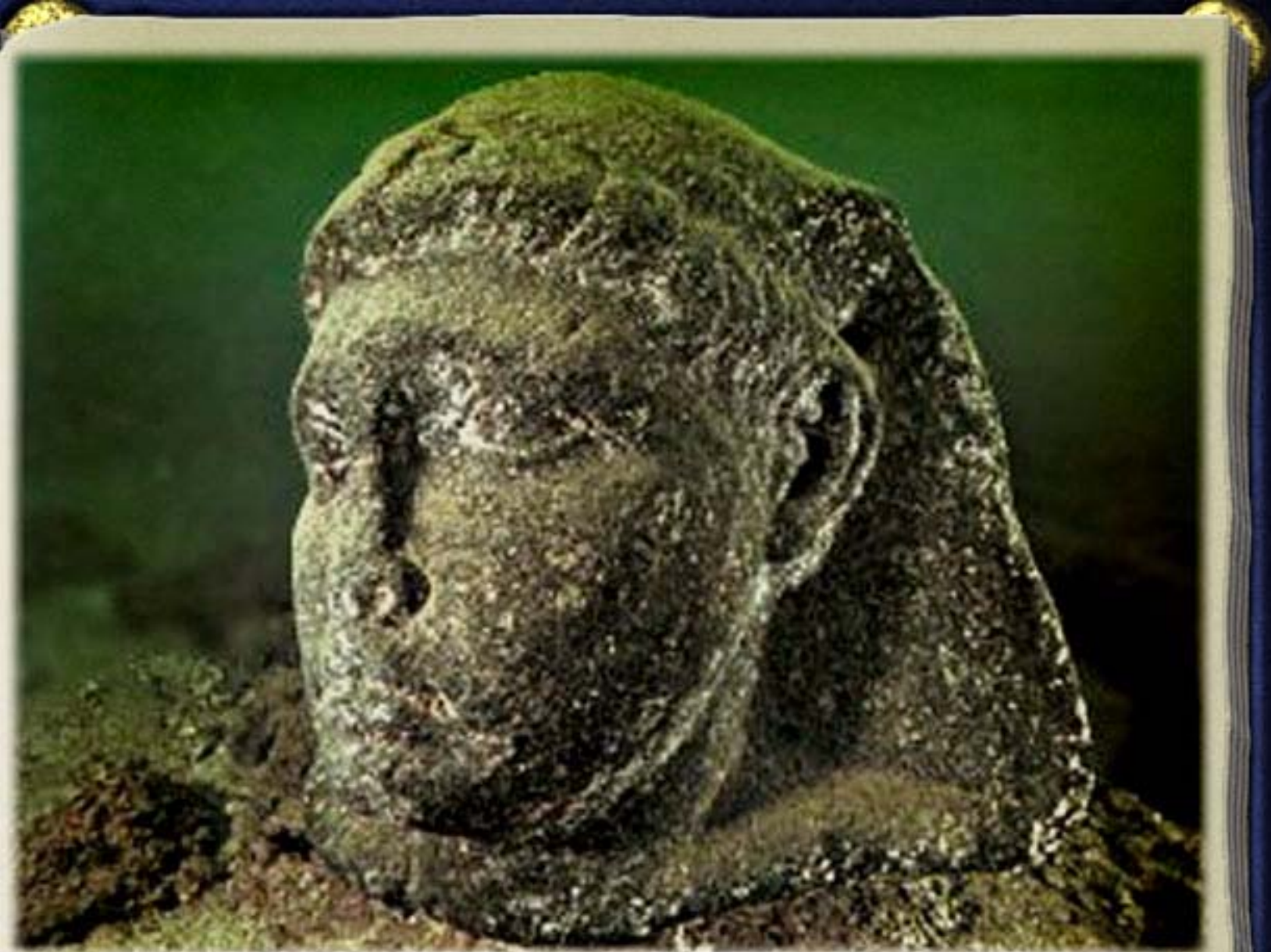
The holy ones do not ascend; they serve the God Below and perform the rites of His worship, and rule over the people, communicating to them the word of the God. The holy ones are highest, save for those who have been touched by the God Below and changed.

The magi wander far, some in the company of the soldiers, others alone; they rule the soldiers and are ruled by the priests. So much I have learned of their mode of life; but the mage who visits me is canny, and answers my questions with questions. They have no money, no commerce among themselves; all are, in the end, slaves to the God Below.

[None of "Virundus'" remarks are particularly related to the mode of life of his subjects; other than this brief description from Dirac and the hints supplied elsewhere in the text I have been unable to glean any detail from the manuscript. Indeed, it is hard for one to imagine what kind of life they might live, two miles or more below the ocean's surface.]

### Language

[Unfortunately I can say but little of the language of Xalot, referred to as "Xalote" in the text, since I have, as yet, only been able to read it by means of magical interpretation. The script is rather elegant, the capital letters angular and the lower-case letters curvilinear; the proper names are often rather literal-minded. I do not know if this language is spoken beneath the waves, or if it is written only; what evidence there is in the text hints that it is the language used in Xalot before its inundation, and some other means of communication (the language of creatures of elemental water, perhaps?) may now be current in that sub-aqueous land.]



### *Xalote Phrasebook*

<i>Aigailon</i>	Beach, shore	<i>Katapolis</i>	Sunken (Fallen, Drowned) City
<i>Bythizo</i>	To make sink, to drown	<i>Katatheos</i>	God Below
<i>Enavagesan</i>	Shipwreck	<i>Pelagos</i>	Ocean
<i>Hadalos, Hadalpelagos</i>	The Deep, the Deep Sea	<i>Skotos</i>	Darkness
<i>Gaen</i>	Dry land	<i>Emporia</i>	Trade
<i>Hydros</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>Prospberos</i>	Offering
<i>Ichthys</i>	Fish	<i>Proskeneo</i>	To worship

## The Drowning Deep

### Outlook and Worldview

#### The God Below

**Symbol:** A black disc with twelve spiraling arms.



**Alignment:** Any evil

**Portfolio:** The deep ocean, darkness

**Domains:** Water, Evil, Abyssal

**Favoured Weapons:** Net and trident

**Dogma:** The God Below lives and rules among us; do his will and he will bless you, oppose him and he will destroy you. Obey his least command with perfect fidelity. The time comes soon when he will rise and claim the rule of all the world; those who stand with him at that time will be exalted, those who oppose him will die.

#### Abyssal Domain

**Granted power:** The cleric is immune to pressure damage from deep water, and is also immune to the bends (if the Dungeon Master is using this optional rule, described below.)

1<sup>st</sup>: *Speak with animals* (aquatic creatures only)

2<sup>nd</sup>: *Water breathing*

3<sup>rd</sup>: *Deeper darkness*

4<sup>th</sup>: *Fear*

5<sup>th</sup>: *Control water* (double normal area of effect)

6<sup>th</sup>: *Insanity*

7<sup>th</sup>: *Control weather*

8<sup>th</sup>: *Summon monster VIII* (aquatic creatures only)

9<sup>th</sup>: *Crushing tentacles* (as *Crushing hand*)

[The mindset of his subjects is another theme which "Virundus" does not address at length; the overall impression created by his narration is of a personality pathologically disinterested in the psychology of others. If the other elements of his description of his domain are accurate, it seems to me that their society — caste-bound, highly militarized, and, above all, ruled by a godlike figure actually present in their very midst — must be socially stagnant and extremely authoritarian, perhaps resembling that of Falkovnia in the degree of domination the "state" — here probably represented by a combination of religious and military authority — has over the daily life of the domain's inhabitants.

Unusually for such a state, the secret police seem to be almost entirely external in its orientation; "Virundus" claims to maintain a wide-ranging and well-informed network of spies, but the internal discipline of the realm seems to rely more on the sheer terror of displeasing or going against "Virundus" wishes.

The main "positive" or hopeful message present in Xalote society would seem to be "Virundus" declared intention of bringing all the surface world beneath his sway, and richly rewarding those who serve him well in this exploit. With the information at hand I posit a people dominated by fear and religious fervor, convinced of the immanence of their divinity and certain that the day will soon come when they will follow their god to victory.]

### Religions

All who live beneath the wave know and acknowledge Me as their sovereign, Emperor and God, and they do obeisance to me according to the old laws. No other god holds sway here, as all my servants know. The worship of all others, past or present, is forbidden those who live within the Deep; he who denies it will die.



## *Art and Trade*

Alas for the cunning artisans, the workers in gold and silver, the layers of mosaics and painters of murals! All they have wrought is here still, but the skill of their hands is lost. Some there are who labor in stone or coral, fewer still who brave the fire of Skotos and there work metal in the molten deep; but there are treasures to be found here still, stores of knowledge from old times, the plunder of a thousand kingdoms and the tribute of ten thousand satraps. Over and above all these things there may be found all the wealth of the great deep; whether it be pearls and other gemstones, the sea-wrack of ships broken in the storm, the plunder of the dry-lands and sun-lands, all these things serving to enrich My kingdom. Those who serve Me in the lands above, the *peripateioi* who traverse the dry-lands and sun-lands in My service, exchange this wealth for those things found needful, wrought metal and other goods for which the fire is needful; My servants shall hasten to supply My friends with all they may desire from the wealth of My hand.

## *History*

Time would fail to speak of all I have caused to be done by My servants in the time since the wrath of the old god brought my empire

below the wave. These scores of years I have sought the surface world, to make Myself and My Will known to all; those who went carried the word of My coming and the knowledge of My great city Xalot, and the message that all must bow the knee or be cast down. For many scores of years all these exertions bore but little fruit, for but few of My servants sent beyond the bounds of the Deep, into the sun-lands and dry-lands, returned to Me to tell me of their doings; while others remained in the sun-lands and dry-lands, and forgot Me, changing their obedience for the memory of obedience and, at last, for ignorance and weakness. But few (and they shall be well-rewarded) heard My servants and obeyed the call of the Deep, leaving the thralldom of the Winter-Warlock for a better master.

In the ten years past all has changed; by My exertions and those of the magi and hieroi who serve Me I have caused My dominion to be joined with the dry-lands and sun-lands more closely, the better to work My will upon them. My eyes now see beyond the waves, My hands reached beyond the tides; My faithful servants travel the mountains of the dry-lands. All these things shall be mine at last.



## Government

All beneath the wave must serve Me or be destroyed; beyond this there is no law. My chief servitors, who carry out My works, I have named as Polemarchs, rulers of the rifts and satraps over all Hadalpelagos. The chief of all the priests is Archon; the commander of my soldiers in the City itself is Strategos; the highest of the magi is Magistrate. Each gives My word to those of his own kind, the Archon ruling all lesser peoples, who are not permitted to approach My presence. Any who oppose My will are devoured by My wrath, and there are but few who are so foolhardy; I am the strong friend of all who befriend Me, the terrible foe of all who oppose.

## Conclusions

So concludes the double narrative compiled by Brother Dirac on that dire night! Those who read this will understand the import of all compiled here; it seems that Shay-lot, that fabled city of the lost, is *real*—and that its influence reaches from that sub-aqueous realm into our own. It seems to me, in reading over all that has been written, that “Virundus” is almost petitioning (perhaps I should say, *demanding*) our assistance in his schemes of dominion; he is at some pains to note the high regard he holds for mages, and

the many rewards that he gives his friends—and the destruction he intends to wreak on his enemies.

In a way, this new knowledge is a source of difficulties; having received his embassy, in the unwilling person of Brother Dirac, we may now find ourselves obliged to respond to these overtures or risk the wrath of their author. For my part I believe he greatly exaggerates his ability to influence events on *terra firma*; but it might prove more fruitful to open negotiations with this power from below, at least as a means of gaining more information about his true strengths, weakness, and agenda. (I feel it possible that Brother Dirac may have been reserved for just such a purpose—to serve as a future liaison between our Fraternity and this “Virundus”. Almost I hope, for his sake, that his walking into the Nocturnal Sea was for him *only* the end of his former life—and not the beginning of a new one.)

## *The Drowning Deep*

### *Teleportation in the Deep*

Under normal circumstances teleportation in the Drowning Deep follows the normal rules for underwater adventuring in D&D described in *Stormwrack*. The Dungeon Master may also wish to apply rules for dramatic pressure changes—such as attempting to teleport to the surface from the ocean floor. Teleportation succeeds under these circumstances, but immediately induces the bends. Everyone teleported to the surface must make a Fortitude save at DC (10 + 1 per 20 feet of depth risen) each round for the next ten rounds. Each failure causes 1d4 points of Dex and Str damage; a character with a Dex or Str of 0 does not die immediately, but does begin to drown. *Remove disease*, *heal*, or other similar spells end this effect, but casting spells through the intense pain induced by the bends requires a DC 30 Concentration check. Attempting to teleport to a lower depth in the domain may also deal damage, according to the pressure rules laid out in *Stormwrack*.

### *As heard in a port...*

"Isn't it precious? The pearls, the ivory, the strangely long, fluid design? Have you ever seen anything comparable? No doubt one such as you will have heard whispers of Shaylot, of the city lost beneath the sea. This is its key. Take it into your hands. Do you not hear the waves, taste the salt, feel the tug of the current in your hair? I assure you that its owner dreams much, much more. But what is one such as I to do with the sea? What is gold, indeed forgotten treasures untold, to the Vistani? But a chain that is not to be borne. The thing offends me. It is a curse, filling my thoughts with concerns that would turn me from the open road. Veritably I have spoken of it, have told you its truth. It is mine now to do with as I wish and I would sell it to you. Let us come to a mutually agreeable price for a key that is a treasure."

-Dr. Vinchenzio, travelling showman and Vistani outcast

### *Dread Possibility: The Groom of the Sea*

Seafarers are a suspicious lot and those of Arbora are no exception. They know well that the Nocturnal Sea is a fickle mistress, caressing one day, killing the next. To divert her fell attentions, every year they kidnap a youth possessed of great beauty, array him in fine garments, put a coral ring upon his finger, and wed him to the sea on the night of summer's first new moon. Much stock is put in this rite for the groom is always seen to go willingly and the sea is invariably calm, as though the bride were awaiting her lover's coming. The rite is performed by an ancient ship's chaplain.

The few sailors who have accompanied him, rowing him out of sight of land, whisper variously of the sea reaching up with taloned hands, webbed-fingers, tentacles, or even black mists to take possession of her prize.

Of course these men usually imbibe in not a little rum before setting off, so it is difficult to know what truly is to be seen.

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# *Conclusions*

*Minutes of the Umbra*

## Conclusions

Fellow Umbra; we meet in shadow. Who hears?

I HEAR.

*I hear.*

*I hear.*

I hear.

**(UNISON:) THE EYES OF THE WATCHERS ARE ON US.**

First, Brother Hazan's compiled report.

YES...QUITE INTERESTING.

No trace of Brother Dirac has been found, I gather?

*Not yet. Probing too vigorously now may be premature, all things considered.*

A MATTER FOR ANOTHER DAY, I CONCUR.

*And I.*

NOT TOO LATE, OF COURSE. WE ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES INTERESTED IN THAT MATTER.

Caught that, did you? The woman-thing's appearance was a fortuitous one, I presume: the sea-hermit's conduct is hardly subtle.

*True. But his tactics were intriguing. Counter-reflective defense, against a spell outside his documented repertoire?*

## Conclusions

*Indeed. Further tests of his abilities are in order. It's a pity he's so intransigent; even ignorant of Shadow, he plainly holds knowledge worth having.*

*Oh, it's not entirely a pity.*

True. Hardly a likely ally for the renegade. If van Rijn had sought sanctuary with Todstein's master, his spirit would no doubt be bound to some ramshackle grisgol monstrosity by now.

*Unpleasant thought.*

Unpleasant for him, perhaps.

So the traitor is not to be found in the Nocturnal Sea.

*Yes. And this possible arcane sighting near Neverwere Manor?*

I strongly suspect this cloaked figure's identity is just one part of that split lich.

NOT OF ANY INTEREST TO US FOR THE MOMENT.

*This new matter? The manifesto from below?*

NOT A CONTRIBUTOR AT PRESENT, OBVIOUSLY; BUT IT SEEMS EAGER TO BECOME SO.

*A prospect which demands attention; but, I think, no immediate action. Unlike the Lady.*

Yes. I intend to take up her invitation myself.

*You? Yourself? (laughter) Oh, how very droll.*

## Conclusions

Your japes are tedious.

SURELY THE TASK, AS BROTHER DIRAC DESCRIBED IT, DEMANDS AN EXPERIENCED EYE; I CAN THINK OF NO-ONE BETTER SUITED FOR AN INITIAL VISIT. WHAT OF THE LIGHTHOUSE, AND BARON EVENSONG'S REQUEST?

*I think neither demands personal attention from any of us at present.*

The other sea next, then?

OF COURSE. THE APPEARANCE OF PROGRESS IS AS ESSENTIAL AS ACTUAL PROGRESS, AT PRESENT. IT IS ALWAYS WISE TO MAKE SOME GESTURE SUITABLE FOR OBSERVATION, IF ONLY TO CONCEAL OUR INVESTIGATION OF OUR MORE PROMISING LEADS.

Especially when the gesture draws others to reveal themselves.

*And importantly, it gives the brethren the opportunity to work together, and to feel they contribute to the common cause.*

INDEED. NOTHING IS SO IMPORTANT, AT PRESENT, AS MAINTAINING OUR COHESION AND ESPRIT DE CORPS IN THE FACE OF SO DAMAGING A DEFECTION. I TRUST THAT ALL OF US KEEP THIS IN MIND AS WE GO FORWARD.

As you say.

...

*Indeed.*

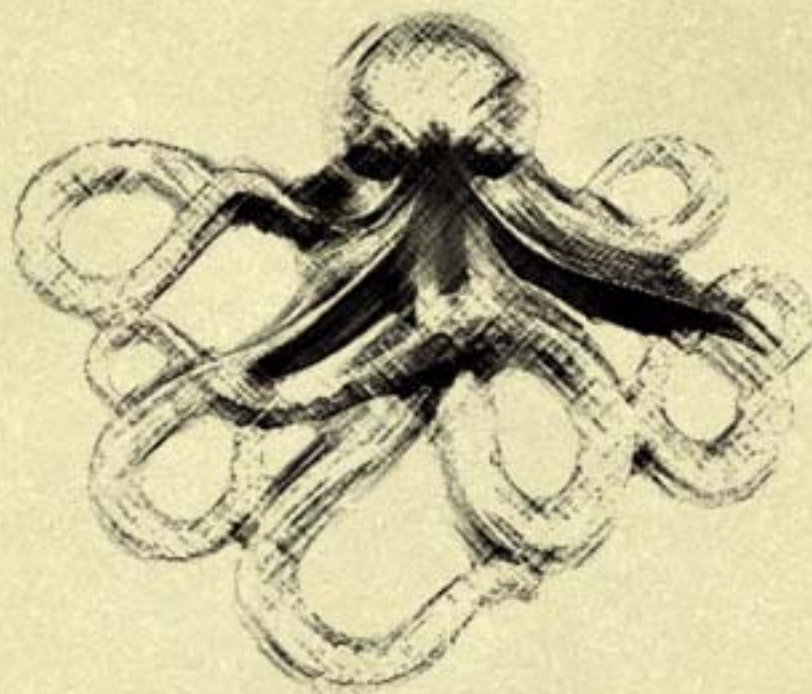
VERY WELL. FELLOW-UMBRA, I GIVE YOU THE FRATERNITY OF SHADOWS!

(UNISON:) SCIENTIAE ET REGNUM SUM NOSTRA INTRO UMBRA!

## *Conclusions*



# PART VIII



*Dungeon Master's  
Appendixes*

*Appendix I*

*New Magic and Feats*

## *Appendix I New Magic and Feats*

### *Creature Creation Feats*

The reclusive wizard spawns new creatures in a dark cellar, trying to outperform nature: in his mind, he seeks to prove that gods are not the only ones responsible for new life.

The evil cleric uses dark divine magics to craft a new horror to do his bidding and guard the temple from unbelievers, obedient as a skeleton, yet not limited to the low intelligence and non-existent creativity of the Obedient Dead: in his mind, he uses his patron's gifts to create a slave worthy of that dark master.

The obsessed druid labors to make new, prettier beasts, better equipped to survive this harsh world than those that Mother Nature, alone, has made: in her mind, she assists life's ascent up the ladder of evolution.

All these spellcasters, for reasons of their own, seek to transform life and change it according to their wishes. The feats described here are the means by which they endeavor to see these hubristic dreams literally made flesh.

#### *Create Magical Beast (Item Creation feat)*

**Prerequisites:** Caster level 5th, 1 item creation feat, Knowledge (arcana) 5 ranks, Heal 3 ranks.

**Benefit:** This feat enables a spellcaster to create a magical beast, by merging two or more creatures of the animal, magical beast, or vermin type. The process is both costly and time-consuming, and requires preparatory research for each new combination a given spellcaster attempts.

There is a chance that the completed creature will turn upon its creator. Use of this feat in Ravenloft warrants a Powers check (3%), as an act of sheer hubris or perversion.

#### *Create Aberration (Item Creation feat)*

**Prerequisites:** Caster level 10th, Create Magical Beast, Knowledge (arcana) 10 ranks, Heal 5 ranks.

**Benefit:** With this feat, any two or more living corporeal creatures can be combined to create a living aberration. The process is both costly and time-consuming, and requires preparatory research for each new combination which a given spellcaster attempts. Only the greatest of spellcasters can tamper with life to such a degree.

There is a chance that the completed creature will turn upon its creator. Also, use of this feat in Ravenloft warrants a Powers check (4%), as an act of seer hubris or perversion.

Druids are incapable of learning this feat, as creating such bizarre life forms is anathema to their divine magic.

### *Creating a Magical Beast*

The process of creating magical beasts is presented here, along with an example of these rules in action. In the text to follow, the creature upon which modifications are to be made is called the "base creature". Other creatures being used to enhance such a melded life form are called "secondary creatures". The magical beast to be created is called the "target creature".

#### *A. Advance Preparation*

In order to create a magical beast, the creator needs a lab costing at least 500 gp/HD of the target creature. This lab must be equipped specifically for the creation of magical beasts and/or aberrations; an alchemical laboratory, for example, will not suffice for this task.

Regardless of the laboratory's size and quality, the target creature's HD can be no higher than the feat-user's caster level -1.

## Appendix J New Magic and Feats

### B. Creature Design

Designing a new magical beast is a two-step process. First, the creator must come up with a plan for creating the target creature, and select the base and secondary creatures necessary for its creation. Second, suitable base and secondary creatures must be procured and examined, to work out the details.

Note that the first step may be omitted if a creator copies a creature read about or encountered in the past (e.g. reverse-engineering an owlbear), but the second stage *must* be done in person. Creators cannot, for instance, copy a creation-ritual from another spellcaster's research notes, although consulting another caster's successful design provides a circumstance bonus to the would-be creator's skill check (see below).

A creature produced by means of the Create Magical Beast feat may itself be used

as the base creature for a new ritual in turn. Such a "stacking" of beasts requires that a separate ritual be devised, each time an additional set of secondary creatures is added to the mix.

#### Step 1

The player tells the DM how he or she envisions the target creature, or the DM thinks of an idea for such a monster. The DM decides if the creation is even possible, and what base and secondary creatures will be required to produce it. Secondary creatures may be no more than one size category bigger or smaller than the base creature.

If the creature is to demonstrate unique or atypical behaviors, these must also be selected at this time; if not, the target creature will act like the base creature by default.

### Creature Creation Example: The Scorpiwolf

A 7th level wizard named Fragdan decides to make a scorpion-tailed wolf as a guardian for his secluded home. The wizard's residence contains a 2500 gp laboratory, which he equipped specifically for this purpose.

Fragdan's finished creature may have up to 5 HD. If he wants a stronger monster, he will have to add more equipment to his lab before he begins his work. In no case can Fragdan create a magical beast of more than 6 HD, unless he gains more levels as a wizard.

After some initial research, Fragdan decides that Medium scorpions should be combined with a wolf from Verbek to create what he needs. As he wants a moderately-powerful guardian, he decides to use three scorpions rather than one, to give his creation increased resilience, more abilities, and deadlier venom.

When contemplating the creature and its function as a guardian, Fragdan decides to remove the wolf's pack instincts, to make the "scorpiwolf" a solitary creature. This will let it stand guard in solitude for long periods, and ensures he need not create a whole pack of them.

Here, the target creature is the scorpion-tailed wolf. The base creature is a normal wolf, and the secondary creatures are the three scorpions; using three secondary creatures, rather than one, will increase the finished target creature's HD. The DM decides that the scorpions must be monstrous Medium scorpions and the base creature, a wolf from Verbek. The wizard's choice to change the behavior of the scorpion-tailed wolf is also noted, as this decision will factor into the procedure later.

If Fragdan later decides that a winged scorpiwolf would be better than a land-bound one, he will need to start again at this stage, and devise a separate ritual to incorporate a scorpiwolf and some winged creature into a single magical beast.

## Appendix I New Magic and Feats

### Step 2

The spellcaster must acquire and study a set of living specimens of the base creature and all secondary creature(s). Such study includes vivisection, and always results in the deaths of these initial specimens. In the case of sentient magical beasts, or of vivisections performed without anesthesia (see *Van Richten's Arsenal*) on specimens with an Int of 1 or 2, this may incur an additional Powers check.

This stage of the process takes 3 days, plus one day for each secondary creature. The research costs 50 gp/day, not counting the purchase price of the specimens (DM's

discretion), plus one vial of anesthetic or ether per non-mindless specimen per day (if desired). At the end of the procedure, the creator must pass a Knowledge (arcana) check, with a DC of 15 + HD of the target creature. This DC is increased by 1 for each secondary creature of the base creature's type, or 2 for each secondary creature of another type. For each facet of the base creature's natural behavior that is to be changed (social vs. solitary, predator vs. scavenger, diurnal vs. nocturnal, etc), the DC also increases by 1.

A +5 circumstance bonus applies to the Knowledge (arcana) check if the creator can consult design notes from another,

*After some traveling and bargaining, Fragdan acquires a healthy wolf from Verbek and three Medium monstrous scorpions. He sets to work, vivisecting and examining the creatures to determine how their bodies (alive or dead) react to various magics and treatments. After six laborious days and the expenditure of 300 gp, plus six doses of ether for the wolf, he has yet to come up with a workable design, and all his specimens are dead and need to be replaced.*

*His research so far wasn't a total failure, however, as his experiments have shown that the scorpions must've been untouched by magic throughout their lives in order to be successfully incorporated into his scorpiwolf. Fragdan acquires several more creatures, and sets to work again. After two more retries (12 days and 600 gp), he finishes designing the arcane ritual that will merge these creatures into a tough, scorpion-tailed wolf, while stripping away the pack instincts of normal wolves. In the event he decides to create additional scorpiwolves, Fragdan won't have to do the research for the ritual again: he just has to perform it.*

The base DC for Fragdan's Knowledge (arcana) check was 15, +5 for the target creature's HD. This was further modified by +6, for three secondary creatures of a different creature-type (vermin) than the base creature (animal), and +1 for changing the wolf's pack instinct to solitary, for a final DC of 27. As Fragdan is inventing this creature from scratch, he cannot gain a +5 circumstance bonus for consulting the notes of a previous creator; he does receive a +2 bonus for his ranks in Knowledge (nature), as his specimens are animals and vermin.

*It takes Fragdan three tries to succeed on this check. The DM rules that the first failure was because the wild scorpions he'd purchased had been captured with a Hold Monster spell; alternately, they might have needed to be from Har'Akir, hatched in darkness, of a different species, etc. His second failure occurred because integrating the circulatory systems of a mammal and an arachnid (different creature types) isn't an easy task. Each of his failures teaches Fragdan more about how not to build a scorpiwolf, so he receives a +2 circumstance bonus on his second attempt to design one properly, and a +4 bonus on the third.*

*To prevent them from struggling under the knife, Fragdan had used ether to anaesthetize the wolves used in his research. This spares him from any need for a Powers check (yet).*

## Appendix J New Magic and Feats

successful creator of a similar target creature, or is advised directly by such a person. If the base and/or secondary creatures are either animals or vermin, and the creator has 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (nature), a +2 bonus from synergy also applies to the Knowledge (arcana) check. Each previous failed attempt to design the ritual also grants a cumulative +2 circumstance bonus, as the creator learns from past failures.

If the base and the secondary creatures are of the same species (i.e. the creator simply wants to make a higher-HD or multi-headed version of the base creature), another +3 circumstance bonus applies to the Knowledge (arcana) check, and no secondary specimens are needed for vivisection. The cost of research is also halved if the target creature's HD, alone, are being augmented, although the minimum of 3 days' work is still required.

If the Knowledge check succeeds, the caster has managed to devise the arcane or divine ritual needed to create the target creature and can proceed. This particular ritual may be attempted as many times as the caster wishes, without need for further research. If it fails, the DM may decide that the caster had misjudged what sort of creatures are needed (e.g. wrong subspecies, wrong place of origin, wrong history), or that the character simply needs more study.

### G. Creature Assembly

Having developed a workable design, the caster must use a fresh set of creatures, this time to merge them. The process of assembling the target creature takes one day, plus an additional day for each secondary creature. It costs 200gp/day +200 gp per HD of the target creature, and drains 50 XP per target creature HD from the spellcaster. The ritual must be performed under similar conditions to the construction of a magic item, save that the process *cannot* be set aside in mid-ritual: if the creator's work is interrupted, the base and secondary creatures become unsuitable and the assembly must be started again, with new specimens.

Success is determined by a Heal check with a base DC of 10, +1 per HD of the target creature and +1 per secondary creature used. A creator with 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (nature) receives a +2 bonus from synergy on this Heal check, provided the base and/or secondary creatures are either animals or vermin. Success on the Heal check to create a specific sort of target creature also gives the creator a +5 competence bonus on subsequent Heal checks to create similar target creatures. If the base creature and secondary creatures are of the same species, an additional +4 circumstance bonus applies to the Heal check, as merging similar creatures is easier than merging dissimilar ones.

At the DM's discretion, sentient magical beasts may be allowed a saving throw to resist being incorporated into the target creature, as per the Create Aberration feat (see below). Magical beasts which were themselves a product of this feat never receive a saving throw.

If the creator's Heal check fails, the target creature is still created, but it is hideously distorted and in agony. It must pass an immediate Fortitude save as the same DC as its maker's Heal check, or else it writhes in helpless anguish and dies within minutes of its creation. Even if it survives, it exists in a state of constant pain, is permanently and irrevocably afflicted with the sickened condition, and is likely to rebel against its maker if not euthanized. Witnessing such a deformed "mistake" is grounds for a Horror save, at a DC of 10 + ½ creature's HD.

Upon the creation of a creature, the spellcaster must make a Powers check, whether or not it is malformed or survives the procedure.

## Appendix I New Magic and Feats

Fragdan is ready to make his creation. He prepares a fresh set of creatures and sets to work. The ritual is lengthy and costly, taking four days and 1800 gp in components, and draining 250 XP from the wizard.

*The creatures remain caged for the whole ritual and in close proximity. Connected by arcane symbols, lines, and even copper wires, the creatures merge with a flash of light at the end of the ritual. The resulting creature appears in the specially-prepared stone circle in the middle; the procedure has worked properly, so it survives the transformation.*

*Fragdan has good cause to be happy; depending on his knowledge of medicine, biology, and healing, there was a risk that the creature would be created, but it would lie helpless as its merged body failed to support it and would swiftly die. Likewise, it might have been twisted and deformed – more so than intended, that is – yet still dangerous and mad with pain. It seems that this time, Fragdan has managed to integrate the internal organs and biological functions of his creation properly.*

*Suddenly, Fragdan's elation is disturbed by an eerie sensation of being watched. Just for a moment, he is wary ... but no, his creation is healthy, and his efforts have succeeded!*

Fragdan's creation-ritual takes one day, plus three days for three secondary creatures. It costs 200gp/day +1000 gp, and 50 XP for each of the scoriwolf's 5 HD. His Heal check DC is 10 + 5 (for the scoriwolf's HD) +3 (for the three scorpions), for a total DC of 18. He receives a +2 bonus from synergy on his check, due to his ranks in Knowledge (nature).

*Fragdan's first Heal check succeeds, so the scoriwolf is neither deformed nor dying. In the future, he will have a +5 competence bonus on Heal checks to create more scoriwolves. He also passes his 3% Powers check, so the Dark Powers leave the wizard unmarked for his temerity ... at least, for now.*

### D. Creature Loyalty

Merely having created a creature does not guarantee its loyalty. Wise beast-makers will have a few friends around when assembling new monsters, in case the molded flesh should choose to pounce once it stops writhing.

Immediately after its assembly, the caster must test the target creature's Loyalty. This test is treated like a specialized Diplomacy (or Wild Empathy) check. The target creature's initial attitude is indifferent. If the creature was created in a malformed state, the DC for this and all other Charisma-based skill checks made toward it is increased by +12, as its terrible agony sours its reactions to everything around it.

**The Loyalty check is:** 1d20 + caster level + caster's Charisma bonus – target creature's HD.

Whatever the creature's attitude becomes, in the wake of this Loyalty check, is the completed beast's default reaction to its maker from then on. Barring extreme abuse or betrayal, such a creature's "friendly" reaction will not become less amicable, and an intensely loyal ("helpful" attitude) magical beast is quite willing to die in its maker's defense or service: a major reason why many spellcasters choose to trust their own creations over mere hirelings.

Note that on a failed check, a new-made creature could easily become unfriendly to its maker, perhaps even attacking outright if such behavior is consistent with its nature and attitude.

## *Appendix J New Magic and Feats*

*Just in case his creation isn't friendly, the wizard has a couple of mercenaries ready to stop it if necessary. After some initial disorientation, the scorpiwolf looked to its creator with mild curiosity. It steps out of the arcane circle, sniffs its maker's hand, then submissively rolls on its back at his feet. Relieved, Fragdan breathes easily again.*

*As the base creature is a wolf and it retains canine body language, the scorpiwolf now reacts to Fragdan much as a trained dog would react to his owner. Even if the ritual succeeds every time, there is no guarantee that future scorpiwolves will be as tractable as this first one.*

Now that the scorpiwolf has been created, Fragdan rolls a Loyalty check to determine its reaction to him. He rolls 1d20, +7 (his caster level), +1 (his Charisma bonus), -5 (for the finished scorpiwolf's HD). Fragdan's total check result is 17, which moves the scorpiwolf's reaction from indifferent to friendly, as per *PHB* p. 72.

Had the wizard rolled badly on this Loyalty check, the scorpiwolf would have growled and snapped if approached, like any wild wolf that feels cornered (unfriendly). It might even have attacked immediately and viciously (hostile): it's a monster, after all, and was built to be an aggressive loner.

### *F. Training and Breeding*

Once created, a magical beast may be trained as per other monsters of similar intelligence. Its creator receives a +5 circumstance bonus to all Charisma-based skill or ability checks toward the newly-made creature. This is particularly useful in handling the creature (if its Intelligence is 2 or less), or persuading it to cooperate (if it is sentient, with Intelligence 3 or higher).

Base or secondary creatures' personalities and memories are always extinguished in the ritual. The target creature possesses full motor skills, practical knowledge (e.g. what kinds of food it eats), language skills (if any), and skill ranks, but it lacks any memories of past experiences and may (if smart enough) even realize that it is a magical creation. Its personality and habits are broadly like those of the base creature, barring deliberate alterations to its behavior.

To train a non-sentient magical beast, the creator rolls a special Handle Animal check, with the following modifiers:

When instructing such a creation, the creator (and only its creator) can use the Handle Animal skill as if trained, even if the creator has no ranks in that skill.

The creator's +5 Charisma bonus applies to the Handle Animal check, offsetting the +5 that is applied to the DC because the target creature is a magical beast.

A "friendly" or "helpful" target creature is treated as domesticated for purposes of Handle Animal checks, despite being a magical beast. This comes in handy if the creator's minions need to handle or 'push' the beast in the creator's absence.

For sentient magical beasts, the Diplomacy skill and direct instruction are required to teach it instead. A sentient magical beast which does not share any language with its creator may be taught to understand a single humanoid tongue in (24 months / beast's Int); it will not be able to speak this language aloud unless the base creature could talk, or unless vocal cords from a secondary creature with speech were incorporated into its anatomy.

The target creature may be sterile, or may be capable of reproduction, at the DM's discretion. Malformed magical beasts are always sterile. Created beasts that can breed do so in the same manner as the base creature (live birth, laying eggs, etc), and at a similar rate. To produce young, breeding pairs of created beasts must be created by the same spellcaster, using the same ritual and the same kinds of base and secondary creatures. The offspring of magically-created beasts are not subject to the same +5 bonus to the maker's Charisma-based checks as their parents.



## Appendix I New Magic and Feats

*Having won over the scoriwolf's loyalty, Fragdan may now train it as a guardian. It proves easy to train as a guard-beast, and it is content to remain alone ... a fortunate preference, as a quick inspection reveals that his new creation lacks a gender, so can never breed. That's okay with Fragdan: he only needs one guard-beast.*

Although he lacks ranks in Handle Animal, Fragdan won't need them to train his scoriwolf, and he gains a +5 competence bonus on his check. It is friendly to him by default, so he automatically treats his creation as domesticated: he need not "rear" it to make it trainable.

As Fragdan just barely passed his Knowledge (arcana) check on his third try, the DM rules that his scoriwolf is sterile. If the wizard later decides he wants more scoriwolves, he must either create each and every one with his ritual, or else go back to the drawing board and research a new ritual that will produce fertile specimens, then create at least one male and one female capable of breeding. If he chooses the latter course, he must start again at Step 2 of "Creature Design", above.

### Created Beast Template

This template is a guideline for determining the statistics of target creatures produced by the Create Magical Beast feat. Aspects of this template may be overridden or altered at the DM's discretion, as creating life is a chancy process: the results are often unpredictable!

"Created beast" is an inherited template that may be added to any corporeal animal, magical beast, or vermin (referred to hereafter as the base creature). This base creature then takes on certain features of another corporeal animal, magical beast, or vermin (referred to hereafter as a secondary creature). The effects of this template stack, so a magical beast with the "created beast" template may be used as the base creature for another, more complex magical beast.

The finished creature (also called "target creature") gains a single physical feature or paired set of features (head, tail, legs, wings, stinger, etc) of its creator's choice from the secondary creature, along with all attacks, movement type(s), normal senses and/or penalties that come with that feature. Such features replace the corresponding parts of the base creature, if any.

An additional head may be added to a created beast, but only if three secondary creatures of the base creature's own species are incorporated for that purpose. These secondary creatures confer no other benefit

(see below). The extra head may then be switched out for the head of some other creature, if another secondary creature with a different head is also incorporated.

The creator may then choose **one benefit** possessed by the secondary creature to confer upon the base creature, provided it has a better value than the base creature's own. At least one secondary creature must be included in any created beast; if multiple secondary creatures are utilized, each extra specimen confers **an additional benefit** of its creator's choice. Only innate traits, features or capabilities of a secondary creature may be conferred as benefits, not ones acquired through character class advancement (e.g. a gargoyle rogue could confer DR as a benefit, but not the ability to sneak attack). Spell-like abilities may not be conferred through the Create Magical Beast feat, and secondary creatures used to add heads to the base creature do not contribute any such benefit.

Unless otherwise stated, all abilities remain as per base creature.

*Size and Type:* The creature's type changes to magical beast. Recalculate base attack bonus and saves accordingly. Size is unchanged.

*HD:* Increase hit dice to d10s, and add one d10 HD per secondary creature incorporated into it during the creation ritual.

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**Speed:** If limbs from the secondary creature confer a new movement type upon the created beast, or if they replace the corresponding limbs of the base creature, it gains the same speed as the secondary creature. If flight is acquired in this way, its aerial maneuverability is one step worse than that of the secondary creature, to a minimum of clumsy. Otherwise, as base creature.

**AC:** Replace base creature's natural armor bonus with secondary creature's, if caster chooses this as a benefit. Otherwise, as per base creature.

**Attack/Full Attack:** As per natural weapons of base and/or secondary creatures. If a secondary creature's natural weapon replaces one of the base creature's, the secondary creature's attack type and base damage apply (e.g. a rhino's head on a lion's body will gore rather than bite).

If a secondary creature's natural weapon is in addition to the base creature's own, it is treated as a secondary natural weapon by the target creature. If an extra head was added to the base creature, the target creature gains natural attacks appropriate to that head; these function just like attacks made by the base creature's original head (e.g. a tiger's bite is a secondary attack, so both of a two-headed tiger's bite attacks are secondary attacks).

If the base creature lacks natural weapons entirely, any natural weapon which it acquires from the secondary creature becomes its primary attack.

**Special Attacks:** Special attacks of the base creature are retained, provided the corresponding body parts remain. Extraordinary or supernatural attacks of the secondary creature may be gained, but only if the creator selects this as a benefit (e.g. a viper's jaws would not deliver poison unless that benefit is chosen).

**Special Qualities:** As per special attacks. If any sense organs of the base creature have been replaced by the secondary creature's, then all corresponding enhanced or impaired sensory qualities of the secondary creature (low-light vision, scent, light blindness, etc) also replace those of the base creature, even if not selected as a benefit.

**Abilities:** Increase base creature's Strength by +2. It can also receive a +2 to any physical ability, if the caster chooses this benefit and the secondary creature's score in that ability is 2 or more higher than the base creature's.

**Skills:** As per base creature. Skills of the secondary creature may be selected as a benefit, either as new skills or as replacements for the base creature's. If the resulting bonus exceeds the created beast's HD + 3, the difference between them is considered a racial skill bonus. All of the base creature's skills may be treated as class skills, when allotting skill points from increased hit dice.

**Feats:** As per base creature. If new feats become available due to increased HD, the caster may freely choose feats from the secondary creature's feat list, even if the created beast lacks those feats' usual ability prerequisites. Racial bonus feats of the secondary creature may be selected as benefits by the creator, likewise regardless of ability prerequisites.

### Sample Created Beast

#### Scorpiwolf

#### Scorpiwolf

CR 3

Always N Medium magical beast

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60', low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +6, **Spot** +6

**AC** 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14 (+2 Dex, +4 natural)

**hp** 37 (5 HD)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2v

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**Speed** 50'

**Melee** bite +8 (1d6+2) and sting +2 (1d4+1 + poison)

**Base Atk** +5; **Grp** +7

**Atk Options** trip, poison (injury, Fort DC 14, 1d3 Con/1d3 Con)

**Abilities** Str 15 Dex 15 Con 15 Int 2 Wis 12 Cha 6

**Feats** Alertness, Track<sup>B</sup>, Weapon Focus (bite)

**Skills** Hide +2, Listen +6, Move Silently +3, Spot +6, Survival +2 (+6 when scent-tracking)

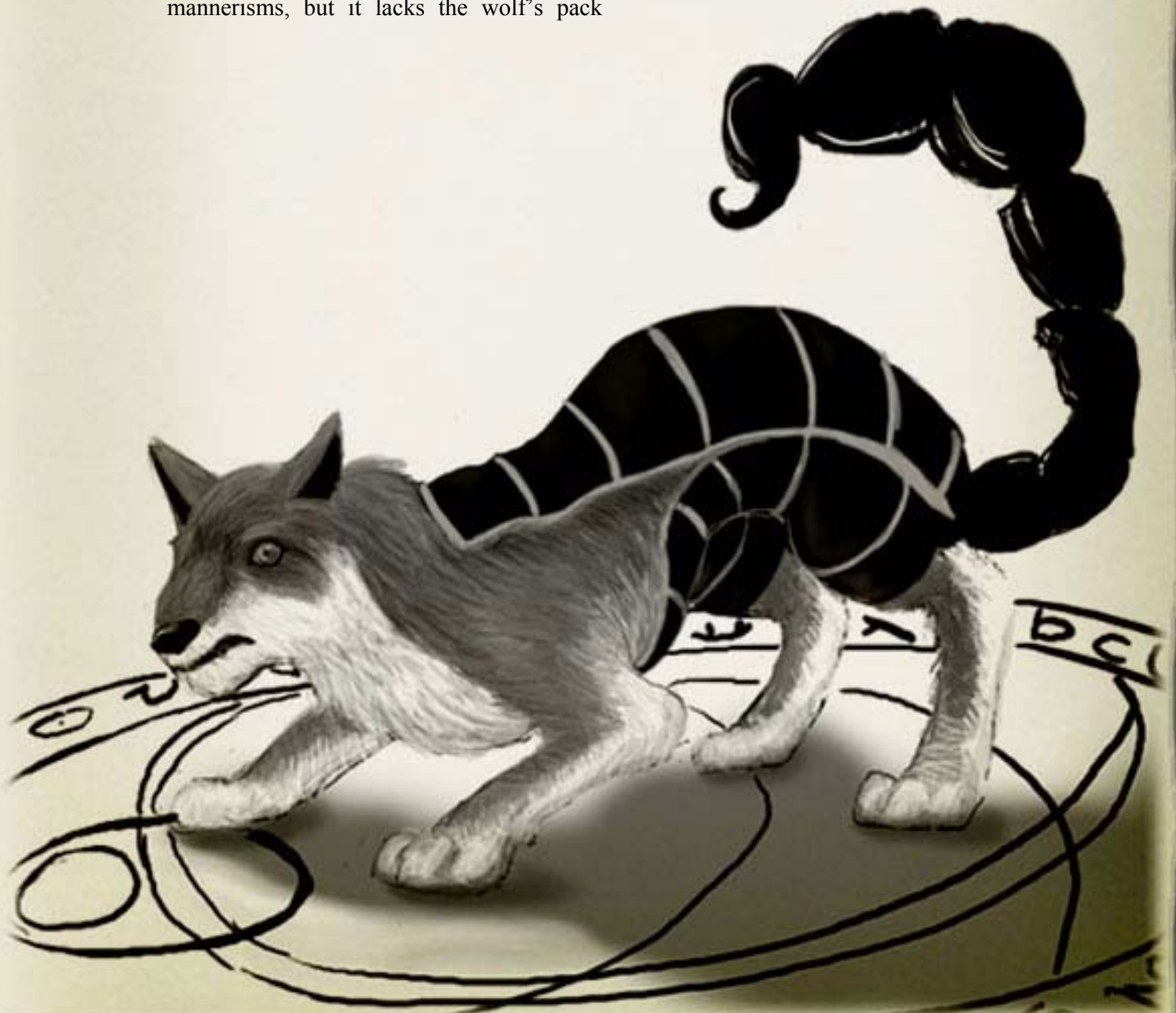
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*This growling, wolfish creature's body is plated with chitin, interspersed with patchy tufts of fur, and a barbed scorpion's stinger curls up and over its back, dripping venom.*

The scoriwolf is a monster crafted from wild beasts and a wizard's hubris. Four wolves and twelve monstrous scorpions were destroyed to that end, most of them painfully. It is wolf-like in its habits and mannerisms, but it lacks the wolf's pack

instincts and is quite content to hunt alone or guard its master's hideout.

The scoriwolf receives a wolf's +4 racial bonus when tracking by scent, and its bite and trip attacks, skills, and feats. From the scorpions, it receives a stinger (physical feature), and three benefits: poison, a thick carapace covered with tufts of wolf fur, and the ability to see in pitch darkness. The use of three scorpions in its creation also granted it more HD than a wolf, thus increasing its venom's potency and combat prowess, and giving it another feat (Alertness).



## Appendix J New Magic and Feats

### Creating Aberrations

In most mechanical respects, using the Create Aberration feat is similar to using the Create Magical Beast feat, with the following exceptions:

- The base and secondary creatures may be of any living, corporeal creature type, so long as they are no more than one category apart in size. The target creature's HD may not exceed the creator's HD +1.
- The target creature will be an aberration instead of a magical beast, with d8 HD and a good Will save. The caster can choose to raise one of the aberration's other saves as a selected benefit, either by +4, or to any one secondary creature's save, whichever is less. A created aberration does not gain the augmented humanoid subtype, even if the base or secondary creatures are humanoids.
- The DCs for the Knowledge (arcana) and Heal checks are increased by +2 for each creature type utilized, *including* the base creature's own type. For example, merging a giant with a magical beast increases the DCs by +4.
- The monetary costs of research and assembly are *at least* twice as high as for creating magical beasts. At the DM's discretion, it could cost up to 5 times more. XP costs are the same as for making magical beasts.
- Spell-like abilities of secondary creatures may be selected as benefits by the caster, provided the level of spell is no greater than  $\frac{1}{2}$  the target creature's HD. Caster level for such spell-like abilities is that of the target creature, or of the secondary creature, *whichever is less*. (Second-generation offspring of created aberrations use their own caster levels for spell-like abilities, not the secondary creatures'.)
- If sentient beings other than magical beasts are used as base or secondary creatures, they receive a Fortitude save to resist being incorporated into the target creature. The DC of this saving throw is  $10 + \frac{1}{2}$  creator's level + creator's spell-DC ability modifier +1 per secondary creature used. Spell resistance applies, when resisting this effect.

#### Example: Howling Horror

A 12th level wizard wants to meld a dread troll (base creature) with a werewolf, in order to create a regenerating aberration with damage reduction. Each of the two creatures must make a Fortitude save at the ritual's end, with a DC of 10 +6 (half of 12), +5 (the wizard's Int bonus), +1 (one werewolf), for a total of 22. If the troll's Fort save succeeds, the ritual will fail automatically, so the DM rolls its save first.

To improve her chance of success, the wizard keeps an extra werewolf caged nearby during the ritual, just in case the one bound in the ritual circle makes its saving throw. If that happens, the caged lycanthrope must immediately make a saving throw of its own, as the dark magics of the ritual will target it next. If its save fails, the back-up specimen vanishes from the cage as its flesh merges with that of the troll.

If the first werewolf fails to save, the caged specimen need not roll a saving throw at all, as the wizard's ritual requires only *one* secondary creature. The caged werewolf is spared, to watch in horror as its pack-mate is hideously fused with the troll ... and to wonder who the *real* monster in the ritual chamber is.

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If a creature successfully makes its save, it is not incorporated. This may result in a weaker finished product than intended, if fewer secondary creatures than desired are successfully incorporated into the aberration. If *all* of the secondary creatures present save against the ritual, or the base creature does so, the ritual fails. Wise spellcasters keep extra creatures on hand in case some of the secondary ones make their saves, or impair their specimens' Fortitude saves with spells or Con-damaging poisons.

- Using humanoids or equivalent sentient races (DM's discretion) as base or secondary creatures in the final creation-ritual constitutes premeditated murder, warranting an additional Powers check. Vivisectioning such beings during creature-creation research constitutes both premeditated murder and (if not anesthetized) routine torture, also incurring a check.
- If a person is incorporated into a created aberration, *Wish* or *Miracle* can extract that person alive from the target creature, destroying the aberration in the process. *Limited Wish* or *Break Enchantment* cast on the slain carcass of the aberration can reverse the merging ritual, retrieving incorporated creatures' dead remains. An extracted corpse can then be raised from the dead, albeit with the Ravenloft setting's usual risks.
- As with created magical beasts, a created aberration retains no memories from the incorporated base or secondary creatures. Because they are often sentient, created aberrations are more likely to deduce how they came to be. At the DM's discretion, this realization could impact the creature's immediate reaction to its creator, which may change the DC of the Loyalty check.
- Last but not least, an aberration-creator may designate himself as the base creature. To retain his personality and

memories once merged, he must succeed on a Will save, with the same DC as an unwilling creature's Fortitude save. If he fails this Will save, he has transformed himself into a monster with no memory; if he succeeds, he retains his former identity and memories. All of the usual risks of the creation-ritual apply, including malformation or death.

Even if all necessary saves and the Heal check succeed, the transformed creator must immediately make a DC 22 Madness save, due to the painful and violent nature of the transformation. Of course, given the risks, most spellcasters who dare to attempt such a procedure are already unstable in the extreme.

Note that any PC who survives such a grotesque merging (even a voluntary one) becomes an NPC. If extracted from the fusion via powerful magic, that character may be played as a PC again, with his or her previous statistics.

### Sample Created Aberration

#### *The God of Many Faces*

This evil man turned himself to a monster in an attempt to gain the power to freely blend in wherever he wished, be it the bed of a married woman or the courts of royalty. He lost his own identity in the bargain, however, and now thinks of himself as a god amongst mortals.

The base creature for this villain is a half-elf Sor 11/Rog 1. Secondary creatures are a human werewolf and three dread doppelgangers, from which he acquired a slam attack, DR, natural armor, and the power to change shape and read thoughts.

#### **The God of Many Faces**

**CR14**

NE Medium aberration

**Init** +3; **Senses** Listen +10, Spot +9; detect thoughts (DC 22), low-light vision

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**Languages** Elvish (Sithican dialect)\*, Balok, Mordentish, Vaasi; empathic link

**OR** 4 if powers revealed, 1 as half-elf

**AC** 21, touch 15, flat-footed 18 (+3 Dex, +6 natural, +2 deflection [*ring*])

**hp** 104 (16 HD); **DR** 10/silver

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +10, **Will** +14 [+2 from *belt*]

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** slam +13/+8 (1d6+1) or +1 *human bane dagger* +13/+8 (1d4+2 + poison)

**Base Atk** +12; Grp +13

**Atk Options** sneak attack +1d6, poison (injury, Fort DC 15, 1d6 Str /-)

**Special Actions** detect thoughts (DC 22) at will

**Combat Gear** silver +1 *human bane dagger*; *potion of cure serious wounds* (3d8+5); *potion of lesser restoration*; 4 doses of poison.

**Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 11<sup>th</sup>; DC 14 + spell level):

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5<sup>th</sup> (4/day) – baleful polymorph, dominate person

4<sup>th</sup> (7/day) – anesthesia<sup>VRA</sup>, confusion, lesser geas

3<sup>rd</sup> (7/day) – explosive runes, nondetection, rage, suggestion

2<sup>nd</sup> (7/day) – invisibility, scorching ray, siren song<sup>VRA</sup>, Tasha's hideous laughter, touch of idiocy

1<sup>st</sup> (7/day) – charm person, color spray, expeditious retreat, true strike, ventriloquism

0 (6/day) – acid splash, daze, detect magic, detect poison, flare, mage hand, prestidigitation, silent portal<sup>SpC</sup>, touch of fatigue

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**Abilities** Str 13, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 19

**SQ** change shape, dread familiar (lizard), scalpel's kiss, share spells, trapfinding

**Feats** Alertness<sup>F</sup>, Craft Wondrous Item, Create Aberration, Create Magical Beast, Eschew Materials, Silent Spell

**Skills** Bluff +13, Climb +4, Concentration +7, Diplomacy +6, Disguise +4\*, Gather Information +6, Heal +11 (+13 for magical beasts or aberrations), Hide +9, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Knowledge (local) +8, Knowledge (religion) +4, Listen +10, Move Silently +9, Open Lock +7, Search +9, Sleight of Hand +9, Spellcraft +11, Spot +9

**Possessions** Combat gear; *belt of resistance* +2 (as *cloak*); *vivisectionist's scalpel* (grants +6 competence bonus to surgical or creature-creation Heal checks for 24 hours if blade is used to inflict pain on a helpless creature); +2 *ring of protection*.

**Change Shape (Su):** As dread doppelganger; see *VRF: Doppelgangers* for details.

**Detect Thoughts (Su):** As dread doppelganger; see *VRF: Doppelgangers* for details.

**Scalpel's Kiss** Before becoming an aberration, the half-elf sorcerer who became the God of Many Faces failed a Powers check, acquiring a +2 bonus to all Heal checks involving either magical beasts or aberrations, himself included. As a penalty, the palms of his hands bleed slowly for one hour – harmless, but gruesome and potentially betraying – any time he uses a slashing weapon, scalpel, or other edged implement to cut another living creature.

**Skills** As a (former) half-elf, the God of Many Faces gains a +2 racial bonus on Diplomacy and Gather Information checks and a +1 bonus to Search, Spot and Listen checks. His dread familiar, a chameleon [Speed 10 ft., +16 Hide; otherwise as standard lizard], grants him a +3 bonus to Climb checks and (if in range) the Alertness feat.

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\* The God of Many Faces gains a +10 bonus on Disguise checks when using Change Shape. He is too inexperienced with his Detect Thoughts ability to receive bonuses to social skill checks when he uses it, as a true dread doppelganger would.

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*The half-elf's amiable smile widens into a malicious grin, and his fist lashes out in a sucker-punch, his knuckles suddenly grown as knotted and hard as rocks.*

The self-styled "God of Many Faces" was born little more than a year ago, when a half-elf sorcerer (whose name the "God" neither knows, nor cares enough to find out) went much too far in his effort to enhance his own abilities.

The sorcerer in question was born into disgrace, never meeting his father or knowing anything about him. In fact, the man was a powerful sorcerer who'd enchanted his Sithican mother for a single night. Treated badly by her people for succumbing to "inferior" human magic, and far worse after giving birth to a half-elf, she and her child became outcasts from elven society. In desperation to feed herself and her young son, his mother was forced to prostitute herself as an exotic pleasure for the human men of neighboring domains. Years of exploitation and shame ground down the elf-woman's spirit, until it broke at last; she committed suicide when her son was still a boy, never suspecting he had inherited his sire's arcane gifts.

Left on his own, the next few years of the half-elf's life weren't easy; he resorted to theft and con-artistry to survive, until his own nascent talent for sorcery emerged. Accustomed to men treating his mother as something to be used and discarded, he treated others in the same way: as patsies to be bilked or tools to exploit for his own pleasure. Turning his magic (primarily Enchantments) to that opportunistic end, he grew up to be a powerful sorcerer, supporting a hedonistic lifestyle through adventuring and deceit. Forever nagged by the fact that he was neither human nor elf, one thing or the other, he became fascinated by shapechanging magics and creatures of

all kinds, as well as by arcane means of combining two life forms into one.

Following a chance encounter with a doppelganger Exile, the discontented sorcerer hit upon a plan to ritually merge himself with several of its kind, thus claiming their imitative powers for himself. In his mind, he believed that this would allow him to walk as either elf or human as he chose, a "half" no more. Being a lecherous sort, he also thought this would be an easy way to sate his own lusts, by impersonating the spouse or lover of any woman who caught his eye. Reading others' minds was bound to come in handy too, as would increasing his own ability to withstand attacks.

His first series of rituals worked, incorporating powers from three captive doppelgangers into himself, but the half-elf's mind didn't cope perfectly with this transition to his new body. He became delusional, believing he had achieved a measure of divinity, if not true immortality. Obsessed with acquiring more, he hastily prepared a second ritual, this time to render himself nigh-invulnerable to attack. Unfortunately, his hurried attempt to meld with a werewolf went awry: when the process was complete, the fused being that stepped from the ritual circle was no longer the sorcerer, but a newborn entity that recalled nothing but its own "godhood".

The God of Many Faces is aware that he was once a different creature, but he believes that he was destined to become a kind of masked god, ascending to divinity and shedding his fallible mortal body. A self-serving egomaniac, he believes he has transcended the limitations of both humans and elves, people and monsters, and is therefore superior to them all. He savors his abilities to the fullest, freely robbing, exploiting, or murdering victims of all races for his own profit or entertainment. He sometimes takes jobs as an assassin or spy, for the right price or the visceral stimulation of a challenge; he spends his ill-gotten gains on self-gratification and comfort, reverting to outright robbery if in need of quick funds.

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Between his shapechanging powers, his many spells of enchantment, and his sheer charisma, the God of Many Faces seldom sleeps alone ... whether his chosen bedmates actually agree or not. He doesn't realize it, but he has become far worse than his father: only the fact that his second ritual also left him sterile has stopped him from leaving his own misbegotten offspring scattered across the Core, to live out his previous life's early misfortunes.

Though bereft of memory, the God resents both humans and elves by force of habit, and finds it amusing to trick these races into facilitating their own downfall, such as planting *Explosive Runes* in a "spellbook" and selling it to a power-hungry wizard. He often engineers events so that folk who judge others by appearance or race will, themselves, be condemned – and slain – for their own looks or species (e.g. luring a bigoted Sithican elf to Tepest and then tipping off the Inquisition). Unfortunately, such exercises in "poetic justice" often result in innocent casualties (e.g. the elf bigot's traveling companions could wind up on the Inquisitors' pyre as well). The God of Many Faces resents the idea of anyone else having a "happy childhood", and has been known to deliberately use his magic on pregnant women, in hopes his tampering will cause them to give birth to calibans, not normal babies.

Working by trial and error, the God has rediscovered the procedure for incorporating multiple life forms into one, and he is considering adding still more monstrous powers to his own. He is also considering using this knowledge to create others of his kind (or rather, some *lesser* creatures of his kind), but he knows that this goal is at odds with increasing his own powers: the more rituals he benefits from himself, the more difficult it will be to create underlings with similar abilities. Which option he pursues may depend on which he meets, first: a new monster with powers he covets, or a half-elf he finds interesting enough to "recruit".

## New Spells

### *Frostshroud*

Transmutation

**Level:** Drd 0, sor / wiz 0

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Area:** One 10' square of surface / level (S)

**Duration:** Special

This spell causes an inanimate surface to become covered by a thick white coating of frost. The frost does no harm to the affected surface, but it allows coated surfaces or items to blend into the background in a snowy or icy environment. The Search DC to locate a structure or object that matches its wintery surroundings in this way is increased by +5, as are checks to find or interpret features of a frost-shrouded surface, such as engravings or hidden panels on a coated wall. If this spell is applied to an ice-slick surface, the frost adds texture to the ice sheet and changes the usual +5 increase for slippery surfaces' Balance and Climb DCs to +2.

*Frost shroud* is limited in that the affected surface must be at or below freezing temperature, else the layer of frost melts away as rapidly as it forms, terminating the spell's effect in one round. If cast under suitably-frigid conditions, the spell's effect will last until the ambient temperature rises sufficiently to melt its entire area of effect. If a small part of the affected surface is warmed to the melting point, but not the whole surface, the *frost shroud*'s thawed portion will temporarily lose its coating, then regain it in one round as soon as the cold conditions return. Magical fire damage of 3 hp or more will negate the *frost shroud* permanently in the fire-affected area.

*Material component:* A pinch of powdered glass mixed with several drops of water.



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### Shrink Construct

Transmutation

**Level:** Sor / wiz 5

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** One compliant construct

**Duration:** One day / level; see text

When applied to a construct which is obedient to the caster, this spell shrinks the construct to 1/16 its normal size in each dimension (to about 1/4000 its original volume and mass). This change effectively reduces the construct's size by four categories (for instance, from Huge to Tiny). The construct becomes inert and immobile for as long as the spell remains in effect. Optionally, the affected construct's composition may also be altered to a cloth-like one; shifting to or from such a state is a standard action.

This spell affects constructs of up to Large size for casters of up to 12<sup>th</sup> level. Casters of 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> level may shrink constructs of up to Huge size, and casters of 17<sup>th</sup> level or more can shrink a construct of up to Gargantuan size. *Shrink construct* bypasses the immunity to magic exhibited by many golems and other powerful constructs. Constructs must be under the absolute control of this spell's caster to be affected; hence, berserk or dread golems are immune to its effects. Even constructs formed of insubstantial materials, such as prismatic golems (*MMIII*), may be affected, provided they are under the caster's sole control.

A construct affected by this spell may be restored to animation and its normal state by a word of command from the original *shrink construct* caster, or merely by tossing it against a solid surface. Its former state is also restored if the magic is dispelled or the construct enters an *antimagic field*. Once the construct regains its original composition and activity, the spell is ended.

*Shrink construct* may be made permanent with a *permanency* spell. In such a case, the construct may be shrunk and expanded an indefinite number of times, but only by the original caster.

Meredoth developed this spell to ensure he could never again be caught defenseless in a magic-suppressed environment. He usually keeps up to half-a-dozen assorted constructs pinned inside the hem of his outer robe, in their shrunken, cloth-like form; any antimagical effect strong enough to stifle his powers also negates the spell, so he need only invert his robe's hems and spin around, and these minions drop to the floor around him and spring to his defense.

### Shrink Item, Greater

Transmutation

**Level:** Sor / wiz 4

This spell functions like *shrink item*, save that it also affects magical items or structures.

The effects of *greater shrink item* and *shrink item* do not stack.

### Somnambulism

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]

**Level:** Asn1, Brd1, Sor/Wiz1

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Range:** Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./level)

**Target:** One sleeping creature

**Duration:** 10 minutes/level

**Saving Throw:** Will negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

This spell causes a sleeping creature to begin sleepwalking. The movements of a sleepwalking creature are random; she may walk in circles within their sleeping area, retrace the paths of her daily routine, walk in a straight line as far as she is able, or even perform small tasks in her sleep such as

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changing clothes, moving small items, or preparing drinks. The *somnambulism* spell provides no control over the sleepwalker's actions. At the end of the spell's duration, the somnambulist will sit or lie down in her current position, returning to normal sleep until she would normally wake.

Sleepwalking creatures are helpless. They are not aware of their surroundings, though if they are in a familiar area they do not run into walls and other obstructions. Striking or wounding awakens a somnambulist, but normal noise or running into walls and other objects does not. Awakening a sleepwalker is a standard action (an application of the aid another action), and depending on the circumstances may prompt a Fear check from the awakening sleepwalker (due to awakening suddenly in an unfamiliar and possibly hostile location).

*Somnambulism* does not affect creatures that do not sleep (such as elves), constructs, or undead creatures.

### *Somnambulism, Directed*

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]

**Level:** Asn4, Brd4, Sor/Wiz4

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Range:** Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./level)

**Target:** One sleeping creature

**Duration:** 10 minutes/level

**Saving Throw:** Will negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

This spell causes a sleeping creature to begin sleepwalking, as with the *Somnambulism* spell, but under the control of the spellcaster. So long as the caster and the target remain within range of each other (25 ft. + 5ft./level), the caster may direct the sleepwalker's movements; exceeding this radius causes the spell to end prematurely. The targeted creature need not actually see or hear the spellcaster's command, as these are conveyed directly to the target's mind via

arcane means. The somnambulist's actions are limited to walking as the caster directs; not even the simple random tasks some sleepwalkers manage are possible under directed *Somnambulism*. At the end of the spell's duration, the somnambulist will sit or lie down in her current position, returning to normal sleep until she would normally wake.

Sleepwalking creatures are helpless. They are not aware of their surroundings, though if they are in a familiar area they do not run into walls and other obstructions unless directed to by the spellcaster. Striking or wounding awakens a somnambulist, but normal noise or running into walls and other objects does not. Awakening a sleepwalker is a standard action (an application of the aid another action), and depending on the circumstances may prompt a Fear check from the awakening sleepwalker (due to awakening suddenly in an unfamiliar and possibly hostile location).

*Directed Somnambulism* does not affect creatures that do not sleep (such as elves), constructs, or undead creatures.

Assassins use this spell to arrange supposedly accidental deaths.

### *Transmute Snow to Stone*

Transmutation [Cold]

**Level:** Sor / wiz 5

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft. / level)

**Area:** One 10' cube / level (S)

**Duration:** Permanent

**Saving Throw:** See text

**Spell Resistance:** No

This spell turns naturally-occurring snow or slush of any depth into a soft stone-like material that resembles porous white marble. The resulting "stone" can be cut and quarried like normal rock for purposes of construction, and resists melting in the same manner as real marble. Chips of less than 1

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pound in weight revert to snow if broken away from the bulk of the stone.

Structures built out of snow (e.g. igloos) may be transmuted by this spell, although those larger than one 10' cube per caster level will require multiple castings. A building constructed of the "stone" created by this spell is quite difficult to heat. In below-freezing ambient temperatures, it feels just as cold inside as outside; in warmer settings, it feels 10° colder inside the building than outdoor conditions and mundane and/or magical effects would otherwise make it.

Creatures standing in slush or snow when it is transmuted to stone are allowed a Reflex save to avoid being trapped. Creatures of Tiny size or smaller, wearing snowshoes, or magically able to walk on the surface of snow are exempt from this threat in snow (but not in slush).

If *transmute snow to stone* is cast on the ceiling of a snow tunnel to cause a cave-in, characters immediately beneath the affected area take 8d6 points of bludgeoning damage, or half that with a DC 15 Reflex save. They are subsequently buried. Creatures no more than two squares outside this 'bury zone' take 3d6 points of bludgeoning damage from sliding debris, or no damage with a DC 15 Reflex save. Those in the 'slide zone' who fail to save are also buried. Effects of being buried by a cave-in are described in the *DMG* (p. 66).

*Transmute snow to stone* counters and dispels *transmute stone to snow*.

*Material component:* A chip of white marble, a pinch of salt, and a teardrop.

### *Transmute Stone to Snow*

Transmutation [Cold]

**Level:** Sor / wiz 5

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft. / level)

**Area:** One 10' cube / level (S)

**Duration:** Permanent

**Saving Throw:** See text

**Spell Resistance:** No

This spell turns natural, uncut or unworked rock of any sort into an equal volume of loose snow. If the spell is cast upon a boulder, for example, the boulder collapses into a hill of snow. Magical stone is unaffected, unless it is a product of *transmute stone to snow*. The depth of snow created from normal stone cannot exceed 10 feet; however, the depth which can be created from already-transmuted snow has no limit. The affected area is treated as heavy snow (*DMG* p. 94) for the purpose of movement.

A creature standing on level stone when it is transmuted sinks in 2 +1d4 feet, halting movement and incurring a -2 penalty to attack rolls and AC. Such a creature may extricate itself from snow in two rounds, or as a full-round action with another creature's aid. Creatures of Tiny size or less, or creatures able to walk atop snow (e.g. due to magic or snowshoes) are exempt from sinking.

If *transmute stone to snow* is cast on the ceiling of a cavern or tunnel, the snow falls to the floor and spreads out in a mound to a depth of 5 feet. For example, a 12<sup>th</sup>-level caster could convert twelve 10-foot cubes into snow. Drifted on the floor, this would cover an area of twenty-four 10-foot squares with snow to a depth of 5 feet. The falling snow and the ensuing cave-in deal 8d6 points of bludgeoning damage to anyone caught directly beneath the area, or half damage to those who succeed on their Reflex saves.

If stone on a steep slope is transmuted into snow, the resulting collapse is treated as a miniature avalanche (*DMG* p. 90). The total area of the 'bury zone' is equal to that of the spell effect, while the 'slide zone' extends an additional 10' around the bury zone's edges.

Castles and large stone buildings are generally immune to the effect of this spell, since *transmute stone to snow* can't affect worked or cut stone and doesn't reach deep enough to undermine such buildings' foundations. However, small buildings or

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structures often rest on foundations shallow enough to be damaged or even partially toppled by this spell.

*Dispel magic* or *transmute snow to stone* returns the snow to its original state, but not necessarily its original form. Snow created from stone melts normally at temperatures above freezing; exact melting time varies with how warm it is and how loosely the snow is spread out.

*Transmute stone to snow* counters and dispels *transmute snow to stone*.

*Material component:* A small lump of salt crystal and a teardrop.

### Vision Stone

Divination

**Level:** Sor / wiz 4

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Close (25 ft. + 5 ft. / 2 levels)

**Target:** One gem or item / level

**Duration:** Permanent until discharged

**Saving Throw:** Special

This spell enables the caster to enclose a telepathic message in a gem or other object. The caster is able to set the conditions under which the message will be revealed, under the same criteria and limitations as a *magic mouth* spell. When a creature meeting the specified conditions holds the object, it glows and pulses, and the message is delivered mentally to the creature. The message remains in the object until its magic is dispelled or the conditions for its delivery are met. Each casting of this spell can imbue up to one object per caster level; all affected objects must carry the same message and respond to the same triggering condition.

*Vision stone* enables the caster to place a 50-word mental message or a one-minute vision into the designated object. The delivery is inaudible, 'heard' only in the mind of the recipient. The *vision stone* cannot trigger magical effects, but post-hypnotic suggestions (implanted via the

Hypnosis skill) may be activated in this way. A sufficiently distressing vision or message may suffice to trigger a Fear or Horror save. Recipients of a *vision stone*'s signal can still perceive and react to their surroundings.

The content of a *vision stone* is entirely up to the caster, who may incorporate real, hypothetical, or wholly fantastic experiences into a vision. Visions may be experienced from the point of view of the recipient, from some other creature's perspective (e.g. a vision of being a dragon or ghost), or as an omniscient, intangible observer. Likewise, messages may be 'heard' in the voice of the caster, that of some other creature (including the recipient), or an anonymous, genderless drone.

Items worth 100 gp or more (either gems or fabricated items) may be imbued with *vision stone* at up to caster level 14. At caster levels of 15 or higher, gems or crafted items of any value may be imbued with such an effect. Only non-magical items may be endowed with messages in this way, and the affected object disintegrates immediately after the message is delivered.

*Material component:* An eyelash and a tooth from any creature.

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*Appendix II*

*New Monsters*

## Undead Salient Abilities

The following salient abilities are suitable for undead encountered in the Nocturnal Sea region, as most were reverse-engineered by the necromancer Meredoth, based on exotic Walking Dead native to his world of origin. Note that, while each is recommended for either Obedient Dead (skeletons, zombies and lebentod) or Hungry Dead (ghouls, ghosts, and their ilk), it is not unusual for Walking Dead of one sort to possess salient abilities typical of another category (as per *VRGttWD*).

DC values for saving throws against all the salient abilities listed here are  $10 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ HD} + \text{Charisma}$  modifier.

### *Aura of Chilling Weakness (Su):*

**CR adjustment:** +1/3

As a free action, the undead creature can surround itself with a slowly-spreading aura of eerie greenish light which weakens its opponents. This emanation radiates from the creature's head, and expands in radius by 5' increments each round, from an initial 5' to a 25' radius on its 5<sup>th</sup> round of operation. In natural darkness, the aura creates shadowy illumination within its area of effect. Effects that extinguish light, such as *darkness*, hide the glow but do not negate the aura's effects.

Any living creature touching or entering the creature's aura must make a Will save or suffer a -2 penalty to attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks, and saves (identical to the shaken condition, but not a fear effect) for 1d4+1 rounds. A saving throw must be made for each round a living being remains in contact with the undead's aura, but the effects of multiple failed saves are not cumulative.

Aura of Chilling Weakness resembles the Fear Aura<sup>*VRGttWD*</sup> that is found in some of Ravenloft's Restless Dead, but this variant is more commonly seen in the Hungry Dead.

### *Bane-Orbs (Su):*

**CR adjustment:** +1/2

In lieu of its usual claw or slam attack(s), this undead creature wields a pair of glowing balls of red light, one in each hand. These "bane-orbs" may be used to make touch attacks, either at melee weapons when held or as ranged weapons if thrown (30' increments). If a bane-orb is thrown as an attack, it immediately vanishes after it has struck or missed its target, and a new one appears in the creature's vacant hand. The undead may extinguish the bane-orbs as a free action if it needs to use its hands for some other purpose (e.g. to climb a ladder); recalling them to its hands again is likewise a free action.

Bane-orbs inflict a base 1d6 hp of damage against their targets. In addition, if a bane-orb hits a creature of the same humanoid subtype as the undead had been in life, damage is multiplied as if it had scored a critical hit (e.g. an elf skeleton with this salient ability does 2d6 hp of damage to elves with its bane-orbs). An actual critical hit scored with a bane-orb will also multiply the damage inflicted. Damage caused by a bane-orb attack is untyped.

This ability may be assigned to an undead creature twice. If so, the bane-orbs' color changes from red to green; base damage increases to 1d10; and the orbs acquire the Bane special weapon property against the creature's former humanoid subtype. In addition, any special attack effect which the undead would normally inflict via its slam or claw attack(s) is transmitted by the bane-orb (e.g. an elf ghoul with the enhanced Bane-Orbs power would inflict 2d10 hp of damage to an elf target [+2d6 on a critical hit], or 1d10 hp + paralysis to a non-elf).

Bane-Orbs are usually seen in the Obedient Dead, particularly those in which more than the minimum number of HD have been concentrated via the *animate dead* spell. Undead of less than 2 HD are not strong enough to channel the energies of this salient ability. If a lebentod possesses the Bane-Orbs power, its separated hands each wield one orb as a melee attack; a hand must be attached to an arm to hurl its bane-orb.

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### *Manifest Spite (Su):*

**CR adjustment:** +1

Once per round, the undead creature can generate an aggressive, free-roaming entity known as a "spite", which then attacks a single designated target. Congealed from the undead's own hostility to life, these Tiny manifestations will chase and assault their assigned foe until the enemy is dead, flees more than 100' from the generating undead, or until the spites are successfully Turned or destroyed. An undead creature can manifest a maximum of one spite at a time, per HD it possesses.

In most respects, a spite functions like a *spiritual weapon* spell effect, save that it cannot be negated by spell resistance, and the damage it inflicts depends upon its target's alignment: 1d6 for Evil targets, 1d8 for Neutral ones, and 1d10 for Good-aligned ones. They also receive a +4 bonus on their attack rolls, relative to the undead which generated them. The 'caster level' of a spite is equal to its undead creator's Hit Dice, for purposes of dispelling effects.

For Turning attempts, a spite has half the HD of the undead creature which created it. As spites' existence is extremely fragile and temporary, these manifestations can be destroyed normally by a Turning attempt (i.e. Ravenloft-specific rules that limit Turn Undead do not apply). A spite cannot be rebuked or commanded.

In appearance, a spite resembles a ghostly streak of white with a snarling face at one end, that tears through the air at fantastic speeds (100 ft). Its gnashing maw gapes wide, its eyes are beady and hateful, and a pair of miniscule, useless arms hang off its sides, often pointing threateningly at their designated target an instant before they dive to the attack. If an undead that creates these vicious little pests is destroyed, all its spites emit high-pitched wails of foiled hatred, and disperse into nothingness.

To date, Manifest Spite is an ability that is found only in some of the niche-ensconced doorkeepers of Todstein's Hall of Flesh. Only sentient undead with a Charisma of 15 or more may possess this power, which

Meredoth based (not very accurately) on tales he'd heard second-hand.

### *Mind-Hazing Touch (Su):*

**CR adjustment:** +1/2

Any victim hit by the undead creature's melee attack suffers 1 point of Intelligence damage, and must make a Will save or enter into a Mind Haze. This replaces the normal damage or other effects of melee attacks by an undead of its type. If the undead creature has more than one type of attack (such as claws and a bite), this salient ability applies to one of its natural attack types.

Creatures under the effects of a Mind Haze will continue to repeat the same action or sequence of actions – moving, attacking, etc – until the Haze wears off in 2d4 rounds. If repeating such an action would be actively suicidal (e.g. continuing to walk off a cliff), a new saving throw is allowed; if repetition is physically impossible (e.g. retrieving and drinking a potion already used), the victim pantomimes the action. Victims under the effect of a Mind Haze are considered to be flat-footed.

Mind-Hazing Touch is a rare power, and one not introduced by Meredoth. It occasionally is seen in fog cadavers animated by zombie fogs that blow inland off the Nocturnal Sea, or in mist horrors created by the mist golems of Fogview Bay beach.

### *Retributive Death-Cry (Ex):*

**CR adjustment:** +3/4

When the undead creature is destroyed, it unleashes a piercing death-cry. All sentient living beings who hear this shriek (a sonic effect) must make a Will save or become shaken and suffer a -4 morale penalty to Dexterity. These penalties persist until the victim receives the benefits of a *remove fear* or *remove curse* spell.

Retributive Death-Cry is a power virtually unique to zombies, and particularly to those designated as suicide troops. They are often deployed in combination with undead which have the Self-Destruct (*VRGttWD*) salient



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ability, so their shrieks can impair the Reflex saves of the latter power's targets.

### *Scream of the Graveborn (Su):*

**CR adjustment:** +1/2

As a full-round action, the undead creature may scream (a sonic effect) once every 3 rounds. Living beings within 20' must make a Will save or temporarily gain one negative level. Multiple screams' effects stack, and any creature temporarily reduced to 0 levels or Hit Dice falls unconscious and cannot be roused for 3d4 x 10 minutes. The negative levels persist only 1d4 minutes, so can never result in permanent level loss.

Scream of the Graveborn is most common among the Hungry Dead.

### *Shrunken (Ex):*

**CR adjustment:** +1

By magical and/or mundane preservation techniques, the bodies of undead with this salient ability were shrunken before being animated. A Shrunken undead's size is reduced by two steps (Medium to Tiny, etc), with all attendant modifiers to attack rolls, armor class, space/reach, abilities and skill checks. Base damage per attack remains unchanged, although Strength modifiers to damage will likely be reduced. The undead also acquires the benefits of the "withered" state of preservation (*VRGttWD*), if it did not already possess them (i.e. natural armor bonus of 1/2 HD + Charisma modifier).

Shrunken undead also receive a +6 racial bonus to Jump checks. A zombie which is treated in this way before animation is more coordinated than usual for its type, losing the Single Actions Only special quality.

Only bodies with flesh and skin can be Shrunken, and such postmortem shrinking of remains is incompatible with the process of creating a lebentod. Thus, this salient ability is mainly seen in zombies, though it also crops up in a few Ancient Dead crafted by primitive jungle tribes.

### *Spirit-Rending Touch (Su):*

**CR adjustment:** +3/4

Any target touched by the undead creature must make a Fortitude save or be panicked for 1d4+1 rounds, while suffering 1d3 points of Constitution damage. In each subsequent round of panic, the victim must save again or take another 1d3 Con damage. Creatures reduced to 3 Con or less fall unconscious for 10 minutes, which halts the ability damage.

Spirit-Rending Touch is common among Obedient Dead created from those slain by energy-draining magics. It has also been seen in free-willed ghosts arisen after such a death, sometimes in the form of a gaze attack rather than a touch attack.

## *Flayed Rider*

*(Nuckalavee)*

*Legend claims the Flayed Rider was once a man, yet the shape that rears up from the fouled pond's stagnant water is less human than any goblin. Its squat, malformed man's torso is wedded at the waist to a quadruped body only superficially equine, furlless and slime-slickened, with dripping frills of fin and a long tail like an eel's, now lashing the brackish water's surface to froth. Its wrists join to webbed, taloned things more paw than hand; ungainly frog-feet, also clawed, sprout from its fetlocks in place of hooves.*

*Worse even than its grossly-bloated, ogreish face or the hate-filled, spit-spraying bellow of rage it unleashes, is its skin: transparent as a tadpole's belly, such that the taut cords of blanched muscles, the ivory of bone and sickly yellow of gristle, the ropy coils of gut in its paired bellies and the pulsing streams of black blood within its veins, are hideously cast into view.*

*Ezra's mercy, let it **not** have been a man...*

### **The Flayed Rider**

**CR 14**

Male nuckalavee ranger 6

CE Large aberration (aquatic)

**Init** +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft; Listen +6, Spot +6

**Aura** death 120', fear 60', stench 30'

**Languages** Nuckalavee\*, Grabenite

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### Outcast Rating 9

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**AC** 17, touch 13, flat-footed 13

(-1 size, +4 Dex, +4 natural)

**hp** 132 (17 HD); fast healing 3

**Immune** poison

**Resist** fire resistance 30; **SR** 21

**Fort** +11, **Ref** +12, **Will** +12

**Weakness** freshwater aversion, *geas*, turning vulnerability

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**Speed** 40 ft. (8 squares), swim 90 ft; unhindered by boggy or muddy terrain

**Melee** 2 claws +21 (2d8+8 plus killing touch); or

**Melee** unarmed touch +21 (killing touch); or

**Melee** rake +21 (2d6+4) [Centaur Trample<sup>RWi</sup>]

**Ranged** Large composite longbow (+8 Str bonus) +18/+13 (2d6+8/x3); or

**Ranged** Large composite longbow (+8 Str bonus) +18/+16/+11 (2d6+8/x3) [Rapid Shot]; or

**Ranged** Large composite longbow (+8 Str bonus) +14/+14 (2d6+8/x3) [Manyshot, 2 arrows]; or

**Ranged** Large composite longbow (+8 Str bonus) +12/+12/+12 (2d6+8/x3) [Manyshot, 3 arrows]

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**Space** 10 ft; **Reach** 5 ft

**Base Atk** +14/+9; **Grp** +26

**Atk Options** Cleave, Power Attack, killing touch (Fort save DC 21 *finger of death* effect); Able Sniper<sup>RWi</sup>, Manyshot, Rapid Shot; favored enemy (humans) +4, favored enemy (fey) +2

**Special Actions** breath weapon (6d6 cold damage 60' cone, Ref save DC 21), rebuke undead (5/day, 1d20+2 turning check, 2d6+13 HD affected), Centaur Trample<sup>RWi</sup>

**Combat Gear** Large composite longbow (+8 Str bonus), 2 quivers of 30 Large arrows

**Ranger Spells Prepared** (CL 3<sup>rd</sup>):

1<sup>st</sup> – *entangle*, *resist energy*

**Abilities** Str 27, Dex 18, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 13, Cha 14

**SQ** amphibious, ghastly appearance, magical beast empathy +4, speak with undead, undead affinity

**Feats** Able Sniper<sup>RWi</sup>, Alertness, Centaur Trample<sup>RWi</sup>, Cleave, Endurance<sup>B</sup>, Manyshot<sup>B</sup>, Power Attack, Rapid Shot<sup>B</sup>, Track<sup>B</sup>

[<sup>RWi</sup> – *Races of the Wild*. Centaur Trample permits the Rider to overrun as per the Trample feat, and to make a rake attack on a knocked-down target with its clawed front flipper. Agile Sniper grants it a +2 bonus for ranged attacks on flat-footed targets within 30', and a +4 bonus on its Hide checks to conceal itself again after it fires from hiding.]

**Skills** Craft (fletcher) +5, Hide +10, Listen +6, Move Silently +12, Spot +6, Survival +10, Swim +16\*

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**Breath Weapon (Su):** Once every 1d4 rounds, the Flayed Rider can breathe a 60' cone of frost (if on land) or icy, brackish water (underwater), either of which inflicts 6d6 hp of cold damage. The Reflex save DC is Constitution-based, and success reduces cold damage by half.

**Death Aura (Su):** The nuckalavee is always surrounded by an aura which is deadly to weaker varieties of natural life. Tiny or smaller animals and vermin within 120' of this creature incur one negative level per minute until slain. The Flayed Rider cannot choose to suppress this aura's effects. While familiars suffer no negative levels from this Death Aura, those that had been Tiny or smaller animals before becoming familiars feel extremely ill inside its area of effect. Such a familiar must pass a Fort save (DC 21;

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Constitution-based) or it acquires the nauseated condition until it leaves the aura's radius. Upon exiting the aura, it feels better immediately. The Rider's death aura is a death effect.

**Fear Aura (Su):** The nuckalavee radiates a secondary aura of fear in a 60' radius. This effect is identical to the *fear* spell; its Will save (DC 21) is Constitution-based. The creature is able to suppress or re-activate its Fear Aura as a swift action.

**Freshwater Aversion** Like all its kind, the nuckalavee is repelled by fresh water, even though it causes it no actual harm. It retreats beneath the stagnant mires of the Aassumpf when it rains, and will not cross freshwater rivers, lakes, or streams. If splashed with at least a gallon of fresh water, it must make a Fear save (DC 20); if this results in panic, it remains panicked until it can immerse its body in brackish or stagnant water, and for 1 minute thereafter. If struck by a water-producing spell, the DC for its Fear save is equal to the spell's DC -2.

**Geas** Graben Island's nuckalavee is cursed by a permanent *geas* effect which forbids it from entering the sea. If somehow forced or tricked into doing so, it suffers the usual consequences of defying a *geas/quest* spell.

**Ghastly Appearance (Ex):** The physical appearance of the Rider is so menacing as to impose a +2 to the DC of any Fear saves it provokes, and so grotesque as to add +4 to the DC of any Horror saves its actions incur. Merely seeing its hideousness for the first time is grounds for a DC 15 Horror save, or DC 18 for those who believe the (false) tales that it was once a human being.

**Killing Touch (Sp)** Three times daily, the Flayed Rider may employ an effect similar to *finger of death* in combination with either its claw attacks or an unarmed touch attack. Its effective caster level is 11, so those who pass their Fort saves (DC 21; Constitution-based) suffer 3d6+11 hp of damage. It may hold the charge of this

attack under the same terms as other touch-attack spells.

Those slain by the nuckalavee's Killing Touch die in terrible agony, their skin fading to a grisly transparency like its own. Horror saves incurred by witnessing death or dead bodies have their DCs increased by +3, if they involve victims of the Flayed Rider's lethal touch.

**Magical Beast Empathy (Ex):** Due to its aura, the nuckalavee is unable to use Wild Empathy on normal animals, which sense its inherent malignance and never respond favorably to its presence. It may use Wild Empathy on magical beasts at the usual -4 penalty (included above).

**Rebuke Undead (Su):** Following its arrival in Ravenloft, the Rider's racial affinity for the undead has been enhanced by the dark forces that roused it from its slumber. It can rebuke, command, and bolster the undead 5 times per day as an 11<sup>th</sup> level evil cleric.

**Speak With Undead (Sp)** As *speak with animals*, save that all undead (intelligent or not) are able to understand the nuckalavee's speech, and sentient undead can speak to it even if they would otherwise be incapable of doing so (e.g. it could discern a mute Slain skeleton 'speaking' as if the skeleton had the Dust Tongue feat). The Flayed Rider need make no effort to use this ability, though it must be within range to overhear the undead creature or vice versa.

**Stench (Ex):** The nuckalavee emits a horrid aroma of decay that can be detected from up to 100 feet away. All living creatures within 30 ft. of this monster must make a Fort save (DC 21; Constitution-based) or be sickened as long as they remain in range, and for one round thereafter. A successful save grants immunity to the stench for 24 hours. If a creature that failed its save escapes from the stench's area of effect, then enters it again, it must make a new save. The Rider's stench is not a poison, so resistances and spells that affect poison have no impact on its effects.

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Creatures without a sense of smell are immune.

**Turning Vulnerability** Due to its malignant nature and devout allegiance to undeath, the Dark Powers have rendered the nuckalavee of Graben Island susceptible to Turn Undead effects. Turning attempts that use positive energy suffer a -2 penalty to turning checks against it; those using negative energy do not. This creature can never be destroyed by Turn/Rebuke Undead, but only commanded or driven away. The Flayed Rider may not use its own Rebuke Undead ability to bolster itself against others' Turning powers.

**Undead Affinity (Ex):** The nuckalavee's utter loathing for living things and its life-quenching aura lead most undead to regard it as one of their own. It receives all the effects of the Deathly Pallor<sup>CoD</sup> feat, in that unintelligent undead will not attack it unless specifically commanded to do so. It must pass a Will save to see creatures under the effects of a *hide from undead* spell, and is itself vulnerable to Turn Undead (as above). Intelligent undead react to it as if it had a +4 circumstance bonus to Charisma.

**Skills** \* The Rider receives a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or to avoid a hazard. It can always choose to Take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it moves in a straight line. On opposed Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot or Survival checks made against humans, it receives a +4 bonus to its skill check, or a +2 bonus against fey.

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A freakish, aggressive aberration dragged against its will first to Graben Island, then to Ravenloft, the Flayed Rider is a kill-crazy psychopath trapped by its own folly. Barred from either rampaging freely across the Island or returning to its home in the sea, by a *geas* laid on it by men now centuries dead, it chafes and rages against its captivity, yet it lacks the wit or patience to concoct a way

out of the foul marshes which have become both its territory and its prison.

Were it confined on Liffe rather than Graben Island, the nuckalavee's malice is such that it would most likely become a demilord in its own right. As it is, Meredoth's grip upon Nebligtode is too secure for it to attain such a status ... not that its predicament would change much, if it did.

### Strategy and Tactics

The nuckalavee is a born predator, and uses predatory tactics. Trusting its size, strength, and fear aura to overwhelm and scatter its prey, it enjoys lurking in ambush below the silt-choked, putrid waters of the Aassumpf, hidden by the murk and algal scum. At the sound of squelching footsteps in the mud, it rears up to grapple a victim and haul them into the water to drown. Until it bursts up from the mire, its stench is masked by the reek of foul swamp-water, and it suppresses its fear aura until it strikes, then activates it to scare off anyone who may try to rescue its prize. It cannot suppress its death aura in the same manner, so the distress of familiars or the presence of dead animal carcasses and insects may yet warn the discerning.

Having tasted blood, the aberration gallops ashore to trample and rend more victims, or retreats underwater if heavily outnumbered, with a parting shot from its breath weapon. Even if it falls back after its initial strike, its appetite for death is only whetted, not sated; driven off once, it stalks its quarry through the Senkenwiese and Aassumpf, alternately picking off its targets with breath weapon blasts, hit-and-run charges, and trampling, or sniping at them with its massive bone-and-sinew longbow. Panicked foes scattered by its fear aura or sheer hideousness are tracked down and slain one by one, their corpses - frost-rimed, clear-skinned, or eviscerated by its claws - left in their companions' paths to horrify and demoralize its prey.

If seriously endangered, or if a quarry seems likely to escape from its territory altogether, the Rider hauls a few Strangled from their bog-pits, compelling them to assist it via its Rebuke Undead power. The vile aberration hesitates to do this early on,

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as its homicidal lust for blood drives it to slaughter intruders personally whenever possible.

### Ecology

The Graben Island nuckalavee – the only one of its breed in all Nebligtode, though the possibility that others like it might plague the far-off corners of the Land of Mists is a frightening one – has prowled the Aassumpf and Senkenwiese ever since that domain's birth, and only its reluctance to wander far from the rancid pools in which it slumbers has barred it from annihilating every other breathing creature within its territory. Any living thing its lethal aura fails to extinguish, the Flayed Rider eagerly stalks and slays via bow or breath weapon, for it finds *life* every bit as viscerally-repugnant – of value only for the feral joy which its brutal destruction can deliver – as normal sentient beings deem the undead or aberrant to be. Birds or other flying prey are singled out for a particularly cruel death, by means of its Killing Touch, for the aberration envies them their freedom to soar as they see fit, taking out its own captive frustrations on innocent wildlife.

The Flayed Rider is technically omnivorous, but it far prefers to eat the creatures it hunts down, as feeding on both plants and things slain by its aura is 'too easy' ... for itself, and for the food. Its natural habitat is the sea, but the Anatal *geas* still prevents it from venturing into the surf, just as its inborn aversion to clean, running water confines it between the Schicksalflüsse. This leaves it no choice but to lair in stagnant, fetid pools of the marshland, relocating to another area every few months as its aura slays or drives away the available prey. It constructs cage-like structures from the bones of its kills in these foul lakes; it mounts the skulls of three or four of its victims atop these structures, to jut above the tainted surface and draw any available sentient prey into grabbing range, by force of morbid curiosity.

Though not truly undead, the nuckalavee's appearance makes the Grabenite reports of a "flayed rider" less far-fetched than skeptics assume. Its centaur-like, muscular frame is coated in a thick, yet completely transparent

hide, providing an unobstructed and ghastly view of its muscles, skeleton, and innards. Fearsome, hooked talons and webbing adorn its bestial hands and wide, flipper-like feet; its legs, scalp and eel-like tail are fringed by spine-edged fins. Its face resembles a blend of sahuagin and ogre, and three paired sets of gills – flared wide in the water, tightly sealed above the surface – gape at its neck, cheeks, and the junction between its equine and humanoid torsos. The aberration's eyes are big and globular, pitch black all the way through; they bulge out from its face like a frog's. Its throat is dewlapped, and wobbles when it speaks: either a guttural, gargling approximation of Grabenite, or the slurps, clicks, gags and gurgles of its ugly, tongue-tangling racial language by which it speaks to undead.

Despite having resided in Ravenloft for over a century, the Rider does not appear to be aging in the slightest. Whether this is the work of its curse, the Dark Powers, or just a naturally-prolonged lifespan is unsure, given how very little is known of its kind. More curiously, it does not seem to realize how very long it has been in the Land of Mists, harboring resentment for trespassers who escaped it generations ago, and expecting to find and take vengeance upon these same individuals when it escapes the marsh.

### Society

Even on its native world, the Flayed Rider's habits were quite solitary, as its race's fierce territoriality and temperament makes them intolerant of each other's company, save for breeding purposes. It does, however, accept the presence of undead, and the Aassumpf's many Strangled – the Ancient Dead, ritually sacrificed by the Anatal and cast into the bogs – provide it with company of a sort, in the event it feels the need to torment or taunt something for longer than it takes a living thing to die. It uses the Strangled to perform tasks it is too big or ungainly to accomplish itself (e.g. retrieving an arrow-shot victim's body from the top of a tree), or those for which it simply has no skill ... most notably, to repair the massive composite bow which a Strangled servant crafted out of the bones of men and fey creatures.

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The exception to the nuckalavee's iron hold upon the Strangled is Igil Wotanshand, the delusional undead cleric, who believes the other bog-pit mummies are rightfully his to command. Wotanshand's power is too great for the aberration to compel him to service, although it has rebuked him dozens of times and forced the deranged Anatal to rejuvenate twice. Wotanshand believes that the Rider is a "spawn of Hel" and a fiendish blight on Valhalla's glory, but the aberration's natural adaptation to tainted water makes it immune to the blinding sickness which the Ancient Dead *godi* confers with his touch. Thus, a stalemate has persisted between the two for over a hundred years, tested occasionally by Wotanshand's attempts to conscript living trespassers to aid "the All-Father's righteous cause".

For its part, the Rider seems too filled with hatred for living things to ever contemplate their use as allies against Wotanshand, or as a means to escape its imprisonment. While the thought that humans might, perhaps, be able to dismiss the *geas* that bars it from the sea has crossed its mind in rare moments of calm, this notion swiftly evaporates at the first hint of a human presence in its territory, to be recollected only *after* it has slain the trespassers or been driven off with such overwhelming force, it dares not approach them again.

Due to a grudge pre-dating its imprisonment by the Anatal, Graben Island's nuckalavee has a particular resentment for fey creatures of all sorts, and it has exterminated most indigenous fey from its corner of the Island. Though it despises humans more, it may actually turn aside from its pursuit of human prey for the chance to hunt one of the fey, figuring that any human in its territory will be easy to track down later, once its more-elusive quarry has been dealt with.

**Alignment:** The Flayed Rider is a creature of hate and bloodlust, killing with relish and stalking its prey with gleeful maliciousness. Not very bright, it recognizes only its own wants or needs as real or relevant, and sates them by the quickest and handiest available means, neither respecting nor considering others' welfare.

### Treasure

The nuckalavee has no use for wealth, and it finds the sheen of precious metals and luster of gemstones objectionable, so it casts any riches its victims might carry into the depths of the swamp. Its only possessions of any value are its composite longbow – a morbid and immensely powerful weapon no archer with less muscle-power than itself can wield – and the arrows it crafts from long stalks of Aassumpf reed and the fins and razor-teeth of predatory fishes slain by its aura. Neither bow nor ammunition are magical, although bog-grown resins rubbed into the sinew of its bowstring ensure that the weapon never loses accuracy from being immersed. The quivers it carries, strapped securely on either side of its equine body, are likewise airtight, to keep their contents from being drenched when it swims.

### Golem, Skeletal

*This ungainly-looking, morbid automaton resembles an oversized human skeleton, hastily assembled from mismatched bones, and bound together with string and splinters of wood. Its torso is encased by a metal breastplate. Although roughly humanoid, the creature has four arms: two at its shoulders, the other two attached asymmetrically to its lower ribs. Each of its fleshless hands carries a sword, which it swings with a surprising grace.*

### Golem, Skeletal

CR7

N Large construct

**Init** +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, Listen +0, Spot +0

**Languages** cannot speak; understands its creator's commands

**AC** 24, touch 9, flat-footed 24  
(-1 size, +10 natural, +5 armor)

**hp** 63 (6 HD); **DR** 10/adamantite and bludgeoning

**Immune** cold, electricity, fire, magic

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**Fort** +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2



**Weakness** shatter vulnerability

**Speed** 30 ft. with breastplate (6 squares);  
base speed 40 ft.

**Atk** 4 masterwork Large longswords +8  
(2d6+4/19-20) or

**Atk** 4 slams +7 (1d6+4)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

**Base Atk** +4, **Grp** +12

**Special Actions** berserk

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**Abilities** Str 19, Dex 11, Con -, Int -, Wis 11,  
Cha 1

**SQ** construct traits; immunity to cold, fire,  
electricity & magic; one with weapons;  
shatter vulnerability

**Feats** –

**Skills** –

**Possessions** 4 masterwork large swords,  
Large breastplate

**Berserk (Ex):** When a skeletal golem enters combat, there is a cumulative 1% chance per round that its bound elemental spirit breaks free and the golem goes berserk. The uncontrolled golem then goes on a rampage, attacking the nearest living creature or smashing an object smaller than itself if no creature is within reach, then moving on to wreak more havoc. The golem's creator, if within 60 feet, can try to regain control by speaking firmly and persuasively to the golem, a task which requires a DC 19 Charisma check. It takes 1 minute of inactivity by the golem to reset the golem's berserk chance to 0%.

**Immunities (Ex):** The skeletal golem is immune to any effect causing cold, fire, or electricity damage.

**Immunity to magic (Ex):** A skeletal golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance, with the exception of the *shatter* spell (see below).

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**One With Weapons (Ex):** A skeletal golem is designed to wield up to four specific one-handed melee weapons (usually masterwork longswords), or two specific two-handed melee weapons, at once. So long as it is armed with the specific Large-sized weapons with which it was equipped by its creator, it suffers none of the usual penalties for wielding multiple weapons. Each of its weapons is treated as a primary weapon for the calculation of its attack bonus.

If the skeletal golem was not equipped with weapons by its maker, it treats all of its slam attacks as primary weapons. If it wields any melee weapon other than those given to it at its creation, it suffers the normal penalties for multiweapon fighting and for nonproficiency.

**Shatter Vulnerability (Ex):** A *shatter* spell weakens a skeletal golem's structure for 1 round per caster level. During this period it loses its DR and suffers double damage from bludgeoning attacks.

Skeletal golems are man-like assemblages of bones, animated by an imbued elemental spirit and equipped to serve as guardians or warriors. Unlike the bone golems<sup>1</sup> invented by Azalin Rex, skeletal golems need not be crafted from the remains of slain undead skeletons: ordinary bones of humanoids or animals will do.

Skeletal golems were introduced to the Land of Mists by the necromancer Meredoth, on whose homeworld these constructs are quite common. Despite the sea-mage's jealous refusal to share his magical secrets with Ravenloft's "barbarian" arcanists, the means of creating them has gotten out anyway: perhaps spread by the adventurers who'd bested him in 737, or perhaps disseminated by the will of the Dark Powers

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1. **Historical FYI:** The skeletal golem presented here was originally known as a "bone golem", under the Expert D&D rules and in the *Mystara Monstrous Compendium*. Its name was altered to avoid confusion with the dread bone golem from *Denizens of Dread/Darkness*.

to infuriate and frustrate Nebligtode's darklord.

### Strategies and tactics

Thanks to its four arms, the skeletal golem is a dangerous foe in melee, as it can attack up to four different targets with equal lethality. Most skeletal golems are equipped with four long swords, but any Large simple or martial melee weapon is possible. A skeletal golem is automatically proficient with the specific weapons it was created to wield, but isn't proficient with any other weapon, even if of identical type and size.

Like other magically-animated golems that lack the "dread golem" template, skeletal golems are mindless creatures, obeying their creators' orders in the most straightforward way possible. They lack the independence to take special actions such as tripping or disarming their opponents in melee, but will do so if directed by a creator who is on the scene to give orders.

### Ecology

Skeletal golems have no biological needs. Meredoth finds skeletal golems useful because they are immune to Todstein's cold weather, can be constructed cheaply from the leftover bits of botched or abandoned experiments, are unhindered by the Day of Magic Void, and can be reinforced with bones of deceased Graben family members to boost their durability (see "The Graben Legacy").

Most of Meredoth's skeletal golems are stationed at the House of Bones, with a few more set to guard his next ice-locked *clone* body. A handful of other necromancers in the Core have hit upon the secret of creating skeletal golems as well, in the years since the Nocturnal Sea joined the continent. This dissemination has provoked the disgusted ire of the belligerent sea-mage, who views such mainlanders' handiwork as a shameless theft of his homeland's arcane know-how.

A skeletal golem resembles a humanoid skeleton of Large size, but is actually made of numerous Medium or Large creatures' bones, bound together to assemble a larger frame. All known skeletal golems have four



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arms, and nearly all are equipped with weapons by their creators. Typically, such weapons are forged specifically to arm the golem, so are often etched or embossed with images of bones, death, and destruction in accordance with the creature's intended purpose. If the skeletal golem is armored, as is true in the case of the statistics above, its Large armor is modified to accommodate its extra limbs, and may be decorated to match its weapons.

Though unable to utter any deliberate sound, a skeletal golem's joints are rather rickety and awkward, so it makes clattering noises whenever it bends them to walk or to fight. Nevertheless, the golem wields its weapons with uncanny swiftness and precision.

A skeletal golem and its weapons weigh in at 650 pounds, or more with armor. They are often created in pairs.

### *Advanced Skeleton Golems*

Given enough time and materials, a skeletal golem can be constructed to be heftier and larger than the typical version. Skeletal golems with up to 9 HD remain Large, while one with 10 to 18 HD is Huge. A Huge skeletal golem wields Huge weapons or does 1d8 hp base damage with its slam attacks.

### *Construction*

Pieces for a skeletal golem's creation must come from four or more Large or Medium skeletons; in the Land of Mists, at least four different sentient creatures' bones must be incorporated into it (one for each arm). The process of preparing the bones for animation and lashing them together demands special bindings and substances, costing a total of 200 gp. Assembling the body requires a DC 15 Use Rope check.

If a skeletal golem is to wield weapons, the caster must also provide it with masterwork weapons scaled to the construct's size. Any simple or martial masterwork melee weapon may be used, and the weapons need not all be of the same type. Skeletal golems may also be outfitted with armor, such as a Large breastplate (+5) or Large half-plate (+7); a golem is proficient only with the specific

armor and weapons it is equipped with at its creation.

Building and animating a skeletal golem is grounds for a Powers check, as per crafting an Evil magic item. If bones to be used in its assembly are procured via grave-robbing, additional Powers checks may be called for, even before its construction is finished.

CL 8th; Craft Construct, *animate dead*, *geas/quest*, *limited wish*, *stoneskin*, caster must be at least 8th level; Price 18,000 gp; Cost 9,200 gp + 2,920 gp (2,520 gp for 4 Large masterwork swords and 400 gp for the Large breastplate) + 712 XP.

### *Dread Skeletal Golems*

If the bones for a skeletal golem should be assembled by a creator who has the right mindset of obsession, it may animate as a dread golem before it has been enchanted. Many of the skeletal golems now cropping up outside Todstein could be dread golems, rather than magically-enchanted ones.

Cheaply and crudely assembled from bones stolen from sanctified graves, dread skeletal golems are only rarely armored, and their weapons are seldom any more than rough-hewn wooden clubs.

A dread skeletal golem's statistics differ from those listed above as follows:

### **GOLEM, DREAD SKELETAL CR 8**

CE Large construct

AC 25, touch 11, flat-footed 23  
(-1 size, +14 natural, +2 Dex)

Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2

Speed 30 ft. with breastplate (6 squares);  
base speed 40 ft.

Atk 4 slams +7 (1d6+4), or

Atk 4 Large clubs +6 (1d8+4)

Weakness shatter vulnerability, zeitgeber

SQ construct traits; immunity to cold, fire, electricity, & magic; one with weapons; shatter vulnerability; telepathic bond

Abilities Str 19, Dex 15, Con -, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 5

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### Lebentod, template

The following template updates and expands upon the lebentod template from *Denizens of Dread/Darkness*. DMs may still use the older (and simpler) version for routine lebentod encounters; this expanded template is designed for major lebentod NPCs, or for encounters involving only their disembodied parts.

#### Creating a Lebentod

A lebentod is a humanoid or monstrous humanoid who was rendered undead at the hands or behest of an evil arcane caster. The first lebentod were created by the darklord Meredoth, using malignant magics upon his poisoned victims, and it is possible other necromancers have duplicated his technique. More often, lebentod are created by others of their own kind, as they are one of the few Obedient Dead with the capacity to create spawn, recruiting new minions for their dark masters.

Unlike most Obedient Dead, the lebentod retain their own memories and most of their former intellect from life, although they lack free will and are wholly subservient to the spellcasters they look to for orders. Able to pass for the living, most lebentod act out simulated "lives" alongside ordinary folk, their nature unsuspected and their behavior quite routine, until such time as their masters give them tasks to perform: tasks which they unhesitatingly execute, with neither question nor conscience. Thus, they can be excellent assassins, saboteurs, and spies, blending in until the right moment to strike.

Lebentod whose masters die do not become free-willed, but are compelled to seek out another arcane caster to serve. The Craving that binds them to obedience is too strong for a lebentod to exist for long, without an absolute and unquestioned superior.

"Lebentod" is an acquired template that can be added to any humanoid or monstrous humanoid creature from Small to Huge (referred to hereafter as the base creature). A lebentod uses all of the base creature's statistics and abilities except as noted here.

**Size & Type:** The creature's type changes to undead (augmented humanoid or augmented monstrous humanoid). Do not recalculate base attack bonus, saves, or skill points.

Size of base creature is unchanged if intact, and for partial lebentod that include a torso. Detached body parts' size, and the corresponding adjustments to base creature's AC and attack rolls for disembodied parts, are as follows:

Base creature size	Leg*	Arm* or head	Hand or foot
Small	Tiny +1	Diminutive +3	Fine +7
Medium	Small +1	Tiny +2	Diminutive +4
Large	Medium +1	Small +2	Tiny +3
Huge	Large +2	Medium +3	Small +4

[\* – Includes legs with or without feet, and arms with or without hands.]

**Hit Dice:** Increase all current and future hit dice to d12s.

**Speed:** An intact lebentod's base speed is the same as the base creature's. A lebentod which is basically humanoid in shape but is missing parts, or its detached parts, move as follows:

Shape	Speed
Two-legged torso	As base creature
Head, hand, one-legged torso, or muscular long tail	½ base creature's speed
Arm & hand, leg & foot, or slim long tail	10 ft or ½ base creature's speed, whichever is lower
Arm, leg, foot, or legless torso & arm(s)	5 ft
Wing, short tail, or limbless torso	0 ft.

**Armor Class:** The base creature's natural armor bonus improves by +2. Disembodied parts' AC is modified according to their new size. All parts retain their full natural armor bonus while detached.

**Attack:** A lebentod retains the attacks of the base creature, and also gains two claws and a bite attack if it didn't already have them. If the base creature can use weapons,

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the lebendtod retains that ability. A creature with natural weapons retains those natural weapons. An unarmed lebendtod fighting uses either its claw attack or its primary natural weapon (if any). A lebendtod armed with a weapon uses its claw or its weapon, as it desires.

**Full Attack:** A lebendtod fighting without weapons uses its claws or its primary natural weapon (if it has one) as its primary attacks, and its bite or its secondary natural weapon (if it has one) as secondary attacks. If armed with a weapon, it typically uses the weapon as its primary attack and its claw or other natural weapon as a secondary attack.

**Damage:** A lebendtod has claw and bite attacks. If the base creature does not have these attack forms, use the damage values in the table below. Creatures with natural claw and/or bite attacks retain their old damage rating, or replace it with what is listed on the table below, whichever is better.

Base Creature Size	Claw Damage	Bite Damage
Small	1d3	1d2
Medium	1d4	1d3
Large	1d6	1d4
Huge	2d4	1d6

**Special Attacks:** The lebendtod retains all special attacks of the base creature, and also gains that listed below:

**Create Spawn (Su):** Lebendtod create others of their kind by breathing in the last breath from the mouth or gills of a dying humanoid or monstrous humanoid. This is a full-round action which provokes attacks of opportunity. The theft of the dying breath must be carried out by the lebendtod's head (attached or not); a headless neck or other detached body part is unable to perform the breath-stealing procedure. A lebendtod whose victim is helpless may combine the theft of breath with a coup de grace as a full-round action. The stealing of breath confers no benefits to the spawn-creating lebendtod, though most find the warmth of such stolen breath within their lungs to be pleasantly nostalgic.

After its final breath has been stolen, the body must be left isolated and untouched for 72 hours. If the body remains undisturbed, it rises at the end of this time as a lebendtod under the control of the same master as the lebendtod who created it. It is immediately aware of its new master's identity, and of any standing orders its master may have issued to the lebendtod which spawned it. A spawn which rises as a lebendtod retains all of the memories, knowledge, and character levels it possessed in life.

If a nascent spawn's body is disturbed in any way before 72 hours have passed, but is left largely intact, it arises 1d4 rounds after it was disturbed as a 4 HD ghast. Such a spawn retains none of its abilities in life, and only fragmentary memories of its past. It is subject to the same master as the lebendtod which created it, but is initially unaware of orders issued by that master. The new ghast is considered to be in a state of food debt (see *VRGttWD*), immediately attacking any apparent prey it confronts, with a +2 morale bonus to its attack rolls and -2 dodge penalty to its AC. "Apparent prey" includes any lebendtod using their *veil of life* power.

**Special Qualities:** A lebendtod retains all the special qualities of the base creature, and gains those described below:

**Aging (Ex):** Lebendtod are not actually immortal, like vampires or liches, but their existence can span centuries. A lebendtod's lifespan is equal to the number of years that remained of its life before it became undead (*PHB* Table 6-4), multiplied by 10. Aging effects on abilities do not affect lebendtod.

**Detachable Parts (Ex):** As a standard action, a lebendtod can detach or reattach its extremities at their normal locations without harm. Body parts that can be removed and rejoined to a lebendtod's body in this way include: head, hands, feet, arms (at shoulder), legs (at hip), tail (if any), and wings (if any). Lebendtod with the Quick Draw feat may remove one hand as a free action, or both hands at once, each grasping the other one's wrist and pulling, as a move action.

Because its parts may separate to negate a hold, a lebendtod cannot be held or pinned by a grapple unless it chooses to conceal this

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ability. A lebentod which is disarmed in combat may opt to release its hand, or hand and arm together, along with the weapon so as to retain its possession of that weapon. Releasing a body part to break a hold or pin, or to retain its grip upon a disarmed weapon, is an immediate action.

Detached parts of a lebentod remain animated and under its conscious control, so long as these extremities remain within 100 feet of the creature's torso and in the same domain as it. Pieces that move out of range become inanimate, remaining inert until the distance from them to the torso diminishes to 100 feet or less. One necromancer is said to have shipped his lebentod minions to a rival's home, piece by piece; as soon as both the extremities and torsos were inside and unobserved, their detached limbs unpacked themselves, reassembled their bodies, and attacked as per his instructions.

So long as a lebentod's parts remain within 100 feet of its torso, it maintains a sensory link with its disembodied pieces. It can see, hear, taste and smell using the sense organs of its head, as well as feel with any detached part. A lebentod which removes its head also retains sight and hearing at its torso's location, just as a skeleton's eyeless skull can still see. For disembodied parts other than its head, the lebentod can sense these linked pieces' immediate surroundings (10 ft. radius; visual only), as if *scrying* on its own parts.

Should one of a lebentod's parts travel more than 100 feet from its torso, but is still in the same domain, the creature can attempt sensory contact with that part for 1 minute with a successful Concentration check (DC 20). This doesn't restore motor-control over the absent part, but it reveals the direction and approximate distance to the extremity, as well as any visual clues about the part's environs. While sensing far-off body parts' surroundings, the lebentod is unaware of what is happening to its torso or to any other detached portion of itself. The maximum range at which a lebentod may *scry* on its body parts in this manner is one mile.

Lebentod parts that remain within the 100-ft radius of its control remain connected

for the purpose of beneficial magical effects, including spells or magic items, but lose that connection if they move too far away or become separated by a domain border. For example, if a lebentod is wearing a *ring of protection* on its right hand, the rest of its body shares the benefit of that *ring* so long as its right hand and torso (plus any other separated parts that need this benefit) are no more than 100 feet apart. If its torso is the recipient of a *cat's grace* spell, other pieces of the lebentod within the 100-ft range will also receive the spell's benefits.

**Exception:** *Inflict wounds* spells or similar effects heal only the pieces of a lebentod on which they are actually cast.

A lebentod's animating force resides in its torso, so attacks upon the torso (with or without appendages) are counted toward the destruction of the entire creature and all its parts. Damage inflicted upon disembodied parts does not deplete the lebentod's hit points, but any part which suffers enough damage to destroy it cannot be reattached, reducing the lebentod's ability to function. A lebentod whose head is destroyed is left mute and unable to bite; one whose hands are destroyed cannot handle objects or make claw attacks. Re-attaching a damaged part to the torso causes the torso to suffer one-third of the damage the part had suffered; if accruing such damage to the torso would destroy the creature (i.e. its torso is also low on hit points), the part cannot be reattached until it and/or the torso is repaired.

Physical attacks made by a lebentod's detached parts do not count against the total number of actions or attacks of opportunity which are available to its torso or to other disembodied pieces. A detached body part can't make more than one attack during its action, regardless of how many attacks the lebentod's BAB might entitle the creature to make when intact. Lebentod spellcasters cannot cast more than one spell at a time, regardless of how many pieces they spread themselves out as. Spells cast by a detached body part count as spells expended from its daily allotment.

If a lebentod detaches both its hands, it may still make unarmed strikes with its

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wrists or kick with its legs (with or without feet). If it is reduced to only one limb (arm or leg) it may only make unarmed strikes if it foregoes moving for that round. A torso without any extremities has no attacks and cannot cast spells with components, but can still perform purely mental tasks, such as concentrating to maintain a previously-cast spell effect while its extremities fight.

Turn or Rebuke Undead attempts need not be directed at a lebentod's torso to be effective, but a detached body part cannot be destroyed or commanded in this way unless the corresponding torso is also destroyed or commanded. Isolated body parts' Hit Dice are considered the same as the lebentod's, for purposes of Turning/Rebuking, except that if multiple pieces of the same lebentod are encompassed by a single Turn/Rebuke attempt, the creature's HD are only counted once toward Turning Damage. Thus, if a cleric Turns both arms and the head of a 3<sup>rd</sup> level lebentod, only 3 HD of that cleric's Turning Damage are expended on its parts, not 9 HD. Each of the body parts would still need to be in range of the Turning attempt, within line of sight, and not behind full cover to be affected. If each part is Turned by a *separate* attempt, the three parts would each use up 3 HD of Turning Damage, even though they come from a single creature. A crafty lebentod could use its noncombatant parts (feet, tail) as decoys to exhaust clerics' Turning per day, before its more formidable appendages launch their attacks.

Statistics and available attack-options, skills, feats and class abilities for the more useful detached parts are provided below. Appropriate size modifiers to AC and attack rolls should also be applied, as given above. Charisma-based skills utilized by detached body parts are bound to suffer OR modifiers, unless the audience is kept unaware that the extremities in question are not attached to a body (e.g. hearing a head speak from behind a closed door).

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### Hand

**Hp:** 1/8 of total

**Abilities:** As intact lebentod +6 Dex; Str penalty as per base creature's size (-6 if Small, -10 if Medium, -16 if Large, -24 if Huge), minimum Str 1

**Attack:** 1 claw or 1 Light weapon up to 1 lb.

**Spells:** Personal or Touch-range spells with only somatic components

**Skills:** All Dexterity-based skills but Ride; also Climb, Disable Device, Forgery, Perform (instrumental), and Search. A detached hand receives a +10 racial bonus to Climb checks and a +4 racial bonus to Balance checks.

**Feats:** All feats enhancing the skills listed above; all weapon proficiency feats and fighter bonus feats not requiring two hands; all spellcasting feats usable with somatic components only; and all Sneak Attack-based feats, plus Silent Spell

**Class Abilities:** Provided the base creature has these abilities, a disembodied hand benefits from Rage or Favored Enemy bonuses and Evasion or Uncanny Dodge abilities; can cast spontaneous *inflict* spells; can direct an animal companion or dread familiar via gestures; can use a monk's Unarmed Strike and Quivering Palm attacks; can employ Trapfinding and Trap Sense; and can make Sneak Attacks. Comparable abilities derived from prestige or variant classes also apply (DM discretion).

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### Arm With Hand

**Hp:** ¼ of total

**Abilities:** As intact lebentod +4 Dex; Str penalty as per base creature's size (-6 if Small, -8 if Medium, -12 if Large, -16 if Huge), minimum Str 1

**Attack:** 1 claw or 1 Light weapon up to 5 lb.

**Spells:** Personal, Touch, or Close-ranged spells with only somatic components

**Skills:** All Dexterity-based skills; Climb, Disable Device, Forgery, Perform (instrumental) and Search. An arm with a hand receives a +5 racial bonus to Climb

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checks and a +2 racial bonus to Balance checks.

**Feats:** All feats enhancing the skills listed above; all weapon proficiency feats and fighter bonus feats not requiring two hands; all spellcasting feats usable with somatic components only; and all Sneak Attack-based feats, plus Silent Spell

**Class Abilities:** If the base creature has them, a detached arm with a hand can benefit from Rage or Favored Enemy bonuses and Evasion or Uncanny Dodge abilities; can cast spontaneous *inflict* spells; can direct an animal companion or dread familiar via gestures; can use a monk's Unarmed Strike and Quivering Palm attacks; can employ Trapfinding and Trap Sense; and can make Sneak Attacks. Comparable abilities derived from prestige or variant classes may also apply (DM discretion).

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### Head

**Hp:** ¼ of total

**Abilities:** As intact lebentod -4 Dex; Str penalty as per base creature's size (-6 if Small, -8 if Medium, -12 if Large, -16 if Huge), minimum Str 1

**Attack:** 1 bite or 1 slam (non-lethal damage equal to its bite); cannot grapple

**Spells:** Spells using only verbal components

**Skills:** Appraise, Bluff, Concentration, Decipher Script, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Hide, Hypnosis<sup>RLPHB</sup>, Intimidate, Knowledge (all), Listen, Move Silently, Perform (oral), Reign Undead<sup>VRGWD</sup>, Sense Motive, Speak Language, Spellcraft, Spot, Use Magical Device.

**Special:** A disembodied head's inability to manipulate objects bars it from using many of its skills in many contexts (e.g. it could decipher the hieroglyphs on a visible wall, but could not open a coded book without assistance or magic). A head has an OR modifier of +4.

**Feats:** All feats enhancing the skills listed above; all divine feats; all spellcasting feats usable with verbal components only; plus Extra Turning, Eschew Materials and Still Spell.

**Class Abilities:** Provided the base creature has these abilities, a detached head can employ bardic knowledge and music (oral only) abilities; can cast *inflict* spells spontaneous; can Rebuke Undead if an appropriate unholy symbol is in the same square as it; can direct an animal companion or dread familiar via verbal commands; can use a monk's Tongue of Sun and Moon ability; and can activate command-word-triggered magical items. Comparable abilities derived from prestige or variant classes may also apply (DM discretion).

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### Leg With Foot

**Hp:** ¼ of total

**Abilities:** As intact lebentod +2 Dex; Str penalty as per base creature's size (-4 if Small or Medium, -8 if Large or Huge), minimum Str 1

**Attack:** 1 trip attack; cannot grapple

**Skills:** Balance, Hide, Jump

**Feats:** All feats enhancing the skills listed above, plus Run

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All other extremities (feet, legs or arms without feet/hands, or monstrous limbs such as tails or wings) have no effective attacks if detached from their torsos, and no skills, feats, or abilities except Hide – which, in body parts' case, includes “playing dead” if in plain view – and any feats or abilities that enhance Hide. Hit points are ¼ of total for detached arms, legs, wings or long tails, 1/8 of total for feet or short tails.

In addition to fighting autonomously, a lebentod's detached parts may be wielded as weapons by the creature itself, provided it has at least a single arm and hand attached. Arms or legs count as clubs in melee; a head is equivalent to a hurled club when thrown. Lebentod are considered to be proficient at wielding their own parts in this manner, but not those of others. Impacting the body of an

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opponent does not damage the part in question, unless the opponent has qualities which make it dangerous to grapple (armor spikes, flaming body, etc), in which case the body part takes damage upon impact, as if it had grappled with the target for one round.

As body parts are usually too small to have Reach, lebendtod often throw one of their parts into an opponent's space, sparing it the need to enter a threatened square and suffer an attack of opportunity. A lebendtod may hurl its parts up to 30' in this manner, to deliver a ranged touch attack or position it for a Sneak Attack. The range increment for a hurled hand or head is 10', or 5' for limbs. A successful attack roll with a thrown body part places the extremity in the opponent's square and able to attack in the same round, whereas a failed one hurls it into an adjacent square. Hands that hit when thrown in this manner are assumed to cling to the body of the target, if the opponent is Small or larger. Being thrown does no damage to the body part in question.

A lebendtod and its part may cooperate to flank opponents, provided the extremity in question is large enough to do so.

Needless to say, living witnesses to the removal of a body part may need to make Horror saves. The DC of such saves varies with the situation, but it usually ranges from 10 (simple removal or reattachment) to 20 (a disembodied head sucking the dying breath from a potential spawn). Any witnesses who know the lebendtod socially will incur penalties to these saves.

*Damage Reduction (Su):* A lebendtod has DR 10/magic. Its claw and bite attacks count as magic for purposes of overcoming damage reduction.

*Severance (Ex):* While critical hits do not normally affect undead and don't inflict any extra damage upon them, a lebendtod which suffers a critical hit from a slashing weapon must make a Reflex save, at a DC of 10 + the number of hp damage it takes (after its DR applies). If it should fail this save, one of its detachable extremities (DM's choice) is lopped off against its will, falling into an adjacent square. A lebendtod may reattach the severed part normally, but this requires a

move action to retrieve the extremity, and a standard action to put it back in place.

A vorpal weapon automatically severs a lebendtod's head on any critical hit, not just those scored with a natural roll of 20.

*Veil of Life (Su):* Twice each day, as a standard action, a lebendtod may transform its own appearance to that of a living being. Its *veil of life* can only reproduce its own appearance from life, not that of any other individual. This effect lasts until it is either dismissed (a free action) or disrupted.

A lebendtod's *veil of life* functions much like the *alter self* spell, except as described here. The lebendtod retains the racial skill bonuses and natural armor bonus of the lebendtod template while *veiled*, but it loses claw and bite attacks unless the base creature already had them. Unlike the *alter self* spell, the *veil of life* continues to operate for body parts which are detached or severed from the lebendtod, so long as they remain within one mile's distance and in the same domain. A lebendtod's *veiled* guise seems to grow older with time, but at 1/10 the rate it would have aged, had it remained living (see *Aging*).

If a lebendtod suffers physical damage from a magical spell or effect, its *veil of life* ends immediately. Its guise cannot be re-established until the creature has ceased to suffer damage, in the case of continuous magical effects. A detached body part's *veil* may be disrupted separately from that of its torso or its other parts, and its *veil* also fails if the part moves more than one mile from the torso or is separated from it by a domain border. If the torso's *veil* fails, other parts' true forms are instantly revealed as well, no matter where they are.

So long as its *veil of life* is active, a lebendtod displays all the signs of life (e.g. sweating from the heat) a live person would normally exhibit in public. It may eat and drink (but cannot get drunk), so may benefit from potions or other ingested substances, provided it is not immune to the effect in question. A lebendtod which is struck by an attack while its *veil of life* is functioning appears to be wounded like a living creature, even if its DR actually prevented injury.

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**Utter Servitude (Ex):** While Obedient Dead do not normally have turn resistance, the shackles of enslavement which bind a lebentod to its master are unusually potent, the better to keep sentient reanimated dead in line. Lebentod gain +4 turn resistance against attempts to Command Undead (and *only* to command them) by divine casters who are not their masters, and a +4 bonus to their Will saves against *control undead* or similar effects from any other source. If the lebentod currently lacks a master to serve, these bonuses convert to penalties, allowing another villain to more easily step into the role of its new master.

Darklords with the ability to control the Walking Dead in their domains can override a lebentod's bond to its master... unless its prior master is *also* a darklord, in which case the lebentod's loyalty remains unchanged. The sole known exception is Death, who once had the power to override even another darklord's mastery over lebentod; however, that power may have been lost to it with the Horsemen's defeat.

**Abilities:** As base creature, modified as follows: +2 Str, -2 Dex, -2 Int. As undead creatures, the lebentod lack a Constitution score.

**Skills:** Lebentod have a +5 racial bonus on their Bluff and Disguise checks, and a +12 circumstance bonus on Escape Artist checks if they use their *detachable limbs* ability to free themselves from restraints.

If their *veil of life* ability is not active, lebentod receive those competence bonuses to Hide (+6 if stationary, +2 if moving) and Move Silently (+4) checks shared by other intact Walking Dead (see *VRGttWD*).

All of these bonuses except the Escape Artist bonus apply to those detached parts able to use the skills in question. Otherwise, same as the base creature.

**Feats:** As base creature.

**Environment:** Any land and on shipboard (Nocturnal Sea and neighboring domains).

**Organization:** Solitary, pair, squad (3-5), family (5-8), or community (40-60).

**Challenge Rating:** As base creature +1.

**Outcast Rating:** As base creature +6.

**Treasure:** Standard.

**Alignment:** Always neutral evil.

**Advancement:** By character class.

**Level Adjustment:** -

### *Lebentod Characters*

Lebentod are always evil, which causes characters of certain classes to lose the use of their class abilities. In addition, certain classes suffer additional penalties:

**Clerics:** Clerics lose the ability to Turn Undead, but they gain the ability to Rebuke Undead. This ability can never affect the lebentod's master, nor any of its master's other lebentod, although it works on ghosts arising from botched *create spawn* attempts.

### *As Heard in a Port...*

"I tell you, those men from Graben Island are the toughest I've ever seen! No pansy-arse scholars, they. It's *true!* Last month, me and Sanday were workin' at the docks, and we saw some of them - Grabenites, big as oxen and blanched as snow, like all their lot - unloading these huge crates.

"Well, a rope broke as they was lifting up a heavy crate, and one of them was unlucky enough to have it fall on him. He tried to get outta the way, mind, but the damn thing still caught one of his arms. Crushed it flat. And there we was, watching. Nothin' more we could do than feel sorry for the poor bastard, as they carried him below.

"But before the day was over, damned if he wasn't back up on deck! He'd had his arm amputated, but he still helped out where he could. No whinin' or complainin', nothing. Lost an arm. So what? There he was back to work, until the job was done."

- Overheard in the Black Werewolf Inn, Armeikos



## Appendix II New Monsters

### Sea-claimed, template

(or Shay-marked)

#### Artha Landree

CR 2

Female Sea-claimed (Reaver subtype),  
commoner 1

NE Medium monstrous humanoid

**Init** +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft, Spot +2,  
Listen +2

**Languages** Vaasan

**AC** 12, touch 12, flat-footed 12;  
(+2 natural)

**hp** 12 (2 HD)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2

**Speed** 40 ft. (8 squares)

**Melee** weapon +4

**Space** 5 ft; **Reach** 5 ft

**Base Atk** +4; **Grp** +4

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**Abilities** Str 18, Dex 9, Con 15, Int 10, Wis  
10, Cha 6

**SQ** Amphibious, Virundus thrall, Drying  
body (see below)

**Feats** Alertness, Great Fortitude

**Skills** Climb +2, Hide +2, Listen +2, Move  
Silently +2, Spot +2, Survival +2

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When underwater and fully transformed:

**Senses** Spot +4, Listen +4

**Speed** swim 40 ft. (8 squares)

**Attack:** Claw +4 (1d4+2), or with weapon  
+4

**Full Attack:** 2 claws +4 (1d4+2), bite +4  
(1d4)

**Skills:** Hide +4, Listen +4, Move Silently  
+4, Spot +4

The Sea-claimed sample presented uses a  
1<sup>st</sup> level human commoner as the base  
creature. It has the following ability scores

before the transformation: Str 12, Dex 11,  
Con 11, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Sea-claimed (or Shay-marked as they are  
sometimes called) are humanoids that gave  
themselves to the service of Virundus, or  
where chosen by him to be transformed into  
his agents servitors. The transformation is  
triggered by Virundus when he painfully  
reshapes the flesh of the subject for ten  
minutes by merging the subject in his ever  
changing chaotic body. The often  
unconscious person is then moved elsewhere  
in the palace, awoken, and circled by aquatic  
priest constantly singing praises to Virundus,  
while the subject suffers maddening pain.  
After twelve hours, the transformation is  
finished.

There are many variations among Sea-  
claimed, as Virundus create thralls according  
to the castes of his aquatic realm. There are  
six basic castes, but Virundus could also  
create other monstrous humanoids from  
other marine creatures.

The Locathah subtype is the lowest of the  
cast, and often bullied around. The Locathah  
subtype is often used with unimportant or  
expandable spies. This caste is also used as a  
punishment when his servants displease him.

The Reaver subtype is for fighters and  
guards, the Sahuagin subtype are arcane  
spell casters, the Anguillian subtype for the  
divine spell casters, Wereray subtype often  
have roguish skills, and the rare but powerful  
Wereoctopus subtype is for special guards or  
powerful spies.

Most of the Sea-claimed are surface  
dwellers that periodically returns back as  
Virundus's agents and spies, or stay below to  
guard his sunken palace.

Many Sea-claimed holds enviable  
positions in human society, acting as spies  
and coordinator for other Sea-claimed in the  
area.

Virundus also delights in transforming the  
rarer marine humanoids that oppose him,  
like the Selkies and Nereids.

There are no open conflicts between Sea-  
claimed and genuine aquatic humanoids  
under Virundus's service, as their monstrous  
god would not tolerate it. However, the two



clans generally keep to themselves when not ordered to work together.

### *Creating a Sea-Claimed*

“Sea-claimed” is an acquired template that can be added to any humanoid creature captured and brought to Virundus for the transformation (referred to hereafter as the “base creature”).

**Challenge Rating:** Same as the base creature +1 (except for the weaker locathah subtype: CR +0)

**Type:** The base creature type changes to monstrous humanoid. It does gain the augmented and the aquatic subtypes.

**Alignment:** changes to evil

**AC:** Sea-claimed transformed bodies are more supple and scaly: they increase their natural armor bonus by 2.

**Speed:** Sea-claimed get a swimming speed of 40 feet (if it doesn’t already have better).

**Weakness:** as base creature.

**Abilities:** The base creature’s ability scores are modified as follows: Str +6, Dex -

2, Con +4, Int +0, Wis -2, Cha -4; plus other modification (see subtype)

**Senses:** Sea-claimed gains darkvision out to 60 feet (if it doesn’t already have better).

**Languages:** as base creature.

**HD:** Add one monstrous d8 hit dice. This improvement grants a base attack modifier of +1, a +2 bonus on Reflex and Will saves, 1d8 hit points, 1 x (2 + Int modifier) skill points, and possibly feats (usual rate).

**Special Qualities:** Sea-claimed retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains the following special quality, depending on the subtype Virundus chose to create:

### **All Sea-claimed:**

**Amphibious (Ex):** Sea-claimed can breathe both air and water.

**Virundus thrall (Su):** All Sea-claimed usually obey Virundus’s commands without hesitation. When doing something contrary to their instructions or Virundus’s interest, they are affected like when trying to resist a *lesser geas* spell.

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**Drying body (Su):** If an earth born Sea-claimed humanoid getting out of the water see his physical aquatic characteristics be resorbed after seven days out of the water. The base creature is essentially back to its initial appearance, except small details that might identify its sea connection (slightly fishy odor in hot weather or when working hard physically, gills scar, slight palm hand, scaly or black leathery body part, slight bulgy eyes, etc. DC 20 Spot to see it, unless the detail can be fully concealed by clothing).

However, after a week out of the water, a Sea-claimed that has been transformed for more than 20 years will look somewhat repulsive to most surface dwellers – the aquatic features are very apparent and disgusting (see the tavern in Meerdorf). After 20 more years, the humanity is completely gone of the face, making these creatures look like ugly fishmen.

On the reverse, within ten minutes of being completely back in water (immersed), all physical aquatic characteristics painfully grow back (DC 15 Horror check for witnesses to this transformation).

For marine native transformed to sea-claimed, this ability doesn't apply.

**Symbiotic senses (Ex):** When they stay submerged for longer than three months, sea-claimed attract small symbiotic marine life forms that grow on their bodies or congregate around them: barnacles, anemones, corals, mussels, shrimp, crabs, seahorses, algae, jellies, and tiny fishes.

The collective reaction of these small aquatic creatures alert the sea-claimed of the presence of creatures, giving it a limited form of blind sense: it can feel the presence of hidden or invisible creatures within a 20 foot radius.

Staying out of the water for more than a day typically kills these tiny animals and vegetals.

Sea-claimed proudly bear these marks of fidelity to the deep. For most surface dwellers, seeing a sea-claimed afflicted by these symbiotic life forms is cause for horror check DC 12.

**Voice from the Deep (Su):** By drowning an intelligent victim, a recipient of Abyssal Taint may communicate telepathically with Virundus for the next hour.

**Skills:** While underwater, sea-claimed receive a +2 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, Move Silently and Spot.

### *Castes*

Other changes according to the sea-claimed subtype (or caste):

### **Locathah**<sup>MM1</sup>

The creature's body is yellowish, with tiny scales covering it. Its human face show sad, protruding eyes. Its mouth never ceases to open and close like a fish's.

**Attack:** with weapon, as base creature

**Full Attack:** with weapon, as base creature

### **Reaver**<sup>DoD</sup>

The creature's face shows bulging ferocious eyes and grinding sharp teeth. Its body is partly covered with brown scales, and has webbed hand and feet.

**Attack:** Claw (1d4+2), or with weapon or spell as base creature

**Full Attack:** 2 claws (1d4+2), bite (1d4)

### **Sahuagin**<sup>MM1</sup>

The creature's green body is partly covered with scales and spiny fins. Its humanoid face show stern protruding eyes that seem to assess your value. It has webbed hand and feet.

**Attack:** Claw (1d4), or with weapon or spell as base creature

**Full Attack:** 2 claws (1d4)

**Intelligence ability score:** +2. They often train to be arcane caster, or to improve the casting skills of the base creature.

**Blindsight (Ex):** Underwater, a Sahuagin subtype can locate creature underwater within a 30 foot radius.

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### Anguilian<sup>Sto</sup>

This creature has retracted humanoid members, the hands as bony pincers. Its human face is nearly filled with a repulsive circular mouth showing rings of teeth.

**Attack:** Bite

**Full Attack:** Bite (1d4)

**Wisdom ability score:** +2. They often train to be divine caster, or to improve the casting skills of the base creature.

**Attach (Ex):** If an anguilian subtype hits with its bite attack, it uses its mouth to latch onto its opponent's body and automatically deal damage each round it remains attached. In this case, the anguilian subtype loses all dexterity bonus to AC.

**Blood Drain (Ex):** An attached anguilian subtype drains body fluids, dealing 1-2 points of Constitution damage each round it remains attached.

### Wereray<sup>DoD</sup>

The grey humanoid creature swims with large "wings" linking arms and legs on each side of its body, with a long tail behind it. Its flattened and repulsive head is showing large milk white eyes.

**Attack:** Tail slam (1d2) +poison

**Full Attack:** Tail slam (1d2) + poison

**Dexterity ability score:** +2. They often train to be rogues, or to improve roguish skills of the base creature.

**Poison (Ex):** upon tail slam, needles on the tail inflict poison: Fortitude DC 13, initial and secondary damage 1d3 Strength.

### Wereoctopus

The jet black humanoid creature has eight tentacles around it, and a large beaked face. Six of its tentacles are only 2 feet long, but two are nearly 5 feet long and whips menacingly.

**Attack:** Tentacle (1d4+2), or with weapon or spell as base creature

**Full Attack:** 2 tentacles (1d4+2), bite (1d6+2)

**Strength ability score:** +2.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** same ability as Octopus, Giant<sup>MMI</sup>.

**Constrict (Ex):** An octopus subtype deals 2d6 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

**Ink Cloud (Ex):** same ability as Octopus, Giant<sup>MMI</sup>, but the cloud is 10' x 10' x 10'.

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## Shipbane

*The vaporous cloud appears no different from the other fogs that hamper sailors in these waters, but then you realize that it approaches your vessel against the prevailing wind. It builds as high as the railing as it wafts closer, and ominous, half-glimpsed forms seem to dart about in the fogbank's depths. Have the Mists come, to claim your vessel?*

*Then the fog is upon you, pouring over the ship's rail, and the fleeting shapes from within resolve themselves into distorted, swooping predators out of nightmare. As you brace for the onslaught, vapor gusts across the deck, breeding chaos and confusion in its wake.*

*Not the Mists. Something hungrier....*

### Shipbane

CR2

CE Medium elemental (Air, Mists)

**Init** +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, Mist Peering; Listen +1, Spot +2

**Languages** Auran

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**AC** 18, touch 15, flat-footed 13 (+5 Dex, +3 natural)

**Miss Chance** 20% at 5' (concealment), 50% at >5' (total concealment) in fog

**hp** 13 (2 HD); **DR** 10 / silver or magic

**Immune** poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, polymorph, aging

**Resistance** cold 10, electricity 10

**Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +1**

**Weaknesses** sunlight, cannot approach land or penetrate water

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**Speed** fly 40 ft. perfect (8 squares).

**Melee** 2 claws +2 (1d4+1) and bite -3 (1d6); or 2 claws +2 (1d4+1); or bite +2 (1d6+1)

**Space** 5 ft; **Reach** 5 ft

**Base Atk** +1; **Grp** +2

**Atk Options** Fearsome shapes, confusion fog

**Special Actions** Dive, Flyby Attack

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**Abilities** Str 13, Dex 21, Con 14, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 13

**SQ** elemental traits, Mists traits, vaporous, flight

**Feat** Flyby Attack

**Skills** Bluff +1, Hide +5\*, Intimidate +5, Listen +1, Move Silently +5\*, Sense Motive +2, Spot +2

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**Confusion Fog (Su):** Any group of ten or more shipbanes is constantly shrouded by a dense, magical cloud of vapor, in which visibility is reduced to 5 feet. This provides concealment equivalent to a *fog cloud* spell

Such a Confusion Fog is cylindrical and 20' tall. Its radius is 5' per shipbane in it. Shipbanes can move about freely within the area of a Confusion Fog, or can will the Fog to travel with them at their full flying speed. A Confusion Fog cannot be dispersed or kept at bay by natural winds, although magical winds, solid walls, force effects, or barriers that exclude magic can block these vapors' spread. If one of the group of shipbanes exits a Confusion Fog or is killed, the fog's radius is reduced by 5'. Should the total number of shipbanes within the Confusion Fog fall below ten, its vapors disperse harmlessly on the next round, exposing any remaining shipbanes.

Any creature caught in the area of a Confusion Fog is subject to a *confusion* effect (as the spell) each time it enters the cloud of vapor. The base Will DC to resist *confusion* is 10, +2 for every ten shipbanes present within. For example, a Confusion Fog that is created by fifty shipbanes would have a DC of 20; if one is killed, the fog's DC drops to 18.

**Fearsome Shapes (Su):** A shipbane can change its appearance (but not its size or attacks) as a swift action, to disorient and terrorize its victims. By making hit-and-run strikes out of the fog, then changing their features each time they retreat out of view, shipbanes give the impression of overwhelming numbers, potentially triggering Fear saves even if their foes are more than a match for them. The DC of the Fear save is based, not on the shipbanes' true EL, but on how many of them the victims *believe* they are facing.

**Flight (Ex):** Shipbanes can fly with perfect maneuverability, allowing them to hover, turn or reverse direction as a free action, fly straight up at full speed, or fly backwards.

**Mist Peering (Ex):** Shipbanes (like other beings with the Mists subtype) are less subject to the obscuring effects of fog or mist than usual. Shipbanes' range of vision in a Confusion Fog or other vapor is fifteen feet, not five. Victims within 5' are treated as having no concealment by the shipbanes; those within 15' are treated as having concealment; those at a distance greater than 15' have total concealment. When attacking those with concealment due to fog or mist, a shipbane suffers only half the usual miss chance (10% for regular concealment, 25% for total).

**Vaporous (Su):** Although tangible enough to attack physically, shipbanes' bodies have a semi-gaseous composition. A shipbane can compress its body to squeeze through any crack that water can penetrate, as a full-round action.

**Weaknesses** Shipbanes exposed to direct sunlight are impaired on the first round and destroyed on the second, exactly as if they were vampires. Their Confusion Fog can act as a barrier against sunlight, but each round of contact between sun and Fog burns off five feet of vapor from its top surface, thus dispersing an entire cloud in four rounds. If its sun exposure is interrupted, a Confusion Fog rebuilds itself at the same rate.

Dry land repels shipbanes. They never approach within 100' of an island or 300' of a continental coastline, and will cross over mudflats, shoals, or other landforms that jut above the waves only when they are submerged by the tides.

As beings of air and vapor, shipbanes are too buoyant to penetrate the surface of water, so victims who flee beneath the waves pass out of reach. Even if a shipbane is dragged underwater by force, it will shoot to the surface like a bubble at triple speed, as soon as it is released. Merely splashing shipbanes with water does them no harm.

**Skills** A shipbane in fog or mist, including Confusion Fog, gets a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks.

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First recorded in old Grabenite sagas of the sea-raiders (occasionally under the foreign-sounding name of “*kahl-murur*”), shipbanes are a menace that was long thought only legend, until the Nocturnal Sea’s emergence. Now, the feral elementals have reappeared, to pursue and prey on hapless sea-travelers, where once the Nightmare Lands held sway. Whether plucked from a distant world or wholly born of the Mists, at least one pack (“slaughter”) of shipbanes is known to roam the sunless expanse of the frigid southern waves. Scattered reports from as far north as the Strait of Liffe suggest that other packs prowl the Nocturnal Sea’s far rim, lurking on the foggy fringe of the Misty Border.

### *Strategies and tactics*

Shipbanes wander the Nocturnal Sea in groups of up to sixty individuals; seldom are less than ten of them encountered at a time. Slaughters which have insufficient members to raise up a confusion fog are reluctant to attack, unless natural fogbanks already grant them a clear advantage. When their own or Nature’s vapors *do* shield them and hamper their opponents, shipbanes stage their strikes upon vulnerable vessels in order to create maximum panic, disorientation and chaos, for these gaseous entities are quite literally addicted to the subtle aromas of terror and confusion on a dying victim’s last breath.

Apparently aware that sea-goers in the Land of Mists are fearful of fogbanks, a slaughter of shipbanes rarely attempts to conceal its approach under cover of darkness or storm, but lets the sight of its oncoming confusion fog demoralize intended victims. (Being far too fast for any conventional sailing ship to outrun, they need not worry that such a forewarning will permit an intended quarry to escape.) Upon closing with the vessel, shipbanes will use their first round of flyby attacks to rend sails, break lanterns, entangle ropes, and otherwise disable the ship, while their fog’s *confusion* takes effect. Only after all those on board have had their chance to succumb – and hence, to panic and disrupt any organized resistance – do these elusive elementals turn their attentions to their humanoid prey, now well-seasoned by fear and pandemonium.

Between their many immunities and the advantages provided by their superior eyesight in opaque fog, shipbanes can be extremely difficult to finish off, even for those with silver or magical weapons. They never stay still, but duck erratically in and out of the fog’s concealment, darting from one opponent to the next, and changing their appearance as soon as they slip out of view. Foes who save against the fog’s *confusion* effect may still succumb to ordinary Fear saves, believing the elementals’ numbers too great to defeat. By disabling the ship, the slaughter makes it clear there is no escape, potentially invoking Horror saves as well.

Foes who flee (whether out of Fear, Horror, *confusion* or choice) are preferentially targeted by as many shipbanes as can cluster around them, all eager to catch a whiff of the frightened victim’s demise. Conversely, any combatant on board who firmly stands his or her ground against the elementals is deemed unappetizing and ignored until all other prey have been used up ... unless the brave one should attempt to rescue a mobbed victim, in which case the interrupted “diners” will tear the interloper apart. After all aboard have been massacred, leapt overboard, or sealed themselves behind impenetrable barriers, the slaughter gleefully destroys any propulsion or steering mechanisms that remain intact, then leaves the corpse-strewn vessel to drift onward, vacant and silent.

### *Ecology*

Biologically, shipbanes have no needs. *Psychologically*, these beings – or at least, those found in Ravenloft – seem to crave the final exhalations of the dying, particularly of those who die in a state of confusion and terror. The Grabenite sagas allege that if a ship’s crew is unflinchingly courageous to a man, shipbanes will leave the vessel strictly alone or even flee its approach, though this may be more boastful than factual. More educated theorists have looked for a pattern in known shipbane attacks; some speculate that the creatures may be drawn to vessels whose captains, crews, and/or passengers have committed grave sins or incurred dark forces’ wrath, but this theory is untested.

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Shipbane attacks are most common in the southern Nocturnal Sea, but such creatures can potentially be encountered anywhere on the eastern sea, save close to land or in areas where sun breaks through the omnipresent cloud cover. Given their fatal susceptibility to the sun, it seems unlikely that they could survive in the Sea of Sorrows or seas outside the Core, save at the edge of a Misty Border which could offer them shelter.

The true appearance of a shipbane (i.e. one not using its Fearsome Shapes ability) is not known, assuming it has one at all. Spells that penetrate supernatural disguises reveal only hazy, semi-humanoid silhouettes. Most shipbanes will shift between several hideous guises, during the course of an attack – skin, scales or fur; horns, tusks or warts; feet, paws or hooves; etc – though they always retain talons and fangs with which to attack. Their adopted shapes' colors likewise range across the spectrum, but are always washed-out, pastel, or drab in hue: neither bright nor dark, like the fogs that they inhabit. Forms adopted by shipbanes tend to be outlandish, with rare, shockingly-humanlike exceptions.

Whatever their shapes, shipbanes unleash a torrent of shrieking, deranged cackles during their flyby attacks, and their snide chortling and mocking, childish giggles usher from the obscured depths of the confusion fog, all around their prey.

When slain, a shipbane's body disperses at once into thin wisps of vapor. Unnervingly, other shipbanes nearby will eagerly cluster around these dissipating vapors to bask in their aroma, just as they would savor a dying humanoid's fear-scented breath.

How (or even if) shipbanes reproduce is unknown.

### Society

Shipbanes do not appear to have any leaders, elders, or other authority-figures, gathering in "slaughters" that are little more than mobs. Indeed, they scarcely interact at all, forming groups solely in order to generate the confusion fogs that provide concealment, foment panic, and offer them shelter from stray beams of sunlight: a danger they fear

greatly, however rare a thing it might be on the Nocturnal Sea.

When it isn't attacking vessels, a slaughter either drifts aimlessly with the prevailing winds or moves about at random. Should one shipbane feel an urge to travel in one particular direction, the rest may come along for the ride (dragging the confusion fog with them), or they may capriciously overrule it and pull the fog in another direction entirely. Such "tugs-of-war" over the confusion fog's direction of travel are the closest thing to a 'discussion' which shipbanes are inclined to engage in: they spend most days in a lazy, dreamlike daze, carried by the wind or their slaughter-mates' whims.

**Alignment:** Shipbanes seem oblivious to the horror of their attacks, caring only that their victims should die in a sufficient state of panic and disorientation to sate their vile, hedonistic cravings. Together with their unsociable nature, the fact that they kill for pleasure rather than need, and their habit of gleefully vandalizing ships they assault for the sheer joy of destructiveness, shipbanes' behavior is highly Chaotic as well as Evil.

### Advanced Shipbanes

Shipbanes that are significantly tougher than most (up to 6 HD) have been reported, most often by terrified sailors who fortuitously threw themselves overboard and so escaped their shipmates' vile fate. The scariest thing about advanced shipbanes is that just one is never encountered: if a single member of a slaughter has extra HD, so do all the others.

### Shipbane Mobs

DMs wishing to simplify a battle between a large pack of shipbanes and its foes can treat the shipbanes as a single entity, as per the "Mob" combat rules introduced in *Dungeon Master's Guide II*. Statistics for a slaughter of 48 shipbanes are presented here:

### Slaughter (Mob of Shipbanes) CR8

CE Gargantuan elemental (mob of Medium elementals) (Air, Mists)

**Init** +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, Mist Peering; **Listen** +1, **Spot** +2



## Appendix II New Monsters

### Languages Auran

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**AC** 14, touch 11, flat-footed 9  
(-4 size, +5 Dex, +3 natural)

**Miss Chance** 20% at 5 ft (concealment),  
50% at >5 ft (total concealment) in fog

**hp** 165 (30 HD); **DR** 10 / silver or magic

**Immune** poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning,  
polymorph, aging

**Resistance** cold 10, electricity 10

**Fort** +11, **Ref** +23, **Will** +9

**Weaknesses** sunlight, cannot approach land  
or penetrate water, +50% damage from  
area attacks, suffers 2 negative levels per  
shipbane killed, breaks up at 0 HD or 0 hp.

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**Speed** fly 30 ft. perfect (6 squares)

**Melee** mob 5d6 (hits automatically; ignores  
concealment)

**Space** 20 ft; **Reach** 0 ft (can share spaces  
with opponents)

**Base Atk** +22; **Grp** +35

**Atk Options** fearsome shapes, confusion  
fog (240' radius, Will DC 18), expert  
grappler (can maintain grapples without  
-20 penalty; not flat-footed if grappling)

**Special Actions** dive, Flyby Attack

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**Abilities** Str 13, Dex 21, Con 14, Int 7, Wis  
10, Cha 10

**SQ** elemental traits, Mists traits, mob  
anatomy (can't be tripped, grappled or bull  
rushed), flight, vaporous

**Feat** Flyby Attack, Improved Bull Rush,  
Improved Overrun

**Skills** Bluff +1, Hide +5\*, Intimidate +5,  
Listen +1, Move Silently +5\*, Sense  
Motive +2, Spot +2

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### White-Fang

*The hiss of scales over snow is nearly silent,  
but it draws your attention in time to catch a  
glimpse: a serpentine form, tracing curves in*

*the snowdrift as it glides forward, its frosty  
pelt as white as the snow itself. Brilliant  
blue eyes with slit pupils glitter brightly  
against the whiteness, above a pale, gaping  
throat and fangs translucent as icicles. The  
creature is as hypnotically beautiful as it is  
deadly, and swifter than thought as it strikes.*

### White-fang

**CR6**

NE Huge magical beast (Cold)

**Init** +6; **Senses** tremorsense 120 ft,  
darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, scent;  
Listen +8, Spot +8

**Languages** None spoken; understands  
simple Draconic commands

**AC** 15, touch 10, flat-footed 13; Dodge (-2  
size, +2 Dex, +5 natural)

**hp** 63 (6 HD)

**Immune** cold

**Fort** +10, **Ref** +7, **Will** +6

**Speed** 40 ft. (8 squares), swim 30 ft., burrow  
(snow or ice) 20 ft.

**Melee** bite +12 (2d4+8 plus freezing venom)  
and tail lash +7 (2d6+4); or

bite +12 (2d4+8 plus freezing venom); or

tail lash + 12 (2d6+8)

**Space** 15 ft; **Reach** 10 ft

**Base Atk** +4; **Grp** +20

**Atk Options** constrict (1d8+10), improved  
grab

---

**Abilities** Str 26, Dex 15, Con 20, Int 4, Wis  
14, Cha 10

**SQ** icy camouflage, freezing venom

**Feats** Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative,  
Tracking<sup>B</sup>

**Skills** Balance +2, Climb +8, Hide +2 (+14  
in snow\*), Listen +8\*, Move Silently  
+14\*, Sense Motive +2, Spot +8\*, Survival  
+7\*, Swim +16\*

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**Freezing bite (Ex):** A character bitten by a  
white-fang must succeed on a DC 18 Fort

save or be paralyzed by its venom, which literally freezes the blood. Those who fail their saves become paralyzed in 1d4 rounds, their skin gradually turning blue as they lose 1d8 hp per round until the poison is neutralized or they perish. A *neutralize poison* spell lifts the paralysis, halts the ongoing damage, and restores the victim's color, but does not restore hit points already lost. *Remove paralysis* ends the paralysis effect only.

On a successful save, characters suffer a -2 penalty to Strength and Dexterity for 2d6 rounds. Additional bites against which the victim saves successfully will extend the duration of this loss, but do not inflict further penalties to abilities.

Creatures that are immune to poison are unaffected by white-fangs' venom, and creatures immune to cold automatically

succeed on their saves against it. A white-fang under the control of a master (such as Meredoth) may be ordered not to inject its venom, but to inflict only the base damage with its bite attack.

**Constrict (Ex):** A white-fang may deal 1d8+10 hp of damage per round to an opponent it has successfully grappled. If ordered to do so (e.g. by Meredoth or some other being that controls it) it can make its constriction damage non-lethal.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, a white-fang must hit with a bite attack. It can then try to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins its grapple check, it achieves a hold and can constrict.

**Skills** White-fangs get a +4 racial bonus to their Listen, Move Silently, Spot and Survival checks, as well as a +8 racial



## Appendix II New Monsters

bonus to Swim checks. They can always Take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or otherwise endangered, and may use the Run action while swimming provided they move in a straight line. A white-fang cannot breathe water, but it can hold its breath underwater for 30 minutes before having to make Con checks to avoid drowning.

- \* A white-fang in snow or slush, on open ice, or drifting amongst ice floes at the surface gains a +12 circumstance bonus on Hide checks.

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The white-fang is a silent menace of Todstein's frigid forests and ice-girdled surf, and is known by many ominous names in the skaldic tales of the Grabenites: Hoary Serpent of the Icy Deeps. Haunter of the Frozen Wilds. Winter's Chilling Teeth. Slithering Drake. White Death. All of these epithets are well-deserved, for all that these pale-furred, serpentine predators are seldom seen by any who live to tell of them.

White-fangs are indigenous to Todstein, but they venture well out to sea to hunt seals, fish, and the occasional hapless fisherman when their home isle's pickings grow slim. The white-fangs' usual hunting territory thus extends from Todstein to the fishing banks due east of Graben Island, where the recent increased traffic by both native and foreign fishing fleets has begun to give these lurking killers a dangerous taste for newly-plentiful human prey.

### *Strategies and tactics*

White-fangs are solitary hunters that prefer to lurk unseen and strike from concealment. They swim well, move swiftly across open ground, and can burrow through snow or ice. White-fangs' sensitivity to vibrations allows them to lurk just beneath a blanket of snow or the sea's surface, awaiting a passing footstep or the dipping of a paddle into the water. On land, they locate prey using keen eyesight, hearing, and sense of smell.

Slow-witted if confronted by the unfamiliar, yet well practiced as predators, white-fangs rely on stealth and surprise to inject a lethal, blood-curdling poison into

their victims with their needle-sharp fangs. Like a viper, a hungry white-fang will usually strike once, then retreat to wait for its prey to succumb to paralysis, at which time it returns to swallow its victim whole. (They will not risk consuming prey that is neither dead nor paralyzed, so do not employ Swallow Whole attacks in melee.) Confronted by foes that their venom fails to incapacitate, they resort to constriction and to lashing their viciously-barbed tails, fleeing if seriously injured.

Alchemical antitoxin is not as effective against white-fang venom as other toxins, giving only a +2 bonus to Fort saves against its effects. Blending antitoxin with an equal amount of melt powder (see *Frostburn*) will make the antitoxin as effective as usual (+5 save bonus) against white-fang venom.

### *Ecology*

White-fangs appear prominently in several Grabenite eddas that pre-date Nebligtode's arrival in Ravenloft, suggesting that the icy serpents existed in some abundance on the world from whence its darklord originated. Whether they had been present on Todstein before Meredoth established his home there, were summoned or imported to the Rock by the necromancer himself, or were seeded by the Dark Powers upon his arrival in the Land of Mists is unknown. Whichever the case, he deems them of little threat to his unliving servitors or himself, so lets them remain as free-ranging 'watchdogs' over his isle.

Adaptable and very mobile, white-fangs can be encountered virtually anywhere out-of-doors on Todstein, or within several days' swim out to sea from it. The serpents have even snuck on board passing vessels and hidden themselves below decks, ambushing unwary sailors one by one. They avoid the warm waters to the north, finding such torrid conditions very uncomfortable; to date, none have crossed the open sea to Graben Island, but it may only be a matter of time before they make it there.

An adult white-fang resembles a tremendous python 25' to 30' long, weighing in at over 400 pounds, and covered with a thick pelt of soft, insulating white fur. Its

## *Appendix II New Monsters*

belly sports broad bands of scale, like a normal snake's, and its head is armored in snow-white plates of finest ivory. Its slim viper's fangs are as transparent as glass, injecting sky-blue fluid to envenom prey. Its eyes are likewise blue, while the slim, forked tongue with which it tastes the air for odors is bright red: the only points of color on its entire body. In motion, a white-fang is sinuous, almost hypnotically-graceful, and very, *very* fast.

Young white-fangs hatch from grapefruit-sized eggs in clutches of 2-5, and tend to remain together for safety in numbers for up to three years before setting off on their own. A white-fang hatchling is a mere 5' long, but it grows rapidly if given sufficient food. Straight out of the egg, its freezing venom is every bit as potent as an adult's: a necessary advantage, as it must fend for itself to find prey and avoid larger predators, including adult white-fangs. A white-fang which reaches maturity (around age six) can potentially survive as long as two centuries, though it is rare for them to live longer than forty years in the wild.

### *Society*

Barely intelligent enough to comprehend a few words of Draconic, and unable speak it themselves, white-fangs do not have the communication skills or wit to create their own society. That they understand Draconic at all is something of a mystery: they do not teach their young this language (or anything else for that matter), so their comprehension of its basic vocabulary seems to be inherited.

For most of the year, white-fangs treat their fellows as competitors, larger specimens occupying and defending hunting territories and small ones keeping out of the big ones' way. Once a year, in late autumn, a female white-fang releases pheromones that attract nearby males to form a "mating ball" around her. Such clusters usually contain dozens of consorts, and are the only 'socializing' adult white-fangs will take part in. Occasionally, a recently-bred female is followed around for a few days afterward by a hopeful male, in case the mating was unsuccessful and she comes into season again.

Since 737, Meredoth has acquired a limited ability to communicate with and command Todstein's white-fangs, albeit more through intimidation than supernatural influence. None of the furred serpents will hunt him or his unliving servants, and most will track down and attack intruders on his isle if he personally commands them to do so. A few of the smartest will even hunt down specific trespassers on his orders, and refrain from eating whoever they might catch, provided the necromancer doesn't leave them alone with their prisoners long enough for the dim-witted serpents to grow hungry.

**Alignment:** White-fangs are only minimally sentient, living more like wild animals than intelligent creatures; they barely understand the notion of "good" versus "bad", let alone "Good" versus "Evil". Nonetheless, many seem to take a perverse, bullying pleasure in paralyzed victims' helplessness, slithering all over the bodies of their prey, licking fear-sweat from their skins and tasting their bite-wounds, before devouring them. Curiously, tales of white-fangs encountered by ancient Anatal heroes fail to mention this behavior.

### *Typical treasure*

White-fangs do not collect treasure, but their pelts and the ivory plates on their heads are of value. A typical specimen's furred hide can potentially fetch as much as 500 gp from a furrier, while its ivory scales' value ranges widely (1d6 x 100 gp total) depending on how long ago the creature has molted and replaced old, cracked ones. Naturally, if it is killed in a way that destroys its remains, a white-fang's valuable parts are also ruined.

### *Advanced White-Fangs*

Like the snakes they resemble, white-fangs never stop growing, and specimens of great size are not unprecedented. A white-fang of up to 10 HD remains Huge, while those that live to attain up to 16 HD are Gargantuan. Such long-lived, well-fed examples usually spend the majority of their time at sea, feeding on beluga whales, walrus, and other oversized prey.

## Appendix II New Monsters

### Hoarfrost

An unusually sly young female white-fang, Hoarfrost was caught by Meredoth and incorporated into his *rod of the white-fang*, in imitation of a *python rod* which the aged necromancer had acquired but (not being Good-aligned) could not activate. Hoarfrost now serves the darklord of Nebligtode as a familiar, bodyguard, bloodhound, and a confidante of sorts, to the limited extent that Meredoth is capable of relating civilly to another living being.

*Appendix III*

*Who's Doomed*

# Baron Lyron Evensong

(Demilord of Liffe)

**Male human Bard 12** **CR14**

NE Medium humanoid (incorporeal)

**Init** +4; **Senses** Listen +6, Spot +1

**Languages** Sithican\*, Darkonese, Draconic, Elven, Vaasi

**AC** 21, touch 16, flat-footed 17; **Dodge** (+4 Dex, +5 armour, +2 deflection)

**hp** 79 (12 HD); fast healing 4

**Saves:** **Fort** +6, **Ref** +10, **Will** +11

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** weapon +15/+10 (1d6+5 damage/18-20)

**Base Atk** +9; **Grp** +12

**Atk Options** Combat Expertise

**Special Actions** immaterial, bardic music 12/day (countersong, fascinate [4 targets], Inspire Courage +2, Inspire Competence, suggestion [DC 20], Inspire Greatness, Song of Freedom)

**Combat Gear:** +2 rapier

Bard Spells Known (CL 12th):

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4th (3/day)-Dominate Person (DC 19), Hallucinatory Terrain (DC 18), Modify Memory (DC 19)

3rd (4/day)-Crushing Despair (DC 18), Glibness, Haste, Slow (DC 17)

2nd (4/day)- Eagle's Splendor, Hypnotic Pattern (DC 16), Suggestion (DC 17), Tongues

1st (4/day)-Charm Person (DC 16), Disguise Self, Expeditious Retreat, Obscure Object (DC 15)

0 (3/day)- Detect Magic, Ghost Sound (DC 14), Know Direction, Mending, Message, Prestidigitation

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**Abilities:** Str 16, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 19



**SQ:** Phylactery, bardic knowledge +14

**Feats:** Combat Expertise, Deceitful, Dodge, Iron Will, Spell Focus (enchantment), Weapon Finesse

**Skills:** Appraise +16, Bluff +21, Craft (Instrument) +7, Diplomacy +21, Disguise +23, Forgery +4, Gather Information +16, Hide +9, Listen +6, Move Silently +9, Perform (keyboards) +21, Sense Motive +6, Sleight of Hand +9, Spellcraft +16, Use Magic Device +11

**Possessions** combat gear plus +1 *chain shirt*, *circlet of persuasion*, *gloves of dexterity* +4, *ring of protection* +2

**Phylactery (Ex):** Baron Evensong's soul is bound to his harpsichord: for as long as it exists, he will continue to return if slain. If Evensong is killed but his phylactery is not destroyed, he reforms in 1d10 days. Smashing the instrument is not enough to slay him permanently, but it does weaken Evensong, ending all of his current spell-effects and forcing him to manifest. However, Evensong still returns in 3d10 days and is able to repair his phylactery. To permanently finish off Evensong, his harpsichord must be burned or otherwise

## *Appendix III Who's Doomed*

destroyed in a way that it is irreparable (such as disintegration). The harpsichord is Medium with 50 hit points, hardness 15 and a break DC of 40.

**Fast Healing (Ex):** Baron Evensong heals at an exceptional rate whenever he is in his manor or outdoors on its grounds.

**Immaterial (Su):** Baron Evensong can become incorporeal at will, much like a manifested ghost. In this form he is totally immune to nonmagical attacks. Evensong can turn incorporeal or revert to his solid state as an immediate action.

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The Baron is graceful, with a light charming smile and long delicate fingers that speak of a soft touch necessary for skilful use of instruments. His clothing is the fine silk and bright colours or the nobility, and he discusses their local construction but mentions the imported nature of the fabric in an off-hand manner. His hair is neatly trimmed but seems thick and bushy for his long, angular face. While human, he moves with a deliberate grace and his eyes seem old and wistful; his words come quick and easily, almost in a rehearsed manner, freely flowing over his thin lips as his hands move in an excited manner. At first he seems almost simple, like a minor nobleman with a modest education and few wits, but, for just a moment, behind the vapid smile and easily spoken pleasantries, there was an aged darkness, a veiled depth from years of introspection and contemplation.

### *Background*

Born in another land, Lyron Evensong was raised in a cosmopolitan city of scholars, artists and merchants. Lyron was a musical prodigy, a genius of composition and structure. Seeing his brilliance for what it was, Lyron's father locked him away with only an endless stream of teachers and composers for company. Isolated from human contact, Lyron became detached and uncaring. Emotionally stunted, Lyron found it difficult to empathize with others and was unable to write music that stirred any feeling in his listeners.

His many attempts to produce a masterpiece having failed, Lyron blamed his audience and believed that they were limited by the emotions of their individual pasts. He began channeling his energies into influencing the feelings of others, producing simplistic, yet emotionally-manipulative pieces. Lyron's new works, though critically derided, proved popular with the common folk. Disgusted by how easily people were swayed, he came to see his audience as little more than objects.

Lyron eventually decided that people needed his help if they were to free themselves from their feelings. It was not enough to influence them through their weaknesses: to be truly seen as a genius, he must break the chains of their sentimental ties and spread his unique morality. Lyron frantically wrote a number of philosophical works denouncing emotions. He tried to help free people by burning their homes to release them from old memories and possessions, or killing families to free someone from love.

His experiments all failed. Still, Lyron was convinced he only needed to find the right argument to explain his philosophy, the right action to convince people of the truth. He only needed the time to write the paper or to discuss matter with a subject directly.

All mundane methods having failed, Lyron turned to magic, directly controlling others' minds. His enchantments could temporarily suppress subjects' usual affections, giving Lyron a brief sense of accomplishment that spurred him on. Unsatisfied by his magic's limited duration, Lyron then commissioned a magnificent harpsichord to be crafted and enchanted by a local wizard. It was to share his soul with the listeners and allow anyone who heard it to see the world as Lyron did. But the spell went awry as the Mists rose up around Lyron; the magic trapped his spirit in the wood and wires of the instrument.

Lyron found himself in a new land, Baron of a large manor home he was unable to leave, and terribly cursed. Each night, time slowed in his manor, such that a full century passed between sunset and dawn. Lyron continued to grow old at the same rate as the outside world, each century-long night aging



## *Appendix III Who's Doomed*

him by but twelve hours. Initially terrified by the prospect of centuries alone in his manor, he turned to guests as temporary entertainment. Unfortunately, these guests aged a century in a single night, making an overnight visit as Evensong's estate a death sentence to any human. Nor were long-lived races much use as company, for even they became enraged to be trapped with him for the "night", and had to be killed to ensure their silence.

Despite the growing death-toll among his "overnight" guests, Evensong kept drawing visitors to his manor of Neverwere, using invitations imbued with magic to ensure a steady supply of sacrifices to his own boredom. One of these invitations found its way into the hands of a party of adventurers, who succeeded in shattering his harpsichord and escaping the manor.

Slain, both the Baron and his domain almost dissolved into the Mists but, through luck or design, became bound to another fragment of land. Over the course of months, several such small, fading domains coalesced into a single island, which emerged into the Core as part of the Nocturnal Sea. Lyron quickly seized a second chance at life, rebuilding his instrument and repairing his damaged home.

### *Current Sketch*

Despite past mishaps, Evensong still invites people to dine at his manor, although now he is far more selective in his choices. He enjoys spending a hundred years trying to convince his captives to embrace his callous worldview. After many subjective centuries' practice, his brainwashing techniques have grown extremely refined and complicated.

Liffe was initially a composite domain with multiple demilords, much as Darkon became during Azalin's absence. Baron Evensong has managed to establish his authority the fastest, and is the effective ruler of the land, but the others yet retain a measure of power. While not the only lord of Liffe, Evensong has more power than do the other demilords. He does not know who or what they are, but he senses that rivals are

out there and fears they will try to supplant him. Currently, Evensong seeks to manipulate adventurers into disposing of these other fallen lords.

Baron Evensong is also attempting to isolate Liffe, and is doing all he can to hinder trade and immigration. He knows that converting the entire island to his philosophy will be a difficult task, and the influx of new ideas, trends and goods will only make it harder. Lyron has secretly funded groups promoting isolationism, and even sabotaged trade pacts he has pretended to approve of during senate meetings.

However ambitious, Lyron's plans for Liffe are continually sabotaged by his impatience and erratic-seeming moods and ideas. Each night, Lyron has decades to spend preparing for the next day and reviewing recent events. Every morning, he inevitably emerges from his manor with a revised plan years in the making and only a single day to set it into motion. As a result, his reputation among the other senate members is that of a flighty dilettante with a brief attention-span ... this, even though his "loss of interest" in an idea is usually the result of decades, not hours.

### *Combat*

Baron Evensong avoids combat whenever possible, especially near his harpsichord. He prefers to lead people safely away from his phylactery at the first hint of disagreement, let alone combat. Confident in his own immortality, Evensong is nonchalant about sacrificing himself as a distraction to draw the curious away.

If given time to prepare, Evensong favors using enchantment-spells, enthralled slaves, and thugs hired to do his fighting for him, only resorting to direct violence if given no other choice. Even when forced into combat, Evensong relies on spells before turning to weaponry.

## *Appendix III Who's Doomed*

### *Lair: Neverwere Manor*

Neverwere Manor is a large building outside Claviera. It is spacious and opulent, though unremarkable as such manor houses go. The grounds are reasonably well-maintained, but not obsessively-so, and the house proper is kept in adequate condition. The interiors are tidy and in good repair, though few servants are ever seen engaged in cleaning or upkeep.

Neverwere Manor is the true center of Baron Evensong's domain and curse. Every night, the interior of the house is pulled out of the normal world, although it remains connected by the Mists. It becomes impossible to enter the building by mundane or magical means during the night. Windows and doors, while still subject to cosmetic damage, cannot be penetrated or shattered.

The house's interior becomes another world into itself. Once encompassing but a single room (the parlor), this curious pocket-plane has grown with Evensong's power, and now comprises an infinite series of linked rooms and corridors, branching off of one another and weaving amongst themselves. To casual explorers, the manor does not appear to have changed its layout, but new doors are soon discovered where once there were none, as corridors that were not there before and even whole wings await discovery.

While close to the parlor, the pocket-plane's heart, the manor appears to be a normal house, but the farther explorers move from it, the more their environment grows twisted and bizarre. There are rooms filled with centuries of dust and cobwebs, ancient halls stuffed with relics, burnt husks of rooms scarred by age-old fires, and even rooms reflecting how things have been or will be.

If damaged by its overnight occupants, the Manor repairs itself, slowly returning things to their original state. Furniture rights itself, books replace themselves on their shelves, and broken plates return whole to their cupboards. Any structural damage mends itself instantly when witnesses' backs are turned or even during the blink of an eye.

Unlike the daylight Manor, by the night the windows and doors lead out into an empty, black space, devoid even of stars. Escaping from the Manor does not lead back to Liffe. Once inside the Manor there is no proven way to exit before dawn, when the interior returns to Liffe. Unwilling "guests" have speculated that a single door hidden deep in the manor may lead out, but that the locked portal must be opened by the willing Baron. Powerful planar magics might also force an exit, if Evensong were to invite a spellcaster of such power to stay overnight (unlikely).

Baron Evensong has some control over his home and decides some of the planar traits the manor, such as the flow of time and pull of gravity. Evensong has learned to spare his guests the ravages of age and hunger allowing time to pass for them as it passes in the real world. Days and years still seem to pass but the guests do not grow tired or hungry. However, this is also true for spells and abilities useable once per day, while the manor is timeless they cannot heal, rest or recover spells until a full day has passed in the real world (or eight hours for wizards, which would be roughly 67 years inside the manor). However, the Baron can also make time pass normally in the manor so the guests emerge one hundred years older but have the opportunity to rest, heal and regain spells during their stay. The Baron himself can regain his spells and bardic music abilities in this manner. However, as time passes normally trapped guests run the risk of ageing, growing old and dying while trapped in the manor.

Neverwere Manor has the following planar traits:

- Normal or subjective directional gravity
- Normal time or timeless
- Infinite
- Alterable morphic

## Puncheron

(Demilord of Liffe)

### Male Unique Shadow CR 10

CE Medium undead (incorporeal)

**Init** +2; **Senses** Listen +16, Spot +16

**Languages** Darkonese, Elven, Grabenite, Sithican, Vaasi

**AC** 16, touch 16, flat-footed 14

(+2 Dex, +4 deflection)

**hp** 76 (11 HD); DR 10/gold

**Immune** undead immunities

**Resist** turn resistance +4

**Fort** +5 **Ref** +5, **Will** +8

**Speed** 40 ft. fly (good) (8 squares)

**Melee** incorporeal touch +6 (1d8 str + 1d4 cha)

**Space** 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.

**Base Atk** +4; Grp -

**Atk Options** bad jokes, dodge, shadowcraft

**Special Actions** strength damage, charisma drain, manifest

**Abilities** Str -, Dex 15, Con -, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 15

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**SQ** darkvision 60ft., incorporeal traits, undead traits

**Feats** blind-fight, dodge, great fortitude, stealthy

**Skills** disguise +14, gather information +14, hide +16\*, listen +16, perform (comedy) +16, search +18, sense motive +14, spot +16

**Strength Damage (Su):** Puncheron's touch does 1d8 Strength damage to living foes. A creature reduced to 0 Strength falls to the ground helpless. This is a negative energy effect.

**Charisma Drain (Su):** Puncheron's touch does 1d4 Charisma drain to living foes. A creature reduced to 0 Charisma dies. This

is a negative energy effect. This ability is how Puncheron survives and sustains his existence.

**Bad Jokes (Sp):** The jester can induce forced laughter on listeners. At will - hideous laughter (DC 13). Caster level 11th. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Shadowcraft (Sp):** Puncheron used to be able to create powerful illusions that could kill groups of people. Now he can only make crude puppets from shadow. 2/day - shadow conjuration (DC 16). 1/day - shadow evocation (DC 17). Caster level 11th. All save DCs is Charisma-based.

**Manifest (Su):** By draining Charisma Puncheron heals himself of damage (one Hit Dice for each attribute point) and can take physical form. If he is uninjured and drains a victim of Charisma he can apply the points to his own physical stats splitting them equally between Strength and Constitution. When assuming physical form he assumes the rough features of the individual but lacks all of their knowledge and abilities.

Puncheron is notably weaker in this form (typically suffering from low hit points due to his low Constitution) and lacks his supernatural abilities (but still possesses his spell-like abilities. If slain dissolves into his shadow form retaining all damage inflicted (but regaining any hit points lost due to low Constitution). Stolen attribute points, whether used or not, are lost at a rate of one per day and Puncheron dissolves when one of his stats reaches 0.

**Skills:** Puncheron has a +2 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks and a +4 racial bonus on Search checks. \*He also gains a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks in areas of shadowy illumination. In brightly lit areas, it takes a -4 penalty on Hide checks.

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### Background

Puncheron was the once incarnate shadow of a King Doerdon, a regal darklord. The shade

took the form of a jester, the king's poor sense of humour made flesh. The shared existence was instantly adversarial with the king even trying to have his own shadow executed. Puncheron quickly began to despise the king, blaming his nether-self for his lack of a true existence. The jester despised being bound to the king, musing that the only thing worse than being a reflection was being one that was self-aware.

Through magic and intimidation Puncheron enforced his will over the castle and king. Doerdon became shattered and withdrawn from the constant mental assault from his shadow. Puncheron gained increasing independence from his shade and assumed de facto rule of the kingdom, if not the domain of Risibilos. The jester took pride in reversing all of the king's old laws and decrees.

This lordship ended when a small group of travelers entered the small kingdom and slew Doerdon seemingly ending Puncheron's reign and the jester faded away without his master. However, this was not the end for shortly after a similar fate befell Baron

Lyron Evensong of Claviera. Somehow the mad bard survived and his dying realm merged with Risibilos and others, each propping up the other fading land. Puncheron found himself alive but now little more than a shadow on the wall.

Being the solid reflection of someone was torture to Puncheron, but now he was an image without substance, a reflection of himself. He gained the independence he long sought and laments it endlessly.

### *Current Sketch*

An intelligent shadow Puncheron has learned to steal more than physical strength from his victims, sapping their force of personality and sense of identity. By doing so Puncheron sustains himself and can take physical form for short periods. When he does so he assumes the form of someone he has recently drained, becoming their reflection.

Puncheron strives to free himself of his partial existence becoming his own being. He will do anything, say anything, and



promise anything to become a real being. He currently believe that he has a soul, or at least a reflection of one, and might be able to be reincarnated and is seeking someone he can manipulate to this end. He has also heard of a device known as the Apparatus that might serve his purpose, but is still unsure of exactly what its construction entails.

### *Combat*

Puncheron fights through quick strikes. Unlike regular shadows that prefer to strike while moving Puncheron likes to hide and lay in wait then strike when he is unexpected. He seldom engages in long

## *Easan the Mad*

(Darklord of Vechor)

### **Male Fiendish Wood Elf Wiz13Cr 16**

CE Medium humanoid (elf)

**Init** +4; **Senses** darkvision 60, Listen +2, Spot +2; **Outcast Rating** 2

**Languages** Vechorite\*, Abyssal, Darkonese, Elven, Draconic, Sithican, Vaasi

**AC** 21, touch 17, flat-footed 17

(+4 Dex, *amulet of natural armor* +1, *bracers of armor* +3, *ring of protection* +3)

**hp** 36 (13 HD); regeneration 5

**Resist** cold 20, fire 20, DR 10/magic, SR 18

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +11, **Will** +11

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** +1 dagger +7/+2 (1d4+1)

**Ranged** masterwork dart +11/+6 (1d4+1)

**Base Atk** +7/+2; **Grp** +7

**Attack Options** Reality dominion, smite good

**Special Actions** superior detect thoughts, reality dominion

**Combat Gear** +1 dagger, masterwork darts, wand of *summon monster IV*.

drawn-out fights preferring to simply strike and gain enough life to sustain himself then fleeing. If possible Puncheron strikes in places of absolute dark trusting his darkvision, but he also enjoys attacking in areas of fog, mist or magical darkness.

If cornered and forced into combat, Puncheron focuses on single opponents, preferably wizards, sorcerers and bards trying to strip them of their spellcasting or hope to drain them of enough Strength to take them out of the fight.

### **Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 13th)**

7th (1) -- insanity (DC 22), reverse gravity (DC 22), summon monster VII

6th (2) - acid fog, control weather, mass suggestion (DC 21), permanent image (DC 21), summon monster VI

5th (4) - baleful polymorph (DC 20), dream, feblemind (DC 20), mirage arcana (DC



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20), nightmare (DC 20), summon monster V, teleport

4th (5) - black tentacles, confusion (DC 19), crushing despair (DC 19), hallucinatory terrain (DC 19), shadow conjuration, summon monster IV

3rd (5) - blink, fly, major image (DC 18), sleet storm, slow (DC 18), stinking cloud (DC 19), suggestion (DC 18), summon monster III

2nd (5) - darkness, fog cloud, gust of wind, glitterdust (DC 19), hypnotic pattern (DC 18), minor image (DC 18), shatter, summon monster II

1st (5) - change self, color spray (DC 17), enlarge, grease (DC 18), obscuring mist, silent image (DC 17), sleep (DC 17), summon monster I, unseen servant

0th (4) - dancing lights, daze (DC 16), detect magic, flare (DC 16), ghost sound (DC 16), mage hand, prestidigitation, read magic

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 18, Con 9, Int 20, Wis 10, Cha 7

**SQ:** arcane mastery, familiar (raven)

**Feats:** Augment Summoning, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Create Abberation, Create Magical Beast, Forge Ring, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Conjuration)

**Skills:** Concentrate +15, Craft (alchemy) +16, Craft (clockwork) +11, Craft (metalwork) +11, Decipher Script +15, Knowledge (arcana) +21, Knowledge (local) +16, Knowledge (the planes) +16, Knowledge (Religion) +8, Listen +2, Search +7, Spellcraft +21, Spot +2

**Possessions:** Combat gear plus, *amulet of natural armor* +1, *bracers of armor* +3, *cloak of resistance* +3, *headband of intellect* +2, *ring of protection* +3

**Wild Sorcery (Ex):** Easan's magic is wild and unpredictable, even for him. This has a number of effects:

When casting any spell that permits a saving throw or has a variable effect based

on caster level, roll 1d10 and consult the chart below:

1	Spell save DC and caster level reduced by 1
2-3	Spell save DC reduced by 1
4-5	Caster level reduced by 1
6-7	Caster level increased by 1
8-9	Spell save DC increased by 1
10	Spell save DC and caster level increased by 1

Secondly, any spell that deals energy damage has a 10% chance of dealing a random type of energy damage, the spell is otherwise unchanged. For example, a fireball spell might deal electricity damage for purposes of energy resistance. If this effect occurs, roll 1d6 and consult the chart below.

1	Acid
2	Cold
3	Fire
4	Electricity
5	Sonic
6	Two types. The damage is half one-type, and half another. Roll twice above and ignore rolls of 6.

Thirdly, Easan can spontaneously add metamagic feats to spells he casts. To do so, he spends a memorized spell of the appropriate level. Like all spontaneous metamagic this requires a full-round action. The spell being cast must be one currently memorized.

**Reality Dominion (Su):** Easan can reshape objects in domain at will. Unattended objects receive no saving throw, while attended objects allow the wielder to make a Will Save DC 21 to resist this effect. Changes to items are slow, occurring over minutes or even hours, making this ability less useful in combat. However, Easan can use it to replicate the spells animate object and liveoak. These effects work as if cast by a 13th level caster.

**Regeneration (Ex):** Easan quickly heals from even the most grievous of wounds. Nothing—not even thirst, starvation or suffocation—deals lethal damage to Easan. He can be rendered unconscious by

subdual damage, but he is immune to a coup de grace. If he loses a limb it will regrow within 1d4 hours; even disintegration only disincorporates him for one week. All permanent ability damage done to Easan is considered temporary ability damage.

**Superior Detect Thoughts (Su):** Easan can detect the surface thoughts of any creature in his domain. This works as the spell detect thoughts. This ability works at will and there is no saving throw against this ability. This ability is also continually active, so Easan is always considered to continually aware of the presence or absence of thoughts and requires only two rounds of concentration to read surface thoughts.

Easan is a wood elf with coppery red hair, rich olive skin, and dark eyes that gleam with wild visions no one else sees. His body is slight - barely four feet tall - yet betrays no outward sign of fiendishness. His voice is melodic and can be quite soothing, provided one listens to its soft tones rather than his frequent lapses into gibberish.

### *Dread Possibility The Demon Within?*

Easan did not go mad immediately after the demon was placed within his mind. He desperately sought out clerics to try and remove the taint from within him. None succeeded; few could even detect the demonic presence. This string of failures lead Easan to begin his own fiendish experiments.

The truth is that there is no demon to remove.

The imp was nothing more than a vicious lie told to torment the wood elf, and Easan believed it completely. He latched onto every evil thought and impulse he had, believing it to be a sign of demonic corruption. His desperation to prevent his damnation led him to more and more depraved acts.

Easan is fully aware of how far he has fallen. The more evil he commits, the more convinced he is that he is losing his internal battle. His experiments have been incredibly successful, but with all his knowledge he will never cure himself. There is nothing to cure. The only demons within are his own.



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In public, Easan wears a black toga and goes crowned by a dead laurel wreath; when he loses touch with his surroundings, he usually reverts to the mottled green-and-brown leathers of a forest scout. Engaged in experiments, Vechor's darklord dons a basic laboratory smock, often stained by his grisly research.

### *Background*

Once an inoffensive wizard in an elven nation beyond the Mists, Easan discovered that a neighboring land had fallen under the sway of a terrible half-fiend dictator. Fearing for his homeland, he roused his fellow elves against this imminent threat. Before the wood elves could launch their preemptive assault, however, the half-fiend had Easan kidnapped in revenge for his meddling.

Dragged in chains before the tyrant's throne and accused of "warmongering", Easan protested that he had acted upon legitimate moral imperatives ... things no fiend, or part-fiend, could ever comprehend. With malicious irony, the dictator assured the elf he would have the chance to prove his argument: that Easan's soul, henceforth, would be bound to that of a minor fiend, to which he might struggle to teach "morality". If the elf succeeded in taming the fiendish spirit's malign nature, his argument would be proven valid; if he succumbed to its wicked blandishments, possession would be his due punishment.

Released to pursue this inner conflict, Easan soon found that the dark impulses and temptations which now flooded his mind were too strong to suppress, too persistent to quell. Fearing what evil he might do, he frantically sought the means - arcane knowledge, divine prayer, psychic surgery - to expel or silence the fiendish spirit within. Sought, in vain; no one to whom he turned for help could isolate the evil entity, so inextricably had its essence been woven into his own. Only once did he attain a state of grudging truce with its evil presence, with the aid of mystics, and the half-fiend tyrant soon learned of their intervention in Easan's punishment, wreaking a terrible vengeance upon their realm.

His sanity already frayed by years of inner strife, the wood elf could not bear the loss of his solace and his benefactors. Losing sight of the moral imperatives he'd once cited in his own defense, Easan began to carry out abhorrent experiments upon other sentient beings, in a desperate attempt to quantify the nature and properties of souls. His elven side frantically told itself that he would make amends for these actions, once his works bore fruit and the fiend was banished; the fiendish presence within Easan, pleased by his callous experiments and sure he would never succeed, gleefully egged him on.

Withdrawn, by then, to an isolated mansion of his own construction, and to the comforting depths of his own imaginings, Easan never really noticed that he had been carried away by the Mists. By the time he looked up from his researches long enough to find himself in Vechor, his mind had twisted upon itself so completely that having the Land obey his whims seemed, to him, only natural.

### *Current Sketch*

Easan's internal feud between elven and fiendish spirits, and his own uncertainty as to which spirit's thoughts are which, have left him hopelessly out of touch with reality. While he remains aware, on some level, that his experiments serve a purpose, he is no longer certain why that purpose is worth pursuing, or whether his desire to banish the fiend is a good thing or an evil one. Seldom does he finish a project with the same intent as when he started it; he re-invents his own motives constantly, always telling himself that his prior objectives were those of the fiend. Likewise, Easan might reverse his own opinions a dozen times in a single conversation, lambasting his previous position as "evil" each time he does so.

As darklord, Easan possesses such total control over his surroundings that he no longer considers them real, but a product of his own imagination. Reality, his last threads of sanity argue, doesn't change on a whim, ergo he must be living entirely in his own head. Therefore his "research" must be no more than a series of thought-experiments,



## *Appendix III Who's Doomed*

and his Vechorite subjects, merely constructs of his own imagining. As the people of Vechor aren't real to him, they - like the victims of his ill-conceived, futile experiments - are utterly expendable, though it pleases Easan to see them happy: a pleasant daydream rather than a glum one. Unfortunately for the Vechorites, his usual methods of "making someone happy" tend to involve making them someone, or something, other than they had been; they hide their sorrows from their God-King's charity for good reason.

Easily bored, Easan sometimes changes his realm for sheer amusement, or to see what will happen, or just to be contrary. Most such changes are simply bizarre, but they may also reflect his state of mind. If he is truly calm and at ease, the elven darklord's whims can birth scenes of startling, even breathtaking beauty; if enraged, frightened or depressed, the landscape near him may well reflect these moods, with terrible consequences.

In rare and fleeting moments of lucidity, Easan suspects that his body must really be lying, catatonic, in an insane asylum on his world of origin. If anything remains of his former, benign persona, after so many decades of madness, it most likely takes comfort in this belief.

### *Combat*

Easan's erratic nature persists even in battle, as he shifts tactics unpredictably and may even change sides in mid-combat, for reasons that no doubt make perfect sense to him. Virtually indestructible, he need not fear the consequences of such madcap tactics.

The elf darklord's minions have no such guarantees, and he seldom if ever fights alongside non-construct allies ... not least, because nothing but constructs would willingly risk being caught up in his "wild magic", or destroyed by Easan himself, should he lose track of whose side they are on.

### *Lair*

Easan's mansion of pink and white marble is usually to be found at the foot of the Cliffs of Vesanis, but it occasionally moves instantaneously to the heart of Abdok, or rises to the top of the Cliffs so the Erl-King can admire the view. Curiously, none of the mansion's few human servants seem to notice any change when such relocations occur: to them, Easan's house has always been where it is at the moment.

The manor of Vechor's darklord is usually a rank 2 sinkhole of evil, but this can rise to 3 or even 4 at times, depending on what sorts of experiments are in progress within.

### *Closing the Borders*

Creatures that attempt to leave Vechor when its border is closed are assailed by a cacophony of wild, insane laughter. Neither deafness nor magical silence will dampen this effect. The din is so unbearable that such creatures are considered deafened until they move back across the border to Vechor, at which point the laughter dies away.

Every round that they hear the border's horrible laughter, creatures automatically suffer 1d2 points of Wisdom damage. This continual damage ceases immediately upon their return to Vechor, after which they regain ability points normally. Creatures reduced to 0 Wisdom in this way do not fall unconscious, but slip in a state of mindless trance; they wander, oblivious as Lost Ones, until their random, shuffling steps carry them back into Easan's realm.

# Capitaine Alain Monette

(Darklord of L'Île de la Tempête)

**Male Human Afflicted Werebat**  
**Exp4/ftr4 CR 13**

LE Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger)

**Init** +2 (+2 Dex); **Senses** blindsense 120 ft; Listen +14 (+18\*), Spot +12 (+16\*)

**Languages:** Tempetaine\*; unique pidgin of Low Mordentish, Darkonese, Vaasi and Grabenite (see "Understanding Monette")

**OR:** 2 initially, 8 if lycanthropy is known

**AC:** 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12

(+2 Dex, +2 natural)

**Resist:** DR 5/silver

**hp** 90 (12 HD), Diehard

**Fort** +12, **Ref** +8, **Will** +13 (+17 vs. fear)

**Weaknesses:** chemical bane (skullcap), Landlocked

**Speed:** 30 ft (6 squares), Endurance

**Melee:** mwk cutlass +13/+8 (1d6+2/19-20)

**Ranged:** mwk arquebus† +14/+9 (1d12/x3)

**Base Atk:** +10; Grp +12

**Special Actions:** hybrid form, Current Manipulation, Closing the Border

**Combat Gear:** mwk cutlass, mwk arquebus, powder horn & ammunition  
[† - An arquebus takes two rounds to reload, so Monette can only make consecutive attacks if he had two arquebuses at hand.]

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 12

**SQ:** Alternate form, Bat Empathy, Modified Curse of Lycanthropy, shapechanger traits, Tide-Influenced Lycanthrope, Undying Soul

**Feats:** Alertness, Courage, Diehard, Endurance, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (firearms), Flyby Attack, Iron Will<sup>B</sup>, Skill Focus (Profession [sailor]), Stealthy, Weapon Focus (arquebus).

**Skills:** Balance +8, Climb +8 (+10 w/rope), Control Shape +6, Craft (boatbuilding) +7, Diplomacy +3, Escape Artist +2 (+4 versus ropes), Hide +6, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (architecture/engineering) +6, Knowledge (geography) +11, Knowledge (nature) +9, Move Silently +6, Profession (sailor) +14, Sense Motive +8, Survival +9 (+11 versus getting lost, +11 above ground), Swim +10, Use Rope +7

**Possessions:** combat gear plus immaculate blue-black naval uniform with gold buttons, spyglass.

**Bat Empathy (Ex):** Though he detests them, Monette can communicate with normal or dire bats. This gives him a +4 racial bonus on checks made to influence these animals' attitudes. It also lets him convey simple concepts and (if the bat is friendly) give them commands, such as "friend," "foe," "flee," and "attack."



## Appendix III Who's Doomed

**Blindsense (Ex):** In any form, Monette can use echolocation to pinpoint solid objects and creatures within 120', even if they are invisible or while in the dark. Echolocation is as precise as sight, but it doesn't reveal colors. It is effective in darkness, fog, or similar conditions of low visibility. It also reveals invisible creatures. A silence spell negates his echolocation, forcing Monette to rely on normal senses. This ability makes most forms of invisibility and concealment irrelevant to Monette, although it can't sense ethereal or incorporeal creatures.

**Landlocked (Su):** Monette's curse forbids him to go back onto the sea. He can explore the wrecks, but going any farther makes him ill. He suffers a growing weakness whenever he moves too far from the Île de la Tempête, suffering a cumulative -1 penalty to Con and -1 to Str per 300' from shore, after the first 500 feet.

Monette once tried to commit suicide by flying as far as he could, but the waves bore him back to the island after his strength gave out. Should Monette ever be forcibly taken from his island, he will wither and die when his Constitution reaches 0. However, his Undying Soul trait soon returns him to his prison.

**Modified Curse of Lycanthropy (Su):** Monette is an afflicted werebat, able to take hybrid form only; he has no dire bat form. He cannot transmit the curse of lycanthropy with his bite. While his hunger for raw meat is as fierce as any lycanthrope's, Monette is not weakened by starvation. His chemical bane is skullcap, a plant which is sometimes to be found along the western coast of Île de la Tempête.

**Current Manipulation (Su):** Simply by concentrating for ten minutes, Monette is able to manipulate the sea's currents in his domain, transforming them into vigorous or dangerous undertows. He is able to affect all of the open sea within his domain, except for a 500-foot wide patch of water along the southern pebble beach, where the current is always calmer. When Monette uses this power, a thick fog also

rises over the water, reducing visibility to a hundred feet only. The beckoning beam of his lighthouse remains visible over the water even under such conditions.

The following maritime rules are adapted from WotC's *Stormwrack*:

Current Strength	Current Speed	Swimming DC
Normal (light)	5-10' / round	12
Vigorous	10-30' / round	17
Dangerous	40-60' / round	20

Monette usually starts by creating vigorous currents which fluctuate frequently in their direction, then builds them up to dangerous intensity when a ship is less than 100' from the rocks. This ensures it will crash in about two rounds unless the vessel's pilot is able to steer through the currents.

### **Tide-influenced lycanthrope (Su):**

Monette is an afflicted werebat who does not control his transformation into hybrid form. Twice each day, at high tide, Monette assumes his hybrid form for one hour. The hunger for blood and raw meat is strong during this period, and if Monette knows of a source of meat currently on the island, he will most probably attack in order to sate his appetite, in whatever way best ensures his own safety. Monette can try to suppress his shifts to hybrid form using the Control Shape skill, but he is not always successful.

**Undying Soul (Su):** If Monette is killed - a thing which has already happened at least once in the past - his essence is transferred to one of Île de la Tempête's thousands of bats, which undergoes a lengthy and painful transformation. After a month's time, the darklord's body will have grown back from that bat, with all his original abilities. The only way to slay Monette permanently is to remove all bats from the island as well.

**Skills:** \* Monette receives a +4 circumstance bonus to his Listen and Spot skills if his blindsense is in use.

## Appendix III Who's Doomed

### Sailing the Storm

Piloting a ship safely through such currents requires a Profession (sailor) check at DC 15 in vigorous currents, or DC 23 in dangerous current. If the check fails, the ship's speed falls to zero, meaning the vessel is swept along with the current. A typical captain has 8 or more ranks in Profession (sailor). Poor visibility (darkness or fog) imposes a +2 penalty to the DC. The piloting check is also modified by the shiphandling rating of the vessel in question.

These are a few sample vessels. A complete list of watercraft and their characteristics can be found in *Stormwrack*.

Type	Speed	Shiphandling Modifier	Nb of hulls	hull HP
Barge	5 feet	-6	80	50
Caravel*	30 feet	+2	24	80
Cog **	20 feet	-2	16	80
Galley***	15 feet	-2	78	80
Raft	5 feet	+0	1	30
Rowboat	10 feet	+2	1	30

\* sailing ship \*\* most medieval ships \*\*\* most war ships. Most merchant ships are either caravels (fast) or cogs (slower).

To sink a vessel, at least one of its hull sections must be destroyed. A destroyed hull section weakens the ones adjacent to it by removing 50% of their base hp: a process which can cascade and cause a ship to sink.

If at least one hull section is destroyed, in these turbulent conditions, the captain must make a DC 18 Profession (sailor) check, modified by +4 for every destroyed hull section. This sinking check is made every 10 minutes. A failed sinking check means the ship will go down soon (in 2d20 minutes). However, keep in mind that most ships (75%) won't sink completely in the island's vicinity, but get grounded on rocks instead.

Also, a ship with one hull section damaged by 50% or more loses 5' from its base speed, while a ship with two hull sections damaged in this way loses 10'.

A ship that is hurled against the rocks by the current or waves takes 1d4-1 slam attacks per round, each of which inflicts 1d20+3 hp of structural damage (reduced by wood's hardness of 5). To keep things simple, assume all these attacks strike the same hull section. On next round, if the captain can't regain control of the ship, the damage strikes the same section. A ship which is swept upon rocks by the current and heavy surf suffers a shiphandling modifier of -5.

A sinking ship in such turbulent conditions is a dangerous place to be: every round, a PC has 20% chance of being hit by a heavy object (mast, decking, crate, being slammed against the railing by a wave, etc.). This is a slam attack (melee +6, 1-10 damage). Also, each round there is a 20% chance of being washed overboard by a wave.

Dangerous currents create heavy surf on the rocks and wrecks. When in the water, a PC who gets swept among such obstacles takes 1d4-1 slam attacks each round (+2 melee, 1-4 hp bludgeoning damage).

A PC in the water who makes a successful Swim check can add his swimming speed to the direction of his choice. In dangerous currents, however (40' to 60' per round), the character will probably still be pushed with the current, but more slowly than someone unable to swim. The Swim check must be made every round.

The water around the Île de la Tempête is cold (~50°F) all year round. PCs immersed in it take 1d6 hp of nonlethal damage every 10 minutes; a successful Constitution check negates this effect (DC 9 +1 per previous Con check).

Drowning rules are available in the *DMG*.

*The Tides of Tempête*

The tides on Île de la Tempête rise every 13 hours. When the heroes arrive on the island, roll a d20 until a number between 1 and 13 comes up. If the result is 13, it is high tide when they arrive and Monette is in hybrid form. If not, the number rolled (1-12) is the number of hours before the next high tide. Additional high tides then take place every 13 hours thereafter.

*Monette's hybrid form*

When in his hybrid form, Monette has the following altered statistics:

Large humanoid (human, shapechanger)

**Init** +8

**OR:** 10

**AC:** 24, touch 17, flat-footed 16  
(+8 Dex, +7 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 126 (12 HD)

**Fort** +15, **Ref** +14

**Speed:** 30 ft (6 squares), fly 40 ft (average)

**Melee:** 2 claws +14 (1d6+5) and bite +9  
(1d8+2)

**Base Atk:** +9; Grp +18

**Atk Options:** Flyby Attack

**Abilities:** Str 21, Dex 26, Con 22, Int 15,  
Wis 14, Cha 12

**Skills:** Balance +14, Climb +11 (+13 w/  
rope), Escape Artist +8 (+10 vs. ropes),  
Hide +12, Intimidate +16, Move Silently  
+12, Swim +13, Use Rope +13

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Capitaine Alain Monette is tall and thin to the point of gauntness, and appears to be in his late forties. His preferred clothes are a navy blue uniform, with golden buttons. At first glance, he is easily identified with naval officers.

A large, diagonal scar mars his gaunt face, a souvenir from his years as a captain when his ship was boarded by pirates. The legend of his fury is still a well-known tale among the buccaneers of his native world today.

His eyes are gray, reminding onlookers of the sea when a storm is brewing. He has the stern bearing of an experienced mariner, and no patience with jokers and 'useless' people.

As an outlander living in solitude, Monette finds conversation here in the Land of Mists to be difficult, as he never had the chance to master any native language. His natal tongue (called "Tempetaine" by default) has yet to be recognized by anyone he has met since the Mists claimed him. He therefore resorts to an improvised pidgin of Low Mordentish, Darkonese, Vaasi, and a bit of Grabenite when speaking to outsiders, often blending these languages in the same sentence.

There are subtle signs of his werebat curse. When listening, Monette often tilts his head so his ears are on different levels, a common habit of keen-eared wild animals. He also has a "nervous habit" of clicking his tongue against his teeth, much as bats make sounds to generate echoes their sonar depends on.

In his hybrid form, Monette's dark-winged body is covered in thick brown fur, and his hideous face is a jumble of human and bat. His diagonal scar is still discernible in his werebat form. Outspread, his leathery wings span a full ten feet; aloft, the noise of their powerful flapping can be audible to victims on the ground, so he times his wingbeats in synch with the crash of the surf.

Monette is an afflicted lycanthrope whose other aspect is a hybrid; thus, he cannot take on a true animal form (dire bat).

## Appendix III Who's Doomed

### Dungeon Master's Tips: Understanding Monette

Over the decades, Monette learned this odd mixture of tongues by speaking with people brought to his isle on the wrecks. His polyglot sentences are very difficult to decrypt, but communication is possible.

First, a listener must understand either Low Mordentish, Darkonese, or Vaasi. If none of these languages is known, it is impossible to communicate with Monette through normal conversation. If a character possesses any of the required languages, he or she must pass an Intelligence check against a DC of 18 in order to understand anything Monette tries to say. The listener's roll receives a +2 bonus for each of the necessary languages known (Low Mordentish, Darkonese, and/or Vaasi), and by +1 if Grabenite is also known.

Most of Monette's discourses with Ravenloft natives have been about nautical topics or his island; if a topic is wholly unrelated to these, the DC of the listener's check increases by 2.

An Intelligence check is rolled for each specific concept to be conveyed. If missed, Monette can't express this concept to the listener. If the check misses by 5 or more, the listener misinterprets what Monette was trying to say (DM discretion).

Monette must likewise make his own checks to understand others' Low Mordentish, Darkonese, Vaasi (DCs of 18), or Grabenite (DC 25) speech.

### Background

Alain Monette is an outlander, born in a city called Port-of-the-Prince. Seventh son of a shipwright, he developed an early love of the sea, signing on as a sailor as soon as he could pass himself off as fifteen. When he was an adult, and had proven himself an able pilot and ship's officer, his father built a vessel for him. The *Ouragan* was one of the fastest sailing ships of its time, and brought fortune to Monette.

No nautical peril, whether of storm or shoal or piracy, could keep Monette from the sea, and he was much renowned in the mariners' world. Monette was hailed as a master of all seas. The facial scar he had incurred from ferocious pirates was considered a badge of his courage.

But his fame came at a price. His crew knew him to be a harsh - even brutal - taskmaster. Monette expected his orders to be executed just as he wanted, the very second he uttered them. Failure to meet the Captain's exacting demands were often met with whippings or deprivation of food. Monette was feared by his crew. His standards of tidiness and order on the ship were high.

His crew did their best not to irk the volatile captain, yet on each voyage, Monette liked to single out one of their number as a scapegoat. Throughout the trip, the unlucky seaman would be abused and beaten for the most frivolous of reasons, to set an example for the rest. Fearing punishment if they gave protest, and cravenly relieved that someone else should be targeted this time, the other crew members didn't say a word. But this nasty behavior increased with time. Even his nephew François, recently signed onto the *Ouragan*, received an equal share of these unearned blows.

Once, Monette whipped one of his own crew nearly to death, even though he knew the youth was innocent of any wrongdoing. The night before, Monette had been negotiating a shady shipping deal with a sinister baron, when he noticed the sailor in question might have overheard their illicit bargain. The next day, fearing the possible witness might talk or contemplate blackmail, Monette accused the sailor of repairing a sail badly and beat him, then dumped him off, half dead, at the next port.

Monette's final voyage on his native world was a mission to deliver his king's gold to a warlord, who needed the money to continue

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funding the war against the pirates. But luck wasn't with him this time, and *Ouragan* ran aground in a shallow strait it had crossed successfully many times in the past. Monette was furious. The shallows were infested by venomous stonefish and rays, yet he led his men into the water to loosen the sand bank's grip upon the hull. Two of the crew died, but *Ouragan* eventually floated free once more.

They had lost three days while the ship was stuck, and Monette raged at the thought he should be late to deliver the gold. He drove his men cruelly to keep the ship at maximum speed, day and night, to make up lost time.

Back at open sea, four days out from at its destination and still far from any friendly port, it was discovered that all of the food in the ship's stores had gone moldy, inedible even by sailors' hardened standard. Monette flew into a rage, and his men fled before him as he beat all who stood in his path.

The next morning, Monette grimly declared, his crew would be punished for its slackness by decimation. One man would be selected, using a deck of playing cards: the sailor who drew the Ace of Hearts would be hanged as a collective punishment. The condemned man would hang from the mast until his dry bones fell of their own accord, as a reminder for the others to do their job well.

His crew had reached its limit, at last. That night they mutinied, and seized and bound Monette as he slept. The crew drank up their ex-captain's liquor in celebration and shared the royal gold-shipment among themselves.

All sails were raised, and as the *Ouragan* ran at full speed, they tied Monette to a long rope and dragged him behind the ship. After some time, thinking he must be drowned or shark-torn, they reeled in the rope, only to find their tormentor was still alive. They repeated his keel-hauling three times, but the captain's will to survive would not break; in truth, it only seemed to make him angrier.

Drunken and vengeful, the crew then lashed Monette to the mast and whipped him: the same punishment they each had suffered at his hands. All save for François took part in this vicious, eye-for-an-eye retribution. They jeered at Monette to beg for

mercy, but he denied them that pleasure, never uttering a sound. In time, he fell unconscious, but not before cursing his crew and vowing revenge. The sailors detached his body from the mast and dragged it behind the ship, yet again.

The seawater's bite roused Monette, but his strength was all but spent, and he could not keep his head above water. Soon the water overwhelmed him, and he disappeared under a huge, dark wave. The sailors shouted cries of joy, spat into the sea with a curse on his name, and celebrated late into the night.

However, come the morning, the mutineers discovered that Monette's nephew had cut the line to free the captain's body, ensuring his crewmates could not mutilate his uncle's remains. Irate that this turncoat had cheated them of a last chance to humiliate Monette, the other mutineers threw François into the sea as well, after the obligatory whipping.

Unknown to the crew, François had cheated them of nothing. In truth, that hungry wave hadn't swept Monette to his death, but to a misty cave on Île de la Tempête.

After hours of stupor, Monette awoke in a sea cave to see many bats covering his body, lapping at the blood that oozed from his whip-torn wounds. His shout drove the bats away, but as soon as weariness claimed him again, the bats resumed slaking their thirst.

When next Monette awoke, he caught one of the feeding bats and crushed it. Repulsed, he tried to stand up to escape the horrible cave, but he was too weak to rise. Peering through the dimness, he realized he was likely to die here, for the only entrance was a crack in the ceiling. It let in some light, but it - like food or water - lay far out of reach.

Monette cursed his crew again, shaking with a delirious rage. He vowed he would survive to wreak revenge, no matter the cost. Then he recalled the crushed bat in his fist, and he reluctantly bit into it. The taste of its blood was surprisingly good, and it took the edge off his thirst before weakness overcame him. When he woke again, covered anew in bats, Monette seized and drank two more, feeding on them as they had fed from his wounds.

After three days of this macabre blood diet, Monette awoke, not in the cave, but up on the lip of its entrance, his clothing in shreds. Only then did he realize he was on an island, surrounded by mist-cloaked seas. Though large, it was little more than a desolate rock; its only potable water was a rain-puddle near the ruins of an old lighthouse. Monette was perplexed, as unsure how he had left the cave - he was still too weak to have climbed - as of where he was now. He knew he had never seen such a lighthouse before.

Searching the ruin, Monette soon discovered a huddled, sleeping form: his nephew! Rage rushed through him, for the captain assumed the worst of the mutineers had fallen into his hands. Not stopping to think, Monette began to strangle the young sailor. François awoke with Monette's grip

upon his throat, stifling any possible plea or protest.

Once François had stopped moving, Monette cast his nephew's dead body aside, only to notice to his horror that the youth's back was covered with the same bloodied whip-marks his crew had inflicted upon him. Worse, the youth's wrists were still tightly bound, using the cut end of the same rope they'd used to keel-haul their commander. Belatedly, Monette realized that he had just murdered the only crewman who had truly remained faithful to him.

But swiftly his dread turned to pain, as the castaway captain felt his flesh writhe and his blood boil in his veins. Thick, brown fur was sprouting out of his skin, and great sheets of webbing from his lengthening fingers. He





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staggered in a panic from the lighthouse, but the unholy transformation continued. After a time, the terrible pain stopped, but Monette found himself in a monstrous half-bat body. And he wasn't alone, there: a terrible hunger for blood and raw flesh was in it, and him.

An hour later, Monette resumed his human shape, in a second bout of terrible pain. He found himself back in the lighthouse, near his nephew's mutilated, half-eaten body. He knew, now, how he had escaped the cave ... and why, for the moment, he no longer felt hungry or weak. The year was 677 on the Barovian calendar.

In the weeks to follow, starving for the lack of raw meat, and unsatisfied by mussels and fish, Monette hit upon the idea of using the lighthouse to lure boats to the reefs. (His human side still hoped for rescue; his new, bestial aspect had its own motives.) The top floor of the lighthouse needed to be repaired in order to shield any beckoning signal-fire from the winds.

Mending the roof took him weeks, working with a few tools he found in the lighthouse's intact ground floor. Out of bitterness and a wicked sense of humor, the werebat used his nephew's skull as a candle holder, creating a grotesque sort of jack-o-lantern to illuminate his work. "You can still be of some use," he jeered, taunting François's memory.

Once, he spotted dim lights from a ship that passed him by in the night, and cursed that the lighthouse hadn't been ready. He worked harder, foregoing sleep: his hands bloodied, feverishly hungry for red meat, and talking to his nephew's skull about the torments he would inflict upon the *Ouragan's* crew.

As he finished setting the last stone on the tower platform late at night, he saw a great light coming out of the lighthouse. The skull was giving light, a strong light, focused into a beam! Confused, Monette set it on top of the lighthouse and eerily, the skull started to turn as a lighthouse's lamp would.

Monette screamed in ecstasy when, hours later, he saw a small merchant ship coming toward the island. All pretense of seeking escape had been silenced by desperate need:

he rejoiced that his hunger for blood and meat would be fulfilled! But the ship turned back when it drew the island, as if its captain had realized this wasn't the port he sought. Crying in despair, Monette wished a storm would dash the uncooperative vessel against the cliffs. To his amazement, the ship veered off course at once, as in a strong current, and hurtled into the rocks, where its hull split in two. At the next high tide, Monette feasted upon the wreck's castaways, and his hunger was assuaged.

In the days to come, Monette experimented, and found that he was able to manipulate the currents around the island, much as he had seen sea-wizards do. Smiling with glee, he realized he now had all the tools he needed to take his revenge. He need only wait for the *Ouragan* to heed the beacon...

### Current Sketch

Monette is a lonely man, who doesn't have much to do between shipwrecks but brood about his inability to sail the seas again. He wanders over his island, yet keeps the lighthouse's beam ever in sight, so as not to miss the sign that it has hooked a ship.

After all of a shipwreck's victims have been eaten, Monette collects any remaining bones and other evidence, including those floating on the water when possible, and dumps them over the cliff at the lighthouse's base. He also collects any gunpowder he can find for his arquebus, though this substance is often spoiled by seawater during the wrecks. Last, he collects papers, ship logs, or other books for his own perusal back at the lighthouse - he loves to read logbooks, as it reminds him of his former life - as well as to remove any incriminating documents.

Monette still believes he is on an out-of-the-way island in his native world, unaware that his home is much farther away than he could imagine. He watches for stars at night, that might offer a clue to his position, but the sky above Île de la Tempête was cloud-locked even before his domain joined the Nocturnal Sea, and he has never managed to fly high enough to break through.

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### *Dread Possibility: The Ouragan*

The true status of Monette's former ship is left for the DM to decide. Possible adventure hooks include having it and its sadistic crew appear as a ghost ship or other manner of cursed vessel.

The *Ouragan* could also leave its own Material Plane world for the misty seas of Ravenloft periodically. Such a shift might bring it out of the past, complete with its original mutineers - Monette's chance for vengeance, at last! - or it might appear with a complement of innocent passengers and crewmen: folk quite unaware of their ship's sordid history, yet targeted by Monette even so, as stand-ins for his old betrayers.

When the Nocturnal Sea formed in the year 750, Île de la Tempête's location became fixed in space, but Monette didn't realize it. He merely found that ships passed near the island more frequently, and added a few new languages' vocabulary to his pidgin speech.

The darklord blames the bats in the cave for inflicting his terrible werebat curse upon him. Although capable of communicating with the island's bat population, and perhaps even controlling them, Monette despises the animals and is more likely to feed on them, in the absence of better prey, than converse with them.

Monette also blames his former crew for his predicament, and suspects that the *Ouragan* mutineers can somehow free him from this terrible curse. Whenever he has the chance to meet someone, Monette asks if they have seen this ship or its crew. The likelihood that his former shipmates are long dead, and his vessel, most likely retired from service, is a prospect the werebat has never so much as considered. (Monette lost count of how long he has been imprisoned decades ago, and honestly doesn't realize that he has been trapped on Île de la Tempête for the better part of a century.)

### *Combat*

Monette's preferred weapon in human form is his arquebus. As gunpowder is not yet very common on the Nocturnal Sea, at any given time his gunpowder supply will allow him a maximum of 1d4+3 shots, which he will conserve by using his cutlass.

As reloading an arquebus requires two rounds, Monette prepares several weapons when he is expecting an assault. He keeps a small collection of firearms pilfered from shipwrecks at his tower, although his limited supply of powder permits him few chances to use (or even test) them all.

In hybrid form, Monette tends to stalk his victims, preferably hiding on high ground where his fly speed and climb and balance skills help him greatly. He then ambushes his prey by flying down and engaging a lone victim in a grapple using his great size and tooth and claw attacks to his advantage.

If his victims remain in a larger group or are otherwise too powerful for him, he shadows his prey, picking off stragglers or striking when they sleep. If he can control his animal urges enough, he might even snipe at them in the dark with his arquebus while in his hybrid form, taking advantage of his heightened senses and abilities.

At night or underground, Monette can goad a swarm of bats to attack his victims, then use the ensuing confusion as cover to launch his own ambush. As many bats also inhabit his tower, Monette might also use this tactic there, even during the daytime.

### *Lair: The Lighthouse*

Monette spend his nights in the lighthouse (see Viktor's description). He has pillaged quite a lot of goods from shipwrecks, and he stores these in chests in the tower or in a dry sea cave (kegs of rum, dried food, bullets, tools, axes, daggers).

During the day, he roams the isle, watching the lighthouse beam, fishing, or scrounging items from fresh wrecks.

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### *Closing the Borders*

When Monette closes his domain border - an uncommon event, as it blocks the arrival of new ships - travelers face a seemingly endless misty sea when they try to head away from the island, yet find themselves back within minutes the moment they decide to come back toward it.

Once, Monette left his borders closed for a long period, and a ship trying to escape was transformed into a ghost ship when all crew died from starvation, rising as lacedons, sea zombies<sup>QIR9</sup>, and other water-related undead.

### *Dread Possibility: Message in a Bottle*

Once he has dealt with their passengers, Monette scavenges the ships wrecked on his island, searching especially for vellum and bottles. He has taken to creating maps, with the assistance of salvaged charts, and setting these adrift on the waves to lure in his prey. These maps promise the locations of sunken ships, buried treasure, or ancient ruins, all supposedly lying near or on his island.

Insidiously, the Dark Powers have taken notice of the captain's ingenuity, and lend his ploy some supernatural enhancements. Anyone possessing such a map who quits dry land and can no longer see the shore has a 5% chance per night of sighting, whether on the distant horizon or nearby in the fog, Monette's damning light.

Optionally, instead of maps, Monette might enclose pleas for rescue in some of these bottles, or pages torn from salvaged books, with enigmatic doodles to invite curiosity. In such bottles, he might enclose a distinctive orange-red stone from Île de la Tempête: an apparent clue as to where the "castaway" or "explanation" must lie.

### *Dungeon Master's Tips: Running Monette*

#### **What does Monette do when the light beam is attracting someone to the island?**

When Monette first notices that the beam has attracted another ship, or when he sees a ship coming near, he waits until the vessel is less than half a mile away to activate his Current Manipulation power and raise fog to hopefully crash it on the rocks. He will then spy on any survivors until the next high tide, or salvage the bodies to eat later if none are left alive.

#### **How does Monette hunt?**

When a new ship comes around, Monette usually tries to take one isolated victim at a time, mostly at night, and fly off with his prey to devour elsewhere. He keeps hidden from castaways' sight while in hybrid form for as long as possible.

#### **What if Monette meets someone who can communicate with him?**

Monette is alone most of the time and takes any opportunity to talk to a person stranded on the island. He will invite this person to the lighthouse. It can take days before his hunger forces him to devour such a visitor.

#### **What if Monette is confronted by an able party?**

Monette fears wizards. He was slain once by a necromancer who had wanted to test his body's abilities. If confronted, Monette will flee to a cave and await the departure of dangerous heroes. At night, given the opportunity, he may still attack a lone adventurer by surprise. He will not close the border or manipulate currents, allowing such unwanted, dangerous visitors to leave.

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### *Dungeon Master's Tips: Questioning Monette*

#### *On first meeting Monette:*

##### **How long have you been here?**

It seems like forever. I have started to lose track of time. A year, at least.

##### **How did you get here?**

I was captain of the *Blue Sky*. We were fog-bound, three days out of Egertus. When we saw the light suddenly break through the fog one night, I ordered a change of course. We thought we had reached Graben-town, but a cursed shoal ripped the guts out of *Blue Sky* close to this island. In the foggy night there was much confusion and the ship went down fast. I was the only one to make it ashore.

[The above account is taken from a captain's log, which Monette recovered and read. This log can be found in his tower]

##### **Is there anyone else on the island?**

No. I'm alone.

##### **How do you survive?**

I fish and hunt for crabs.

##### **Have you tried to escape?**

No, not any more. The sea, she be a-watchin' me. Like she does all sailors, one day she decided to take the crew of the *Blue Sky*. But she did not get me.

I can feel her. Watchin' That day when my ship sank, I could feel her callin' me to her depths, pullin' me down, but I fought out of it and escaped her. So she is still watchin'. Waitin' for me to return to the waves. Then she'll take me.

So, no, I won't try to sail away. It don't matter none to her if I leave on a crude raft or the finest sailin' ship afloat. She'll have me. I knows and she knows it. So I am stuck here on this thrice-cursed rock. I don't want to leave.

(He stops speaking and spits into the sea for emphasis.)

[Alternately, if faced by a party that he feels could read through his lies, he could instead tell the "cursed" tale he told Viktor (See page 99).]

#### *Later, after an attack:*

##### **Have you seen the beast that attacks at night?**

No. Never seen no creature around here. You must have brought him with ya.

Or : Yes, there is a blood sucking monster on this island. Never saw him. It is part of my curse, I guess. It doesn't attack me, just the people coming to this island, to chase them off and leave me alone again. Can you help me?

# The Lady of Ravens

(Darklord of the Isle of Ravens)

**Female human sorcerer 18 CR 20**

NE medium humanoid (human)

**Init** +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative);

**Senses** Mistress of Ravens (see below);

Listen +2, Spot +2

**Languages** Polyglot (see below)

**AC** 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15

(+5 armor [robe], +1 Dex)

**hp** 81 (18 HD)

**SR** 18 [robe]

**Fort** +12, **Ref** +11, **Will** +17 [+4 robe]

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** touch +10 (0 + Circe's touch)

**Base Atk** +9/+4; **Grp** +7

**Atk Options** Circe's Eye, Circe's Touch

**Special Actions** Closing the Borders,  
Mistress of Ravens

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**Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 18; +1 DC for Enchantments [Spell Focus]; +4 for caster level checks [Spell Penetration, robe]):

9th (3/day) - power word kill

8th (5/day) - maze, power word stun

7th (6/day) - ethereal jaunt, summon monster VII, teleport object (DC 23)

6th (7/day) - disintegrate (DC 22), geas, summon monster VI

5th (7/day) - baleful polymorph (DC 21), dominate person (DC 22), summon monster V, telekinesis (DC 21)

4th (7/day) - charm monster (DC 21), dimension door (DC 20), greater invisibility, summon monster IV

3rd (7/day) - fly, hold person (DC 20), suggestion (DC 20), summon monster III

2nd (8/day) - detect thoughts (DC 18), invisibility, rope trick, summon monster II, summon swarm



1st (8/day) - charm person (DC 18), shield, sleep (DC 19), summon monster I, unseen servant

0 (6/day) - dancing lights, detect magic, flare (DC 16), ghost sound (DC 16), light, mage hand, prestidigitation, read magic, resistance

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**Abilities:** Str 7, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 22

**SQ:** mental prowess, polyglot, undying soul

**Feats:** Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Improved Initiative, Still Spell, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Enchantment), Spell Penetration, Weapon Finesse.

**Skills:** Bluff +11, Concentration +23, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (nature) +5, Knowledge (local) +9, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +9, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +5, Spellcraft +16

**Possessions:** *robe of the archmagi* (black), *crystal ball*

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**Circe's Eye (Su):** Once per day as a standard action, the Lady of Ravens may cause any humanoid she can see to make a DC 25 Will save or be transformed into ravens, as if the target has failed both saves against

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*baleful polymorph*. There is no maximum number of targets that can be affected at one time, and she may elect to have this ability affect some people but not others. If she cannot sense a person (e.g. due to invisibility), this power will not affect that person. Subjects transformed into ravens in this way instantly fall under the Lady's control.

**Circe's Touch (Su):** With a successful touch attack against an opponent (with the benefits of Weapon Finesse), the Lady of Ravens can transform any living creature into a raven under her sole control. A DC 25 Will save prevents the transformation, which is similar in effect to *baleful polymorph*. This ability can be used at will, and reversed by the Lady of Ravens.

**Closing the Border:** When the Lady closes her domain border, untold millions of ravens flock to its boundary, about one mile out to sea, and mercilessly attack any creature that attempts to cross. There are so many of the birds that no effective defense can be made; creatures caught in the frenzied attack of the birds take 5-20 hp of damage per round until they turn back.

**Mental Prowess (Ex):** The Lady of Ravens may cast any of her spells which normally require material components or arcane foci without such accoutrements. Her sheer force of personality overrides the need for any such materials to channel arcane energies.

**Mistress of Ravens (Su):** All ravens within her domain are constantly under the control of the Lady of Ravens. She can see through their eyes, speak through their mouths, and control their bodies as if they were a part of herself. The Lady seldom asserts her control, preferring to see the ravens "free", but if angered she can cause the ravens to attack anyone she wishes. Ravens that are familiars or dread familiars get a Will save at DC (15 + number of days spent in the domain) to resist the compulsion to obey. If successful, they remain subject to their masters' control.

This save must be repeated daily at dawn; if failed, the raven abandons its

former master, and the master suffers the xp penalty for having dismissed a familiar. A raven animal companion gets no save, deserting its former master instantly as soon as the Lady calls it to her service.

**Polyglot (Ex):** The Lady can understand any language spoken in her presence, and can read any writing she sees. When she speaks to others, she always seems to be speaking in the hearer's natal dialect and accent. This ability is probably a part of her curse, as it denies those who speak with her any hint as to her place of origin.

**Undying Soul (Su):** If slain, the body of the Lady of Ravens will disappear. One week later, at dawn, one of the ravens circling the Tower of Flint will swoop to the floor of the highest room in the tower and transform into her shape, which her spirit re-enters. During that week, the border will remain open and the Lady's summoned minions will be under no authority: they may attack, flee, or ignore intruders as circumstances warrant.

### Background

The Lady of Ravens was born into a noble family on an unknown Material Plane world, the only child of a degenerate line which inbreeding and isolation had brought to the point of madness. She grew up alone and mostly in silence: her mother died when she was still too young to speak, and her father rarely talked to her or anyone else, mutely wandering the halls of their castle like his ghostly ancestors or dreaming the days away in narcotic-induced visions. The servants who fed and clothed her spoke but little also, as the young girl was aloof and disdainful by nature. Her experience and personality both told her that those around her were not her equals, so she largely ignored her caregivers except when giving orders, and snubbed the children of the castle staff without pity.

So-isolated, her only real companions were the ravens that nested in the Tower of Flint, a lofty structure dominating the center of the castle. She, like all of her house, was gifted with the ability to speak with the birds of the tower, and these became her confidantes and

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friends. As a child, she would steal away to the Tower and spend hours telling the birds tales out of her storybooks, and listening to their stories in turn.

Under such circumstances it is, perhaps, not surprising that she came to believe the world was literally constructed to please her every whim. She was hardly surprised at all when she discovered she could summon playmates from nothing and dismiss them when she tired of their company, or bend the servants' wills to her own: she thought it natural that all things should conform to her wishes, and this self-centered perspective only made her power over her surroundings all the greater.

It is also not very surprising that she came to feel she must have anything she desired to have, and be best at anything she desired to do. It soon became understood in the castle that even the slightest criticism of its future mistress would be punished in strange and unforeseen ways, and the castle's servants grew eager to avoid contact with the strange and vengeful child.

After her father's death in her late teenage years, the Lady became even more reclusive, retiring to the Tower of Flint to live in the company of the ravens. Her visits to the castle outside were only sporadic, but on one of these rare excursions through the castle, the Lady saw one of the servant's children she had despised for years, now grown into a young man. He was of her own age and of an extraordinary grace and bearing, cheerful and well-spoken, much admired by everyone in the castle.

The Lady of Ravens, who had deliberately isolated herself from real human contact for her whole life, promptly fell desperately in love with him. More and more often she left her sanctuary in the tower, hoping to catch a glimpse of the young man, and following him covertly whenever the Lady found him. Narcissistic as she was, she simply assumed that he loved her as well, putting down his apparent indifference to shyness or reserve.

Not long after, the young man was called away to war, and for two years the Lady of Ravens suffered, imagining her beloved would not return, or engrossed in bittersweet

daydreams of him dying on some foreign battlefield with her name on his lips. When news of the war's end reached the castle, her excitement was so intense she could neither eat nor sleep for days before his arrival. On the day he returned, gazing down the road from her tower window, she picked him out immediately. Her excitement was chilled, however, when she saw him leap from his horse and take a serving girl into his arms. Suspicions roused, she followed the happy couple as they sought a secluded spot, where she spied on them trading vows of undying love and planning their wedding.

Upon hearing this, the Lady of Ravens knew her feelings were unrequited. Consumed by envy and hatred, she returned to the tower, whipped the ravens into a murderous frenzy, and sent them forth to kill the young man and his lover. She watched from the tower as the deed was done, then hid herself in the depths of the tower, weeping and raging at the betrayal of her love.

When she emerged days later, she found the Tower of Flint was isolated on an island in the midst of the sea. The surrounding castle and its servants had vanished, leaving her absolutely alone. She saw the ravens of the Tower all around her; she called to them, but they voiced no reply. Soon she learned that she could control the birds by an act of will, yet they no longer spoke to her nor told her stories. Stranger still, she could no longer recall her name or the name of the castle of which she had been mistress.

The Mists of Ravenloft had claimed another for their own.

### *Current Sketch*

The Lady of Ravens is a petite woman about five feet in height; her hair and eyes are inky black, her skin as pale as milk. She always dresses in graceful, sleeveless black gowns pinned at both shoulders; she usually wears her long hair caught up high in combs. Her features are regular and even beautiful, her expression and demeanor regal and aloof. She almost never displays emotion in the presence of other human beings, showing a

*Dread Possibility: The Sleep of Reason*

In her desperation to recover her past identity, the Lady of Ravens has turned to an unlikely source of information: the alienist Dr. Harold Tasker. Learning of her goal, he presented himself at the Tower of Flint and told her of his past success in using hypnotic regression to recover lost memories. After lengthy consideration of his offer, the Lady accepted, and Dr. Tasker has spent the last several months probing her early memories for clues to her origin.

Tasker's hidden goal is to use psychological manipulation and post-hypnotic suggestion to make the Lady of Ravens dependent upon his presence and advice, but it is possible he may succeed all too well in connecting the Lady with her subconscious mind. Her grasp on objective reality is already fragile, and the Nightmare Court has long kept an eye on Dr. Tasker. It is possible that his hypnotic "therapy" might inadvertently trap the Lady in a twilight state between dreams and waking, forging a tangible link between the Nightmare Lands and the Isle of Ravens, with the foot of her tower in the Nocturnal Sea and its peak towering above the city of Nod itself. Such a linkage would allow the horrors of the Nightmare Lands and the folk of the waking world access to each other's realms, simply by traversing the steps of the Tower of Flint.

complete, unnerving indifference to others that is somehow more ominous than malice or rage. When her disdainful air does crack, her revealed emotions are nigh-superhuman in intensity; her fury is terrifying, her smile entrancing, her despair crushing.

Her charisma is so potent that the Lady of Ravens can dominate nearly any group by sheer force of personality; attacking her or even disobeying her commands is well-nigh inconceivable for most people.

The Lady is absolutely indifferent to other humans, regarding them as either nuisances or tools, depending on circumstances. Her deep, impartial callousness only eases when she is in the presence of the island's ravens. She regards the birds as her true family, and her only pleasure is to watch them at play in the air above her island. However, even this respite has been rendered bitter by her curse as a darklord: the Lady is no longer able to communicate with the ravens in any way. The birds are now under her absolute control - she can see and speak through them at will - but the ravens are now, in truth, a part of her, and she can no more find solace in their companionship than she could with her own hand or eye.

The Lady of Ravens is desperately isolated without the contact of the only friends she

has ever accepted, and strives ceaselessly to break the barrier between herself and the birds, so she might relate to them as friends and equals again. The Lady believes that her inability to communicate with the ravens stems from having forgotten her name: as the power to speak with them was a legacy of her ancestors, she believes that if can re-establish her ancestry she will regain that ability. Whether this is true or not, no one in Ravenloft knows the truth of her heritage, so she is destined to search in vain.

If the Lady of Ravens encounters a person or group she regards as well-read or capable of accessing special sources of information, she may decide to send them out to search for her name, rather than transforming them to avian form. She will usually lay a geas on the individual or party to assure compliance; if she feels some extra inducement is needed for a group of searchers, she may transform one of the group to raven form as a hostage, offering to restore the victim's human shape if the rest of the group seek out her name for a time (usually a year and a day). Despite her alignment, she takes such an agreement very seriously and will hold to the letter of any bargain she makes.

Past searchers have brought a bewildering variety of tomes, parchments, and papers to



## *Appendix III Who's Doomed*

the Lady, and she has pored over each one meticulously. From this library (now quite extensive), she has learned more than many about the Land of Mists, and particularly its folklore and noble houses. She concentrates on these topics, as she believes they are her best chance of finding some clue regarding her identity.

In addition to the ravens, the Lady has, at times, summoned various elemental and fey entities to her service. Some of these beings remain in her service; others have escaped, had their terms of indenture expire, or have simply been forgotten, and now wander the island, unable to return to their planes of origin. Even though the latter creatures are no longer bound by magical ties to the Lady of Ravens, they still fear her, and only the earth-spirit Kalibos would ever act directly against her.

Unverified stories persist of sailors whom the Lady has favored in one way or another, from promising good weather to providing one of her ravens as a special companion, something like a wizard's familiar. Some of these stories claim the man with the Lady's favor won great stores of wealth in piracy or trade, but all of them end the same way: the unfortunate seaman offends his patroness in some way (usually by causing or allowing the death of a raven) and is pursued by her vengeful birds until he gives himself up and becomes a transformed replacement for the slain bird. It is possible some of the sailors on the Nocturnal Sea are her servitors even now, and many ships bring a raven mascot aboard in the hope of warding off her wrath.

### *Combat*

The Lady has no interest in combat; if she doesn't want to deal with a group or believes they have no relevant information, she uses her Circe's Eye ability to change them into ravens, sparing one of their number to send away as a warning for others to keep clear of her isle. If Circe's Eye is not fully effective and her other opponents persist in attacking, she will use dimension door to leave the area and send summoned minions to deal with the trespassers, possibly engaging in combat from long distance with spells. If forced to

engage melee, she employs Circe's Touch to transform her opponents into ravens.

### *Lair: The Tower of Flint*

This strange edifice - the only testament to a human presence anywhere in the domain - is a 400-foot spire of dark gray flint, roughly sixty feet across at its base and tapering to twenty feet at its top (usually obscured by fog and invisible to viewers at ground level). The entire tower seems to consist of a single piece of stone, lacking any seams or mortar. Enormous, bronze double doors provide the sole route into the tower; broad stairs rise some twenty feet from ground level to this entrance. The ground floor is one enormous antechamber with a forty-foot-high ceiling. Numerous slim windows set high up in the walls illuminate the whole room; at the far end, opposite the double doors, a great stone throne stands upon a dias. If the Lady of Ravens is (relatively) well-disposed toward her visitors, she waits to meet them at the entry hall's center; if less hospitable, she sits upon the throne instead. Flocks of ravens sit watching in this room at all times. A circular stair of stone winds upward behind the dias and throne to the second and higher floors; this same stair leads eventually to the top of the tower.

Below the entry hall (accessed by a trapdoor set in the dias before the throne) is a metal ladder, rungs set solidly in the stone, which leads below ground level to what was once a dungeon. Half of this space is given over to cells, the other half to a torture chamber, its equipment neglected and rusting. Both a 3rd rank ghost and a grave elemental reside on this floor, attacking anyone except the Lady who comes here. (The two don't coordinate their attacks, as each is quite unaware of the other's presence). The ghost, now nameless, is unable to speak and can only be put to rest by dismantling the rack on which it was killed; unfortunately, it considers the torture room its territory and attacks intruders with blind vehemence.



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Above the main entry hall are two floors of what might loosely be termed 'guest rooms'. On the infrequent occasions when the Lady receives visitors whom she doesn't turn into ravens immediately, she instructs them to spend the night here. The possessions of past occupants might well be found here. Above these floors is the library, where the Lady of Ravens spends much of her time perusing the many books, scrolls, maps, charts, and other documents brought by those travelers whom she has geased to do so.

Visitors are strictly forbidden from entering this floor or the higher floors. The library is watched over by an invisible stalker, a 1st rank female ghost now known only as "the librarian", and a 3rd rank ghost referred to as "the moneychanger", who sits at a table only he can see, counting nonexistent coins. If the librarian (who can wander throughout the Tower) is elsewhere, the invisible stalker will most likely ignore any intruders, and the moneychanger certainly will. However, if either the librarian or the Lady is present, they will encourage both to attack. The Lady of Ravens tolerates the librarian - probably because the latter ghost performs a useful function; left to herself, the tower's mistress would simply pile all the documents on the floor - and ignores the moneychanger: if not attacked or spurred to action by the librarian or Lady, he remains contentedly oblivious to everything but his imaginary money.

Situated above the library are two floors of storerooms where the Lady of Ravens keeps things that are not books. (It was here that she stored Felauragoth, for example, before arranging for it to be taken to the mainland.) When a ship wrecks on the Isle of Ravens, she often has her ravens inspect it for useful or exotic items, sending invisible stalkers to fetch things too heavy for the birds to carry. Anything she finds interesting, pretty, and/or valuable will be stored here. These floors are patrolled by two invisible stalkers at all times, unless there should be a disturbance in the library, in which event the creatures have been instructed to aid their fellow. A 2nd rank ghost called "the walker" appears here sporadically, parades the length of the tower (walking directly through the walls as

necessary) several times, then vanishes. He will not attack unless accosted or interrupted in his promenade.

The Lady of Ravens herself makes her apartments above the storerooms, furnishing her quarters with those things she likes best of the detritus the sea brings her. Her most prized possession, a crystal ball, is here, and she spends much of her time observing far-off lands with it. Above her chambers are two vacant floors, then another set of rooms occupied (if such a word is applicable) by a 4th rank ghost referred to as "the weeper". Why she weeps is no longer known, but she takes very great exception to having her mourning interrupted and will savagely attack anyone but the Lady of Ravens whom she finds on this level.

The tower terminates, at last, in a crenellated viewing platform. On those very rare days when the weather permits it, a person with a telescope can make out the shores of every land mass bordering the Nocturnal Sea, as a long line at the horizon.

## Kasibos

Male earth-spirit CR 12

NE Large fey (earth)

**Init:** +0; **Senses:** low-light vision, Listen +17, Spot +17

**Languages:** Sylvan\*, Vaasi, Darkonese

**Outcast Rating:** 4

**AC** 21, touch 12, flat-footed 18 (+9 natural armor, -1 size, +3 deflection)

**hp** 75 (10 HD); DR 10/cold iron

**Immune:** Steel weapons, Acid

**Resist:** Fire, Cold and Sonic resistance 10; SR 16

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**Fort** +9, **Ref** +7, **Will** +11

**Weakness:** Bane

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Melee:** 2 slams +10 (1d12+5)

**Space:** 10 x10 ft; Reach 10 ft

**Base Atk:** +5; Grp +14

**Special Actions:** Hide in Plain Sight

**Spell-Like Abilities:** (CL 10): 3/day - entangle, pass without trace; 1/day - fear, hallucinatory terrain, invisibility, plant growth

**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 8

**Feats:** Craft Magical Arms and Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, Great Fortitude, Track

**Skills:** Craft (weaponsmith) +4, Hide +13\*, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (nature) +15, Listen +17, Move Silently +17\*, Spot +17, Survival +19

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**Bane (Ex):** Kalibos is harmed by sunlight (1 hp damage per minute of direct exposure) and is reluctant to approach any significant artificial light source. In full daylight or equivalent illumination, such as a daylight spell, he is dazzled.

**Hide in Plain Sight (Ex):** Kalibos receives all benefits of the Hide in Plain Sight ability, as if he were a 17th level ranger.

**Skills:** \* Kalibos receives a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks.

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Kalibos stands about eight feet tall and is proportionately broad. He appears to be a crude, near-human effigy crafted of mud, wood, and leaves. Hair-like mosses sprout lushly on his head and body, and the exposed wood of his "skeleton" can be seen in his injured left leg. His eyes, however are startlingly human.

Kalibos hates the Lady of Ravens and is trying to bring about her death; his most likely interaction with visitors to the island will be an attempt to get them to search for the sword Felauragoth and return it to him. He has a fair amount of wealth in the form of gemstones to offer, and will spin tales of the treasures to be found in the Tower of Flint if he finds his audience receptive to that line of persuasion.

For more complete information about Kalibos, please see the *Quoth the Raven* #13 article "The Isle of Ravens".

# Meredoth

Darklord of Nebligtode

**Male human necromancer 15 /  
archmage 5** **CR 24**

CE Medium humanoid (human)

**Init:** +2; **Senses:** Listen +3, Spot +3 w/  
Alertness [rod]; permanent arcane sight,  
darkvision & see invisibility; 3/day  
deathwatch [goggles]

**Languages:** Todsteiner\*, Akiri, Aquan,  
Auran, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic,  
Grabenite, Vaasi; permanent comprehend  
languages, read magic & tongues,  
empathic lin

**Outcast Rating:** 20

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**AC:** 22, touch 12, flat-footed 20  
(+2 Dex, +4 armor [robe], +6 enhancement  
[bracers])

**hp** 71 (20 HD)

**Immune:** Attacks of undead 5 HD or less;  
mind-affecting, detection or scrying spells  
and effects [mind blank]; energy-draining  
and death effects [scarab]; natural cold  
temperatures [moccasins]; drowning  
[pearl]

**Resist:** cold resistance 5, lose hp at half  
normal rate if disabled, Mastery of  
Counterspelling; -10 to incorporeal foes'  
touch attacks [crystal], evasion [ring of  
evasion], divert or dispel one spell/day  
[ring of spell-battle], cast and act freely  
underwater [pearl], contingent *teleport* to  
Wright's Hollow if rendered unconscious  
or slain; SR 20

**Saves:** Fort +12, Ref +13, Will +19 [cloak]

**Weakness:** Heals naturally at half normal  
rate, item-bond backlash

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**Speed:** 30 ft (6 squares), unhindered by  
snow or ice [moccasins]; fly 40 ft [broom];  
swim 60 ft [pearl]

**Melee weapon:** rod of the white-fang +13/  
+8 (1d6+3 plus freezing venom); or



**Melee weapon:** Rod of withering +11/+6  
touch attack (withering)

**Base Atk:** +10/+5; Grp +10

**Atk Options:** Arcane Reach 30', Mastery of  
Shaping; freezing venom (single DC 18  
Fort save; paralysis and 1d8 hp/round if  
save fails, else -2 Str & Dex for 2d6  
rounds); withering (1d4 Str + 1d4 Con  
damage, DC 17 Fort save, ability drain on  
critical hit); *enervate* spell [rod of the  
white-fang]

**Special Actions:** Arcane Fire; un-shrink  
constructs; divert or dispel spell [ring of  
spell-battle], extinguish flame [rod of  
flame extinguishing], push attacker away  
[gloves], rapid casting [circlet], redirect  
healing [shirt], retrieve item [belt]

**Combat Gear:** *belt of hidden pouches* (w/  
spell components), *broom of flying*‡, *circlet of rapid casting*, *repelling gloves*, *ring of spell-battle*, *rod of flame extinguishing*‡, *rod of the white-fang*, *rod of withering*‡, *shirt of the leech*, 6 potions† of *cure serious wounds*, 2 potions† of *neutralize poison*, 1 potion† of *remove disease*; constructs (various) under *shrink construct effect*

[‡ - Pinned to robe under *greater shrink item* if not in use. † - Stored in belt if not in use.]

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## *Appendix III Who's Doomed*

**Wizard Spells Available:** (CL 21, 22 for spells of Necromancy; Base DC 18 + spell level, 19 + spell level for Necromancy & Evocation; Prohibited schools: Enchantment & Illusion)

- 9th (3+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, Create Quasimancer <sup>Ga2</sup>, major salience *VRGWD*
- 8th (5+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*
- 7th (3+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, Inviolable Soul <sup>VRA</sup>, Mystic Cage <sup>VRA</sup>
- 6th (4+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, minor salience <sup>VRGWD</sup>, revive undead <sup>SpC</sup>
- 5th (3+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, deadly feast <sup>LotB</sup>, Feign Undeath <sup>RLCS/RLPHB</sup>, Lichbane Daggers <sup>VRA</sup>, shrink construct <sup>FoSNS</sup>, transmute snow to stone <sup>FoSNS</sup>, transmute stone to snow <sup>FoSNS</sup>
- 4th (6+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, Bone Seizure <sup>Ga2</sup>, corpse whisper <sup>Ga2</sup>, Deconstruct <sup>VRA</sup>, eyes of the undead <sup>Ga2</sup>, repair critical damage <sup>SpC</sup>, Shackle <sup>VRA</sup>, vision stone <sup>FoSNS</sup>
- 3rd (6+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, augment undead <sup>VRA</sup>, Hag's Blessing <sup>Ga5</sup>, Immerse Mind <sup>VRA</sup>, repair serious damage <sup>SpC</sup>
- 2nd (6+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, Ground Fog <sup>Ga1</sup>, locate mark <sup>Ga2</sup>, Protection From Curses <sup>VRA</sup>, repair moderate damage <sup>SpC</sup>, Wall Of Gloom <sup>VRA</sup>
- 1st (6+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, Befoul <sup>Ga5</sup>, Dead Man's Tell <sup>Ga5</sup>, ray of fatigue <sup>VRA</sup>, repair light damage <sup>SpC</sup>, Rotted Warning <sup>Ga5</sup>
- 0 (4+1/day) - All non-prohibited *PHB*, frost shroud <sup>FoSNS</sup>, repair minor damage <sup>SpC</sup>

[Note: Meredoth first learned capitalized spells in Ravenloft. He does not cast these spells spontaneously, but prepares them in advance like a normal wizard.]

**Spells always in place:** *mind blank*, *contingency (teleport)*

**High Arcana:** Arcane Fire, Arcane Reach 30', Mastery of Counterspelling, Mastery of Shaping, Spell Power

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 26, Wis 12, Cha 5

**SQ:** carrion collector, construct communion, Corpsecrafter, icy rebirth, item-bond, minions' link, share or imbue spells, what's mine is mine

**Feats:** Alertness <sup>R</sup>, Bind Salience <sup>VRGWD</sup>, Cold One <sup>D</sup>; *RLPHB*, Corpsecrafter <sup>D</sup>; *LiM*, Craft Construct <sup>B</sup>, Craft Magic Arms and Armor B, Craft Rod <sup>B</sup>, Craft Wondrous Item, Enervate Spell <sup>LiM</sup>, Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll <sup>B</sup>, Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Focus (evocation), Spell Focus (necromancy).

[Capitalized feats may only be applied to spells prepared in advance. <sup>B</sup> - wizard bonus feat. <sup>R</sup> - bonus feat for rod of the white-fang. <sup>D</sup> - bonus feat from darklord status.]

**Skills:** Concentration +24, Craft (alchemy) +29, Craft (metalwork) +14, Craft (sculpture) +14, Hide +9, Heal +9, Intimidate +13\*, Knowledge (arcana) +31, Knowledge (architecture & engineering) +13, Knowledge (nature) +13, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +9, Knowledge (religion) +13, Move Silently +9, Reign Undead +13\*; *VRGWD*, Spellcraft +36

**Possessions:** combat gear plus *bracers of armor enhancement* +6 w/ augment *crystal of greater screening*, *cloak of resistance* +5, *moccasins of the winterlands* (as boots), *goggles of lifesight*, *pearl of the sirines*, *ring of evasion*, *robe of arcane might* (necromancy), *scarab of protection* (9 uses)

**Arcane Fire (Su):** +12 ranged touch, range 1240 ft. (un-typed) or 1280 ft. (negative energy), 5d6 hp damage + 1d6 per spell level expended. Damage is un-typed if a

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normal spell slot is expended, or negative energy damage if one of his Necromancy-only slots is used.

**Carrion Collector (Ex):** Most spellcasters' control of Obedient Dead in Ravenloft is limited to 4 HD per caster level, but Meredoth's limit is 4 HD per level for each variety he controls. "Variety" can refer to the species being animated, or actual type of undead creature; thus, he might control 88 HD each of human skeletons, elf skeletons, and archer skeletons at once. Todstein's master is forever in the market for carcasses of exotic creatures and/or new Obedient Dead variants, to broaden his "collection's" diversity. Lebentod do not count against the number of Obedient Dead that Meredoth (or any villain) can control.

Since he became a darklord, undead that Meredoth crafts have been both stronger and harder than those he had made before. All undead created by his magic receive a +4 enhancement bonus to Strength and +2 hp per HD, as per the Corpsecrafter feat (*Libris Mortis*). Obedient Dead he created prior to 737 gained a +2 Intelligence bonus when he died (*VRGttWD*), offsetting the lebentod template's penalty, and giving his skeletons and zombies access to skill ranks.

Meredoth has no inherent influence over undead which are not his creations (but see "Strays & Sleepers" Dread Possibility).

**Construct Communion (Ex):** Meredoth is far more at ease with constructs than people, and the Dark Powers have granted him the ability to communicate his desires to such creations by the briefest of words, gestures, or cues. His constructs never commit errors due to unclear instructions, so long as those orders come directly from Meredoth. When one of his golems goes berserk, the sea-mage can reassert control over it instantly by swatting it with his rod of the white-fang or bare hand. He can even teach his mindless constructs basic tasks via his Reign Undead skill, albeit at a -4 penalty.

When he expects battle or ventures beyond Todstein, Meredoth pins constructs under a shrink construct spell to his robe's hem, to be activated as defenders or decoys. Number and type of constructs varies, based on the sort of danger he anticipates and how much fighting-room he expects to have.

**Death Proof (Ex):** Undead of 5 HD or less seem powerless to harm Nebligtode's lord. Either they lose track of their target (if the attacker is mindless), or their blows glance off his skin (free-willed corporeal forms) or pass through him without effect (free-willed incorporeal forms). He is likewise immune to ranged special attacks by undead of under 6 HD, such as an allip's babble.

Many undead are disinclined to attack the sea-mage in any case, as the imperfect thawing of his cloned body has given him all qualities of the Cold One feat. Meredoth's minions aren't fooled by his reduced body temperature or metabolism, so never ignore him or his orders.

**Icy Rebirth (Su):** Meredoth lacks the usual Undying Soul special quality, but the Dark Powers permit him to return to life via the clone spell without losing a level. This form of rebirth isn't without consequence: when he woke in his current body, not only had the old necromancer gained the Cold One feat, but he'd acquired cold resistance 5, and his fingernails - always long and ill-kempt - took on a claw-like appearance, increasing his Outcast Rating. If he knew more about Ravenloft's workings, Meredoth might suspect his clone displays all the usual marks of "The Caress", as if the Path of Corruption he sidestepped, having become a darklord all at once, has imposed itself on his clone. This begs the question of how his next cloned body will turn out, or the next...

**Item-Bond (Su):** Using the arcane secrets of his homeland, Meredoth has traded the class ability to acquire a familiar for the capacity to bond with a permanent magic item: his rod of the white-fang. So long as he holds this item, the sea-mage gains the

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benefits of the Alertness feat, as if the rod were a living familiar. When the rod transforms into the white-fang Hoarfrost, the sea-mage loses his Alertness (even if he and Hoarfrost are still touching), but he can share spells with the white-fang or deliver touch-spells through her attacks. Meredoth shares an empathic link with Hoarfrost, identical to that of a true familiar and its master.

Hoarfrost does not receive any of the other powers or perks of a normal familiar, and Meredoth will lose no XP if the white-fang is 'killed' and reverts to rod form. If his rod of the white-fang is destroyed, the darklord immediately suffers 2d6 points of Int drain from psychic backlash, convertible to Int damage on a DC 35 Will save.

In addition, the rod of the white-fang also functions as a greater metamagic rod (enervating), letting Meredoth imbue three spells each day with negative energy. This increases the damage they inflict by +50% to targets harmed by negative energy, while halving the damage to undead, constructs, or objects. This only works if Meredoth holds the rod in item form, and will not function for any other wielder.

**Master of Sky and Storm (Su):** Meredoth can control storms throughout his domain, raising or calming them or directing the course of their winds. His control is too imprecise to target individual ships or buildings, but areas as small as a two-mile radius can be singled out.

To change the weather, the darklord must personally come to the area to be affected (often on his broom of flying) and hurl blasts of arcane fire into the clouds and waves. For every 5d6 hp of arcane fire he expends in this manner, wind conditions worsen or improve by one step (*DMG* p.95, Table 3-24); wind direction also falls under his control. An additional 10d6 can start or halt rain or snow, and another 10d6 adds hailstones or lightning to rainfall, or converts light snow to heavy snow or sleet. Any storm Meredoth raises lasts as long as

a natural one; the sea-mage can repeat the process to prolong it.

As "beating Nature into submission" in this way eats up his time and rapidly depletes his spells, Meredoth only uses this ability when his need is pressing, letting the Nocturnal Sea's own lousy weather prevail most of the time. Nebligtode's master can't influence Todstein's own supernatural 'dire weather' in this way, nor can he part his domain's unbroken cloud-cover or alter the overall climate of its islands.

**Minions' Link (Su):** Since his own death in 737, the sea-mage has sensed it when any of his undead servants are slain in his domain. He can tell which of his creatures expired and the approximate direction to the site of its demise, but no specifics as to how it was destroyed or by whom. This applies to any undead which he personally animated, or to any lebentod or ghost arising as a spawn-descendent of his lebentod creations. He cannot sense the destruction of his creatures beyond the bounds of Nebligtode.

When using corpse whisper or eyes of the undead (described in *Gaz II*), though the necromancer learned both spells on his magically-advanced homeland - Meredoth can maintain links to his undead anywhere inside the Icewalls' perimeter, not just in a one-mile radius.

**Sorcerous Mastery (Su):** Since he arrived in the Land of Mists, Meredoth's own magic functions more like a sorcerer's than a wizard's, allowing him to forego preparation of spells and cast them as needed. He may freely choose among all wizard spells in the *PHB* (plus a few other sources; see above), provided they aren't from his prohibited schools and he hasn't used up his daily slots for a given level. Meredoth may only cast spells he'd known before entering Ravenloft in this way, and cannot apply his metamagic feats (which he learned as a wizard, not a sorcerer, and has never managed to adapt to his altered powers) to them. Intelligence remains his key ability as a spellcaster.



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Even if he wishes to, the necromancer cannot prepare spells known prior to his darklordship in advance. Spells he learned since his arrival can (and must) be prepared as is usual for wizards, and Meredoth can apply his metamagic feats to their effects. He may exchange these prepared spells for Necromancy spells inform his spontaneous-casting repertoire, just as divine spellcasters exchange spells for cure/inflict or summon nature's ally. Meredoth seldom fills more than a few slots with prepared spells, leaving the rest open for spells of any school.

One of Meredoth's daily slots of each level can be devoted only to Necromancy spells, whether prepared or spontaneous. If Meredoth spends such a slot to power his Arcane Fire, its usual (un-typed) damage becomes negative energy damage, letting him heal undead minions from a distance: a morbid twist to his talents as an archmage, courtesy of the Dark Powers.

**What's Mine Is Mine (Ex):** Any sentient being setting foot on Todstein is instantly detected by Meredoth, as is any attempt to teleport into the area warded by its Icewalls. He can't tell how many intruders step ashore at a time, but he can sense if the new arrivals are living, unliving, or a mixed group of both, and whether unliving arrivals (undead or construct) are "his".

**Skills:** \* Meredoth's -3 Cha penalty converts to a +3 bonus for use of the Intimidate and Reign Undead skills (included). This also applies to all Charisma or Diplomacy checks he makes in his dealings with intelligent Walking Dead (but not other undead), or sentient constructs such as dread golems. The Walking Dead ignore the sea-mage's OR penalty.

### Hoarfrost, Meredoth's Pet

**Female white-fang / huptzeen CR 8**

NE Large magical beast (cold)

**Init:** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, scent, tremorsense 120 ft, permanent see invisibility; Listen +8, Spot +8

**Languages:** Understands Draconic but cannot speak; empathic link

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**AC:** 16, touch 12, flat-footed 13; Dodge (-1 size, +3 Dex, +4 natural)

**hp** 84 (6 HD); fast healing 2 in rod form; DR 10 / adamantine

**Immune:** cold, negative energy

**Resist:** fire resistance 15 (75 hp/day), permanent resistance

**Fort** +11, **Ref** +9, **Will** +6

**Weakness:** +50% damage from fire

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**Speed:** 40 ft. (8 squares), swim 30 ft., burrow (snow or ice) 20 ft.

**Melee:** bite +15 (2d4+10 & freezing venom) and tail lash +4 (2d6+5); or

**Melee:** bite +15 (2d4+10 & freezing venom); or

**Melee:** Tail lash +13 (2d6+8)

**Space:** 10 ft; Reach 5 ft

**Base Atk:** +4; Grp +14

**Atk Options:** constrict (1d8+10), deliver touch spells, improved grab

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**Abilities:** Str 22, Dex 17, Con 20, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 13

**SQ:** alternate form, construct affinities, crystal augmentation, +3 enhancement bonus (bite), +1 enhancement bonus (tail lash), freezing venom, icy camouflage, permanent *greater magic fang*, share or receive imbued spells

**Feats:** Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack B, Tracking B

**Skills:** Balance +3, Climb +8, Hide +6 (+18 in snow\*), Listen +8\*, Move Silently +15\*, Sense Motive +2, Spot +8\*, Survival +7\*, Swim +16\*

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**Freezing bite / Constrict / Improved grab / Skills:** See "White-Fang" on page 289.

**Alternate form (Su):** Hoarfrost has control over her shape, allowing her to shift between rod and white-fang (as per *polymorph any object*) at will. While in her rod form, she remains aware of her surroundings, retaining all senses including

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her empathic link to Meredoth. Normally Hoarfrost assumes a shape her master dictates, but if stolen in her rod form or endangered (e.g. by a larger, hungry white-fang) in serpent form, she can shift between states of her own volition. If the rod is within 5' of Meredoth when he casts a spell on himself, Hoarfrost can share in its benefits, even if she doesn't assume white-fang form until a later combat round.

The rod of the white-fang is usable as a +3/+1 quarterstaff, and its +3 end - the one Meredoth wields in melee, corresponding to Hoarfrost's head - delivers freezing venom on each hit. It has the usual AC 9, hardness 10, and break DC 27 for magic rods, but its hit points are one-third of Hoarfrost's at her full strength (28). Its caster level is 21st.

In addition to delivering touch spells in serpent form, Hoarfrost in rod form can act as a receptacle for spells lent by her master. In effect, the serpent/huptzeen has the daily casting abilities of a level 6 sorcerer (7/6/5/3 with Cha bonus), but her list of known spells is empty until Meredoth provides her with choices. By expending low-level spells as if he had cast them, the darklord adds these spells to Hoarfrost's repertoire, which she uses in rod form to defend herself and him, or perform tasks in her master's absence. Meredoth must hold the rod of the white-fang to imbue it with spell options; once he gives a spell to the rod, that choice remains available to Hoarfrost for 24 hours.

The rod cannot cast Hoarfrost's spells in the same round when it serves as a greater metamagic rod (enervating), nor on a round when Meredoth wields it for a melee attack. The necromancer often imbues the rod with *dispel magic*, which it casts on his behalf to negate silence effects; if he needs to know what Hoarfrost has seen or heard, imbuing whispering wind grants his pet a voice. The rod's imbued spells are equal to a 6th level sorcerer's - weak enough so that Meredoth forbids Hoarfrost to use them offensively in serious battles, preferring not to draw hostile attention to her - but need no components.

Note that Meredoth captured Hoarfrost alive and converted her into a magic item, rather than crafting an item that turns into a magical beast. If the rod of the white-fang succumbs to *dispel magic* or an *antimagic*

*field*, Hoarfrost shifts to serpent form rather than remaining an object.

**Construct Affinities (Ex):** Hoarfrost need not eat, drink, sleep or breathe, and she does not age. To spells or abilities that detect living presences, she registers as a construct rather than as alive. When in rod form, she is considered a magical object for purposes of spell effects; for example, Meredoth can conjure the rod of the white-fang to himself via *Drawmij's Instant Summons*.

**Crystal Augmentation (Su):** Inset into her ivory head-scutes, or the sculpted viper-head of her rod form, a fiery red crystal grants Hoarfrost fire resistance 15. It can block up to 75 hp of fire damage per day, calculated before the +50% increase for her subtype. The crystal is etched with Meredoth's own *arcane mark*, helping him keep track of his pet more easily.

**Hardness (Ex):** In serpent form, Hoarfrost retains her rod body's hardness, which converts to DR 10/adamantine.

**Imbued magic (Su):** Meredoth has enhanced his pet with permanent spells, as above. All but *Greater Magic Fang* - applied by a druid lewendtod, not the darklord himself - can't be dispelled by spellcasters under 21st level.

**Negative energy immunity (Ex):** As a fringe benefit of her rod form's metamagic function to imbue such energy, Hoarfrost is immune to negative energy damage and energy drain.

**Reversion Recovery (Su):** If she is injured, Hoarfrost can revert to rod form, in which she regains her 84 hit points as if she had fast healing 2. If this isn't quick enough, she can be healed by repair damage spells in rod form, or cure wounds in serpent form. Shifting to rod form halts ongoing damage incurred by continuous magical effects (unless they affect objects), poison, or disease. Ability damage to Hoarfrost will be healed if she spends 24 hours in rod form.

If 'slain', Hoarfrost reverts to rod form and cannot regain her serpent form for three days. The rod's other powers (metamagic, poison, spells) are suppressed for 24 hours, though it remains a +3/+1 quarterstaff.

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### Dungeon Master's Tips: Exotic Magic 101

The product of a sophisticated culture in which arcana took the place of science, Meredoth grew up surrounded by magics more plentiful and refined than are usually seen in mainstream D&D settings, let alone a magic-sparse realm like Ravenloft. His archmage abilities and bond to the white-fang Hoarfrost (an alternative class ability, in *PHB II* terms) are just the tip of the iceberg: if a DM has been dying to include a high-powered magical effect or item in her campaign, but can't justify giving it to Azalin due to his curse, Meredoth is the ideal darklord to use it, or to introduce it to another part of the Core in the hands of a leibentod minion.

While Meredoth already has a phenomenal number of spells to choose from (see "DM Tip: Too Many Spells!"), adding a few more to his list can emphasize the potency and diversity of options available in a truly magic-saturated environment, and give PCs who dare face down a villain of this caliber the thrills they were craving. Appropriate effects to spice up the necromancer's arsenal (either as spontaneously-cast spells from his homeworld, or prepared ones looted from Ravenloft natives' or outlanders' grimoires) include arctic-themed spells like obedient avalanche or 'quirky' offensive evocations like lightning ring. Defensively, practical divinations like know vulnerabilities are useful to Meredoth, and anything which expands his opportunity for counterspelling (reaving dispel) is like gold to Nebligtode's darklord. Even adding just one or two rare, off-world spells to his roster (like the examples above, each from the *Spell Compendium*) can snap players who've "seen it all" out of their complacency. Two additions to his spell list - the construct-healing repair damage spells (as per cure wounds), and revive undead (a raise dead for the unliving) - are already included above, being central to this villain's vocation as a creature-crafter.

In addition, Meredoth has created, stolen or looted a plethora of magical items in the last century, some of them specifically chosen from the *Magic Item Compendium* to highlight the breadth of his alien culture's arcane advancements. Capsule descriptions of their effects follow:

**Belt of Hidden Pouches:** This utility belt of miniature bags of holding (10 hidden, 20 hidden & opened by command word; each will hold up to 5 lbs, with 6" maximum dimensions) holds Meredoth's staggering variety of spell components. Stored items appear in its wearer's hand on command.

**Bracers of Armor Enhancement +6 w/ Crystal of Greater Screening:** Provides +6 enhancement bonus to armor (stacks with robe); inset crystal imposes -10 penalty to incorporeal foes' touch attack rolls.

**Circlet of Rapid Casting:** Wearer casts low-level spells as a swift action (3 charges/day: 1 charge for 1st or 2nd level spells, 2 charges for 3rd, 3 charges for 4th) as per the Quicken Spell feat.

**Goggles of Lifesight:** Provides *deathwatch*, 3/day

**Repelling Gloves (= Gauntlets; uses/day increased):** Push an enemy back one space (immediate action) if they enter an adjacent space, 3/day; Reflex DC 17 to resist being pushed.

**Ring of Spell-Battle:** Wearer continuously senses all spellcasting within 60', allowing a Spellcraft check (DC 15 + level) to identify spells sensed but not seen; 1/day, the wearer may counterspell an identified spell (as *dispel magic*) or redirect it to another valid target within 60'.

**Robe of Arcane Might (necromancy):** Provides a +4 armor bonus (stacks with bracers), and a +1 bonus to caster level for wearer's spells of the Necromancy school.

**Shirt of the Leech:** Wearer instantly recognizes healing spells of 4th level or lower (60' range); 3/day, Meredoth may redirect a healing spell from its intended target to himself (30' range).

Meredoth's rod of the white-fang is a unique item of his own design, blending features of metamagic and python or viper rods with an obscure sapient construct from his native world known as a "huptzeen". A number of unsociable wizards from his homeland kept sentient magic items in lieu of familiars, and Meredoth - who can't abide living pets - has belatedly formed such a bond with this item and the deadly ice-serpent it transforms into.

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A grim, glowering figure some six feet tall, with gnarled hands and a pronounced stoop, the necromancer Meredoth appears less of a scholar than some doom-saying prophet from antiquity. His ill-kempt beard and wind-tossed mane are a glimmering, frosted white, save for a few residual black strands in his moustache. The Nebligtode darklord's heavy-lidded blue eyes are too small to suit his wizened, homely features, especially his narrow, hooked prow of a nose. His wrinkled skin is paper-white, laced by blue trceries of veins, and his thin lips are tinted lavender; his fingernails bear a purplish tint also, and are thick and cracked like a ghouls ragged claws. Since 737, Meredoth's ears have lacked outer rims, lost to frostbite when his cloned body was thawed. The smallest toes are missing from each of his feet: a subtle clue the old necromancer has more clones in waiting. No matter how deep the chill, Meredoth's exhalations do not fog the air. His flesh is very cold - as clammy as a corpse's - but few even among his unliving servants know this, as he loathes being touched.

Meredoth adheres to the styles of his outlander home, favoring floor-length robes with flowing sleeves he can tie back as he works, and hooded over-cloaks. His garb is black with purple hems; embroidered sigils, waves and lightning-bolts in gold thread decorate the trim of his garb. Color-coded cloth patches - gear and golems under the effects of shrink item or shrink construct - are pinned inside his robe's hem, out of sight yet near to hand. Sealskin moccasins, an astounding array of spell components, and his 6' narwhal-ivory rod of the white-fang, which he leans on as a walking-staff, complete the aged sea-mage's ensemble.

Until Nebligtode's integration into the Core, the necromancer made do with Graben Island wool for his garb, but has since pirated enough silk from cargo vessels to fabricate a more regal wardrobe. That he bothered doing this is owed entirely to his sense of entitlement, not concern for either comfort or appearances: Meredoth's finery is badly rumpled and seldom laundered, invariably reeking of unwashed wizard,

alchemical residues, and embalming fluid, if not grislier odors.

The old sea-mage's voice is a croaking, wheezy rasp in conversation, to which he is not much accustomed. Only when he issues orders to his unliving minions or intones his spells does it take on clarity and a derisive, sour edge. Though permanency and tongues make him fluent in all languages, Meredoth considers it beneath his dignity to speak to "mundane drudges", so he seldom addresses others in any tongue save Draconic: anyone too ignorant of magic to understand that can't possibly be worth talking to, in his opinion. The necromancer's native tongue (here called "Todsteiner" by default) is not shared with any population in the Land of Mists, so he uses it exclusively to direct his constructs, which will not accept orders in any other language.

### *Background*

Born on an outlander world that teemed with magical creatures and occult energies, Meredoth grew up in a grand empire of wizardry: one where arcane might reigned supreme and those lacking in magical talent were summarily consigned to servitude. From an early age, young Meredoth's arcane potential was encouraged, despite its morbid bent, for the Empire was proudly amoral and deemed no field of magic "forbidden". Both his parents (unwed, but such parentage bore no stigma in their culture) were wizards of consummate skill, and their great wealth and resources helped facilitate their son's rapid development as a necromantic prodigy.

Unfortunately for Meredoth, his emotional development was not so well-served by either parent. His father, an introverted designer of constructs, worked nigh-obsessively and spared his child no interest, entrusting his upbringing to golems and other magically-crafted servitors. When the attention-starved lad tried to attract his father's notice by having his artificial caregivers turn upon and destroy one another, he incurred only a stiff scolding for delighting in such crude, physical violence: the sort of base brutality a "mundane drudge" might find amusement in. His mother, a

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frivolous enchantress preoccupied with her own pleasures, was even worse, for the self-absorbed woman had no qualms about using her own favored school's spells to discipline her sullen, irksome son: a violation that left him forever hostile to others' efforts to impose their will upon him. By the time Meredoth entered his teens, chronic self-indulgence had lured his mother to sample *tsongha*, a narcotic wildly-popular with the decadent Empire's elite. The young necromancer watched her wither away from a spirited and powerful, albeit narcissistic arcanist to a listless, vacant-eyed addict in a few months' time.

To Meredoth, the lessons of his upbringing seemed clear. From his mother, he learned that mortal flesh was inherently weak and flawed, undermining the dignity and achievements of whomever heeded its base urges, and that being in control was far preferable to being coerced or pressured. From his father, he learned that arcane craftsmanship was the only thing in life that had value or could improve upon Nature's imperfections, while all that was "mundane" was barbaric and coarse, beneath an imperial aristocrat's notice. From his construct caregivers, he learned that only that which a wizard creates could truly be counted upon, to satisfy his needs - counted on (as his parents could not be) even unto its own destruction - and nothing at all of moral accountability, decorum or respect: things his father had never thought to have his creations teach the boy; and which his mother's callous mind-control led the future darklord to regard as yet another coercive imposition, which he would not demean himself by yielding to.

Despite the lamentable dearth of interpersonal skills which his rearing had equipped him with, Meredoth's creative brilliance at school gave the other young wizards cause to put up with his unwitting crassness and beastly personal habits. The isolated youth was greatly perplexed by the intricacies and randomness of human behavior - his father's constructs had been reliable and rational, whereas people proved to be erratic and moody, interacting by rules he'd never learned and heeding cues that he

could neither perceive nor fathom - but years of parental neglect made him ache for company, even so. Meredoth anxiously accepted his schoolmates' overtures, in the pathetic hope of finding camaraderie among his academic peers ... only to have his proposal for a ground-breaking variant of the skeletal golem stolen, and submitted to the instructor, by the most welcoming of his new "friends".

Repulsed by how his own emotional neediness had lured him into vulnerability, the snubbed prodigy overreacted. He bitterly resolved to forsake fellow humans' fickle company and superficial ways - the longings for adoration and acclaim which had destroyed his mother - and retreated to his laboratory, dreaming that he might one day find a way to purge such betraying flaws as weakness, insincerity, and sentimental gullibility from those around him. Meredoth also covertly drugged his betrayer with concentrated extract of *tsongha*, addicting and mind-crippling his deceitful "friend" at a stroke.

It was Meredoth's first use of poison, but hardly his last. His false friend's treachery had taught him the wrong lesson: in the years to follow, the slighted youth - lacking the words or tact to ask others to share knowledge - incapacitated several scholastic and professional rivals in this way, then stole their secrets as they lay insensate. Those who might dare to accuse him of these crimes found themselves challenged to terrible spell-duels "of honor", should they seek to press charges. As the future darklord's aptitude and fondness for destructive evocations were nearly as great as his talent for necromancy, Meredoth easily bested the weaker, less aggressive victims he'd preferentially targeted for such piracy, and claimed their grimoires as his rightful spoils of victory. The nascent darklord's hidden lust for cathartic violence, for which his father had once chastised him, was sated, and his spell-repertoire expanded.

In the black heart of the Empire, when he wasn't robbing or dueling his peers, Meredoth experimented upon mundane drudges and hapless beasts alike, seeking the means to expunge those sentiments and

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cravings which made the living so much less reliable than constructs: flaws he believed arose from the brutish, primal, and irrational component of human nature. His ignorance of enchantments, to which his mother's disciplines had given him a lasting aversion, hindered his endeavors, but he stubbornly sacrificed many test-subjects in these vain pursuits.

Unwilling to concede that Nature's laws might refuse to give way, to accommodate his uncompromising agenda - to re-make all those around him into worthier beings, that could neither disappoint nor betray him - the frustrated necromancer finally altered his approach, and set about crafting unique undead and constructs. Always, he sought ways to make his creations appear more life-like, function with greater animation, and display a higher capacity for unsupervised, self-directed action. This line of study was far more fruitful, with many significant breakthroughs accruing to his name, but the key to eliminating humanity's many innate "weaknesses" yet eluded him.

Decades passed and Meredoth's powers flourished, as the secrets of necromancy and the archmagi opened before him. Still, his lifelong quest had yet to be fulfilled, and old age - yet another base, organic flaw to be eliminated - began catching up with the obsessed mage. Realizing it was too late to seek Ascension to a higher state of being, and disdaining lichdom as a last recourse of desperate incompetents, the necromancer stoically endured the indignities of his years, until arthritis began robbing him of the deftness his work as wizard and craftsman demanded. Only then did Meredoth consent to partake of those alchemical elixirs that preserved the youth of the Empire's elite. In contrary rebellion against his mother's shallow vanity, he opted not to restore his physique to its prime, but arrested its aging in its late 60s - the same age he appears to be today - so that his frost-white locks and wrinkles might broadcast his contempt for the aristocracy's primping decadence.

Rumors of the testy old recluse's thefts had circulated for years, and his slovenly habits and rudeness bred resentment even among wizards he'd never directly harmed. Unable

to prove his crimes, the imperial bureaucrats eventually hit upon another way to get rid of the cantankerous old crank: promotion. When Meredoth's stature as a supreme master was formally accredited by the state, he received, not the obligatory Council seat he expected, but the title of Baron and a land-grant in one of the Empire's distant frontier territories. Though startled by the bequest, the misanthropic necromancer was glad to be excused from tedious parliamentary duties, and the notion of a secure, undisturbed barony of his own - far from imperial politics and the long list of enemies he had accumulated - was likewise appealing.

At first, Meredoth's new dominion seemed ideal for his needs. It lay in an isolated region with no native wizards - at least, none worth speaking of - and its icy climate would preserve his necromantic materials, retarding spoilage. A forested isle, off the shores of a great bay, he chose as his own residence and research facility; the contingent of settlers he had been burdened with, to colonize his new lands, were dropped off on the coastline to see to their own affairs. The human natives of the region - fair-haired, loutish barbarians, fittingly ignorant and fearful of magic - could serve as test-subjects or be conscripted for forced labor as needed. Best of all, an independent realm of wizards lay far to the south. Although tiny and laughably young, it could provide a suitable venue for spell-thefts, and without the usual risk of Imperial prosecution which his depredations chanced in his homeland.

Using snow-sculpting magics and a frigid variety of golem - the last truly original ideas Meredoth would ever have, had he but known it - the necromancer constructed his residence on the dormant volcanic island, snidely playing up to native superstitions by its morbid architecture. He had scarcely settled in and resumed his research, however, when his retainers on the coast contacted him with word of the colonists' difficulties. Summer was over, autumn nearly so, and their harvest's bounty had been too scanty for the settlement's needs. Disinterested in the trivial whines of drudge-laborers - didn't they realize that his

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researches could eliminate their flaws and weaknesses, and so benefit their kind in the long term? - the new Baron ignored their increasingly-strident pleas for assistance as the snows piled up.

Finally, Meredoth reached a convenient stopping-point in his work and spared a moment to look into the settlers' complaints ... only to discover that many had already died, still more were ill or starving, and the few who yet had strength to be angry saw fit to blame him for their own blatant ineptness as frontiersmen. Offended by their insolent accusation he'd failed in his baronial obligations, the old mage peevishly fulfilled their request for "assistance", re-animating the frozen bodies of the dead and tasking them to construct cabins, gather firewood, and clear the land for next season's crops. When his accusers proved unappreciative of this generosity, he lost his temper, killed and animated their spokesman as an example to the rest, then returned to his isle in a huff, leaving the remaining ingrates to starve in a village of silently-laboring zombies.

By spring, the initial cohort of settlers had perished to the last, yet Meredoth's animated dead had succeeded in erecting an entire series of villages, one after another, along the coast, where the living had failed him. His studies were progressing nicely, spurred on by ideas he'd "borrowed" from the southern magocracy, so the necromancer was not overly concerned by the previous year's losses; indeed, their posthumous achievements proved he was on the right track. He transferred these Obedient Dead to his isle, and called for fresh colonists from the Empire to come occupy the corpse-constructed villages. To facilitate this vital influx of new blood, Meredoth stooped to fulfilling his tiresome baronial chores in person, rather than entrusting them to his underlings' ineptitude, a second time. That his dominion's soil was no more productive, the crops no more plentiful, than before did not worry him, as it would only ensure his plan's success.

By mid-autumn, the new colonists, like the previous year's, had realized that their harvest would not last out the winter. By first snowfall, they too were pleading for

Meredoth's help, without a response. By year's end, the last of their stores ran out, as the young and elderly drew ever-closer to death. Then, like a miracle, their Baron arrived at last ... with food. Ample portions of fish, bread and vegetables were doled out to each grateful colonist, along with the bearer's solemn vow they would never want for nourishment again. In this, Meredoth was good as his word, for each meal he distributed was saturated with slow-acting poison. After the food was consumed and the toxin worked its deadly effect, Meredoth brought his zombies out of hiding, to prepare their successors' remains for revival as a superior breed of unquestioning, need-free Obedient Dead: the very sort of beings into which the misanthropic baron had long dreamed of transforming all the 'imperfect', undependable humans around him.

As sunset colored the seas off Todstein, Meredoth returned to his macabre island to refresh himself for tomorrow's marathon of undead-creation. It was the last time the necromancer's ice-pale skin would ever feel sunlight. As the murderous baron's broom of flying alit, the winter skies erupted in snowflakes - blinding, dizzying, disorienting - cloaking the coastline from view with their swirling whiteness. Taking shelter from the rising blizzard, Meredoth slammed the faux-mausoleum's door, sealing out the eerie wail of the storm. Although normally as cold in his logic as Todstein's permafrost, the far-fetched notion that his actions might have somehow angered the very forces of nature - a laughable prospect: Nature bent to the commands of wizards; it couldn't set its will against them! - crossed his mind, as he stalked off to his bed.

But the forces whose attention Meredoth's callous deed had attracted were anything but natural. And though the snows would abate, Todstein's skies would never clear, for the necromancer and his icy refuge had been drawn into the Land of Mists.

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### Mirror Curses: The Lich-King and the Sea-Mage

While the sheer size of Darkon makes it a likely domain for new additions to the Core to share a border with, the fact that the Nocturnal Sea's emergence left the realm of Azalin abutting that of Meredoth - one of very few darklords whose arcane power actually exceeds the lich's own - may be no coincidence. Their respective curses hint that the Dark Powers' taste for irony may be an equal factor in their realms' confluence.

In this case, the irony is that each of these arcane masters is cursed in a manner that cripples his endeavors, yet the mechanisms of their curses are opposites: inverted images of one another. Azalin - a man whose studies were driven by purpose, not invention for its own sake, even in life - has the brilliance to conceive of new spells and creations, yet has been rendered impotent to execute whatever novel magics his fertile, scheming mind concocts. Meredoth, conversely, easily assimilates stolen spells, appropriates others' ideas for magic items or constructs, and plagiarizes abilities for his minions that he witnesses or hears tell of; yet devising such ideas himself - the one act that ever won the repellent necromancer approval from others - lies tauntingly beyond his grasp. One is a "doer", the other a craftsman, yet each is denied his strongest aptitude, and spared the very knack which his new neighbor desperately craves.

Were these grim wizards' backgrounds or personalities even remotely compatible, it would be natural for them to form an alliance of mutual advantage, each compensating for the other's curse-imposed limitation. Were Azalin's diabolical inventiveness ever coupled to Meredoth's matchless spellcasting flexibility, even the Dark Powers might find their pooled capabilities too potent to constrain! But such a joint endeavor is unlikely in the extreme: Meredoth has no pressing wish to escape the Land of Mists or retaliate against their "tormentors", and Azalin's lichdom - far from intimidating the sea-mage, as the undead tyrant expected it to - only convinced Nebligtode's master that Darkon's king is a bungler, when his neighbor revealed the truth. (Competent mages of the Empire seek Ascension as their means of shedding mortality, not an unpalatable undeath.)

Nor can their shared fondness for necromancy override Meredoth's revulsion at the authority Azalin bestows on "mundane drudges" among his barons and Kargat, or the lich's flagrant contempt for the antisocial sea-mage's ineptitude at political gamesmanship. This mutual distaste would only grow, were they to learn more of each other's pasts: Azalin would surely equate Meredoth's willful neglect of his barony with his own self-indulgent brother Ranald's past royal negligence; and the sarky sea-mage would jeer Azalin's lasting obsession with reclaiming and re-educating his son Irik ... a boy who *wasn't even a spellcaster*, and hence (by Meredoth's political views) had no business being the heir to a throne, in the first place!

In short, these two darklords seem custom-made to rub each other the wrong way, and far more abrasively than Strahd and Azalin ever did. (The vampire, at least, grasps the notion of tact.) This makes durable alliances between the pair psychologically untenable, even if Azalin were willing to reveal his mental block to Meredoth, or the necromancer, admit his creative limitations to the lich (or himself for that matter). Short-term cooperation, as each wizard strives to exploit the other's envied aptitude, is far more viable, assuming either darklord finds sufficient cause to stomach his counterpart's infuriating habits and pretensions.



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In becoming the darklord of Nebligtode, Meredoth suffered less immediate dismay than most domains' masters. Unlike many others, he had little emotional connection to his homeland (save an unshakable belief in its superiority), and cared nothing for those he'd left behind. Having long coveted the privacy of total isolation, the necromancer has, in fact, never made more than a token attempt to escape his domain. If Meredoth ever truly needs to return to the Empire, he presumes he'll find a way, regardless of how the fumbling "barbarian hedge-wizards" with whom he shares the Land of Mists may have failed in their own past escape-attempts. For now, Nebligtode's darklord is quite satisfied to remain where he is, taking full advantage of the enhanced power which both golem-crafters and the spells of his favored school display in this entropy-saturated otherworld. A man who admires and idealizes constructs - creatures capable of mutely standing guard for centuries at a time, without complaint - is not one to be put off by mere physical confinement.

Rather, Meredoth's own suffering as a darklord stem from internal sources: specifically, changes to his former talents as a spellcaster and a designer of unnatural creatures. On the first day of his captivity, as the sea-mage reached for his grimoire to refresh his magics, a torrent of information - the collective contents of his duel-garnered library of spells - poured into his mind, its every pen-stroke burning itself ineradicably into the old wizard's brain. As he staggered back reeling, his precious spellbook tumbled to the floor, its meticulously-inked pages wiping themselves blank before his eyes. Alarmed, Meredoth ransacked his quarters, only to find his other grimoires and scrolls had likewise gone blank. Nor had any of his research notes on undead- and construct-crafting been spared this wholesale erasure.

Only the belated realization that his spell-knowledge had stamped itself indelibly into his mind, letting him invoke his spells spontaneously - not just the meager handful afforded to a sorcerer, but every spell he had ever learned - eased Meredoth's initial gut-reaction of horrified helplessness. But this shift in his casting-methods - one any other

wizard might deem a huge advantage - left the aged necromancer outraged: he'd deeply envied the easy appeal of sorcerers, as a socially-inept lad, and as a grown, hard-slogging arcane craftsman, had despised their lack of diligence with equal bitterness. Yet now, his own magic emulated that of the spontaneous casters he resented!

Worse, the spells which now sprang to readiness at the necromancer's call always functioned exactly as his grimoires had described them: his former techniques for modifying such spells' effects (= metamagic feats) could not be applied to magics he had not prepared in advance. Even interrogating captured bards or sorcerers, in the years to follow, could not teach Meredoth to adapt such techniques to his new, off-the-cuff way of spellcasting. As the exacting control and personalization of one's magics had been lauded, in the Empire, as a crucial hallmark of arcane expertise, having such formulaic, by-the-book versions of spells heed his call - as rigid as a raw apprentice's! - chafes the old wizard's pride as an erstwhile 'supreme master', with every incantation he utters.

Nor was his capacity to adapt and to innovate in other fields - Meredoth's sole redeeming talent, in the reckoning of his old countrymen, and a key buttress of his brittle self-esteem - left unmarred by the Dark Powers. Though quite capable of utilizing new spells or crafting new creatures, the necromancer's once-fruitful imagination no longer offers up ideas for fresh inventions. His efforts to concoct novel spells, engineer pioneering styles of construct, or confer rare and startling powers upon undead minions, must now stem entirely from other peoples' suggestions: his own wits only offer up bland, trivial variants on existing spells or creatures, or hackneyed concepts he'd heard of before his arrival in Ravenloft.

The sea-mage has recreated some spells from his homeland, and made various petty adjustments to creatures and spell-effects, on enough occasions to assure himself he's still capable of successfully completing projects. Proper breakthroughs, however, continue to elude him, no matter what he tries, or how many innocents - 'harvested' from Graben Island or ships traversing the open sea - his

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experiments use up. Nor has Meredoth ever managed to reverse-engineer the "perfected" type of undead into which he'd planned to transform his barony's poisoned inhabitants. Every variation the necromancer has devised since 635 BC has fallen short of his vision (though the lebentod come close) of loyal, compliant servitors purged of organic flaws, whom he can trust to do their jobs exactly as instructed, without supervision or support.

In a response typical of his culture, the aged necromancer "refuses to see" this embarrassing lapse in his own creativity, blaming his perennial lack of progress on trespassers' continual distractions, inferior raw materials, or his incompetent minions' mistakes. The possibility that the loss of his inventiveness could have anything to do with his arrival in Ravenloft - let alone, that such inspired talent might actually be a product of the very human sentiments and "flaws" which he still aspires to eradicate in others - has never so much as crossed Meredoth's narrow, self-absorbed and (now) unimaginative mind.

For just over a century, Meredoth's domain was isolated and nearly inviolate, and the sea-mage lived in strictest seclusion; his ill-reputed island was warily avoided by most men, save the occasional whaling ship or servants bringing in supplies. The first Grabenites who spotted the darklord passing over their Island on his broom of flying dubbed the dark-cloaked apparition "Aegir's Jackdaw". It is a nickname the sea-mage finds a bit annoying - the Islanders' muscle-bound mythology seems quite puerile to the necromancer - yet tolerates anyway, as he much prefers being branded as a creature of myth, by the blandly-mundane magophobes who share his domain, over being positively identified as a wizard.

At first, Todstein's master employed living agents - Mist-led pirates or outcast Grabenites mainly - to supply him with cadavers for his ceaseless research, and the exotic items his many, many spells require as material components. Later, when he learned the Grabens owned a cache of gems suitable for his use as spell-foci, Meredoth poisoned nearly the entire clan and raised them as a new, well-camouflaged variety of Obedient

Dead - the lebentod - thus obtaining their unquestioning servitude and loyalty. From time to time, outlanders or adventurers from other domains appeared on the Rock, delivered by the Mists to interrupt his research; the darklord annihilated many, stole spells from or experimented on others, and dispatched a select few back into the Mists as lebentod agents, to retrieve spells and ideas for constructs and undead from the realms beyond Nebligtode's border.

The easy victories he achieved over this feeble opposition left Meredoth complacent, and the arrogant darklord became lax about his own security. In 737 BC, he paid a high price for his lack of vigilance. Confronted by a hostile band of intruders he might have crushed with ease, had he but taken their threat seriously, Meredoth unwisely tried to capture the lot alive for experimentation, foregoing the aid of his golems and undead servitors. But rather than battle him outright as he'd expected, the trespassing outlanders hit on a tactic his decades as a spell-duelist had failed to prepare him for, for no mage of the Empire would have contemplated such a shameful ploy: they caught Meredoth inside an *antimagic field*, then beat him to death - even their wizard! - with the crude hand-weapons of ignorant barbarian thugs. Even knowing a readied clone awaited, the fallen darklord's repulsed outrage at the shameful manner of his defeat burned like fire.

For a week, this outrage was the only heat the fallen darklord knew, as wild storms ravaged his domain and his unliving minions drove off the intruders. Then, heeding pre-set commands, they gingerly revived the clone he kept hidden in Todstein's network of extinct lava tubes. (Arcane clones in the Land of Mists being notoriously intractable, Meredoth kept his substitute-body inert by the expedient of freezing it solid.) Though his minions did their best, the clone was thawed imperfectly, such that the chill of its preservation never wholly left him.

This temporary brush with death had further side-effects. The necromancer's link to his undead creations grew stronger, in the wake of his own brush with mortality; his prior tolerance for frigid conditions became even greater, giving him a modicum of cold resistance; and the fervent wish to avoid any recurrence of his humiliation has driven the reclusive darklord to pay a greater (albeit sullenly-resentful) heed to self-defense.

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### *Dread Possibility: The One (?) That Got Away*

While he finds undead better company than the living, Meredoth has no wish to personally join their ranks ... at least, not until he improves upon the undead condition to a greater extent than he feels he did with the lebentod. Thus, he relies on the clone spell to elude death, growing himself new bodies and preserving them until needed.

Prior to his arrival in the Land of Mists, Meredoth had prepared such a clone, which he stored in temporal stasis in a cavern beneath Todstein's Gargoyle Point. The stasis-spell allowed him to keep his duplicate 'fresh' indefinitely, provided it was reinstated yearly, after his world's annual Day of Magic Void. The necromancer's constructs were under orders to deactivate the temporal stasis and free him, in the event their creator died and his spirit entered his new body.

Magic, however, can have odd pitfalls in Ravenloft. Six months after Meredoth's arrival in this entropy-rich Land - fully half a year before it was due - the Day of Magic Void hit Nebligtode out of season, disrupting his work and setting his research back years. Once he'd cleaned up the mess, Meredoth recalled his clone's temporal stasis needed replacing ... but, arriving at Gargoyle Point, he discovered his spare body was gone.

The puzzled wizard soon determined that this world affected clones differently, causing them to animate prematurely. Deducing from animal studies that his duplicate must have awakened when its temporal stasis failed, stumbled from the cave in a daze, and fallen from the cliff, he thought no further about its fate, but devised a means of keeping clones frozen prior to use. As the cavern was inadequate for such procedures, Meredoth abandoned it to his gargoyle minions.

However, Meredoth's first clone did not awaken dazed, as he believes, but in full command of its faculties and with a burning desire to murder and supplant its 'parent', thus becoming a man and not a thing. Naked and without material components or spellbooks, lacking Meredoth's darklord status, and with its own half-recalled spells in a muddle, the clone hid until it could flee Todstein undetected, then escaped into the Mists via overland flight, one of the few spells it retained.

Calling itself "Thedmore" as an anagram of its "other self's" name, Meredoth's clone shares none of the real necromancer's darklord powers, save for the fact that Thedmore, like Meredoth, hasn't aged a day since Nebligtode was created. Denied Meredoth's ability to call up spells as needed, Thedmore (CE necromancer 15 / archmage 4) has spent the last century and a quarter assembling its own copies of its forbearer's lost grimoires, sometimes in direct competition with its unwitting creator's own thieving agents. Thedmore's statistics are identical to what Meredoth's were at 19th level; it lacks the Arcane Fire ability, and seems unable to gain levels of its own.

Determined to keep Meredoth ignorant of its existence until it is ready to strike, Thedmore leads a nomadic life, maintaining no unliving entourage and relying on its low Charisma to keep others' questions at bay. It is unable to think of itself as a person rather than an "it", so long as Meredoth survives. Obsessed with its forbearer's downfall, yet uniquely aware of what a ruthless and lethal adversary it is up against, Thedmore shaves regularly and dyes its hair gray to obscure its telltale resemblance to Meredoth. Over the years, the clone has dodged countless near-encounters with its forbearer's lebentod: creatures it has an uncanny knack for identifying on sight.

Notably, a wizard of some power matching Meredoth's/Thedmore's description is known to have been killed in 734, in a botched robbery attempt in Borca that also left the lady of the house dead. Although the culprit's body was never positively identified, several additional acts of spell-theft have been attributed to just such a figure, both before and after the Nuikin tragedy. It is possible that Thedmore, like Meredoth before it, has been using clone spells as insurance against mishaps ... or that it has cloned additional (18th-level) copies from its own flesh as its accomplices, so they might collectively gang up on and dethrone the sea-mage, before fighting it out over which of the clones will step into Meredoth's moccasins.

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### *Current Sketch*

The darklord of Nebligtode is a man who has made denial a way of life: denial of others' worth, his own lapses, or anything - pleasure, company, sentiment - that might inject light or happiness into his colorless, lab-bound existence. From one trivial incident in his youth (long since avenged, and in a manner out of all proportion to the offense), he has fabricated excuses for a complete break with moral accountability, assuring himself that his own thefts and betrayals merely return others' past abuses toward him, in kind.

Too weak a personality to hold his own in human society, he consoles himself with a belief that human interaction is pointless, treacherous and shallow, finding vindication in enumerating traits - biological, cultural, emotional - that make people inferior to constructs or Obedient Dead. These beings, lacking in free will or hidden agendas, the darklord trusts implicitly as he cannot trust the living. It's not that he fears other living humans are actively plotting against him - Meredoth isn't paranoid, and he fears very little, apart from shaming himself in his own eyes - but rather, that even the possibility of being let down by others (even by accident) is too much uncertainty for this chronic control freak to tolerate. If he can't count on something to do exactly as it's told, every single time, he wants no part of it.

After decades of smug complacency, his shameful defeat at adventurers' hands and the appearance of new lands beyond his borders have at last spurred Meredoth to step outside of his lab in earnest, albeit not particularly in haste. Though still convinced he has little to object to about his position - his death, he reassures himself, could never have come to pass, had he not misjudged the sheer barbarity of his opponents - his own inability to reach these neighboring lands has at last gotten him wondering how the Land of Mists affects more than just his necromantic spells. The sea-mage's belated inquisitiveness about Ravenloft is hampered by the peculiarities of his own homeworld's cosmology - one in which concepts pivotal to native scholars' theories, such as that of a "Plane of Shadow", do not apply - so the

necromancer has a lot of catching up to do, the more-so as his curse makes it difficult for Meredoth to think 'outside the box'. His learning is further undermined by his disdain for the Land's resident theorists. By his natal Empire's standards, the civilizations of the Core seem little more than jumped-up villages ruled by louts; thus, Meredoth takes it for granted that any theories the Core's experts have yet hit upon are superstitious hokum and folk myth, not fact.

While his interest in events beyond the Icewalls has grown, Meredoth is still highly preoccupied with ongoing research projects, most of which involve close variations upon existing types of undead, constructs, or aggressive evocation-spells. At any given time, the workaholic necromancer juggles dozens of works-in-progress - half-built construct chasses, composite undead in need of some additional bits and pieces, trivial modifications of familiar spells - in addition to the hundreds of dead-end projects the loss of his creativity has led him to cast aside in frustration, unfinished. When he does come up with something "new", it is generally the byproduct of someone else's stolen research, or an idea fed to him by Colin Graben or his Muspelhounds. Even Meredoth's personal hallmark, the lebentod, are little more than enhanced Obedient Dead, their one novel ability plagiarized from Grabenite accounts of trollish regeneration. The mightiest of all the sea-mage's vile creations, the voracious aquatic abomination known as "the Horror", was based on a deranged research-victim's blood-scrawled sketch on the wall of a Todstein prison cell. Meredoth refuses to acknowledge that such bootlegging is not really his work, stubbornly denying the fact he has become as parasitic and thieving as that false "friend" who betrayed his younger self's trust, so long ago.

On a practical note, the necromancer has seized on Nebligtode's new neighbors as the means to rectify a loss he does admit to: his spellbooks. While spontaneous casting has given him incredible flexibility, Meredoth loathes the fact that he cannot modify these spells as he once could, and he dreams of rebuilding the cherished grimoires he slew and betrayed so many of his peers to obtain.

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He has already amassed a collection of over a hundred spells, from slain trespassers or spellbooks retrieved by lebentod spies, and he often ambushes and robs lesser wizards who dare to enter his domain, adding their knowledge to his library.

Meredoth prefers not to murder fellow wizards outright, unless they fight back too stubbornly or behave in ways that offend his magocratic sensibilities (e.g. swearing fealty to a non-spellcasting liege). In this villain's view, most of Ravenloft's mages are hedge-magicians and spineless dabblers, afraid to openly assert their rightful authority over the rabble, so he feels justified in confiscating the spell-knowledge they lack the nerve to properly reap the benefits of. The sea-mage doesn't view other varieties of spellcaster - also aristocrats, in the Empire's reckoning - as fair game for vivisection or experimental use, either; however, he has no qualms about converting sorcerers, bards, or divine casters into lebentod, justifying such murders as "sparing them" from the weaknesses of the living. When killing non-spellcasters, even such flimsy excuses are unnecessary to him: serving their wizardly betters, be it as living laborers, lab-rats, or Walking Dead, is what mundane drudges are for.

Despite his vast personal power, the sea-mage has a hobbyist's liking for low-level, utilitarian magic items such as his moccasins of the winterlands. In his homeland, petty magical wares were an everyday part of life, and Meredoth often reverse-engineers such trinkets for himself or his minions. Where item-crafting is concerned, the necromancer prefers producing goods that are permanent; wands or other exhaustible items had struck him as a waste of their crafters' talents, even before the alteration of his spellcasting made such gear a bit redundant. Meredoth's own enchanted items are all his own handiwork, save potions brewed by his Niflhounds, and the rings he claimed from slain adventurers. In recent years, he has devoted much effort to replacing the gear looted from his original body by the outlanders. One particular stolen item he cannot craft himself - a ring of shooting stars he'd been rather fond of - still nags at him, and the necromancer would be quite interested in the chance to acquire a

similar ring. Alas, enchanted items seem astonishingly hard to come by, in the Land of Mists: one of the few things Meredoth truly does dislike about this world.

Just as he finds it diverting to fiddle with minor magic items, Meredoth derives artistic satisfaction from stretching the limits of what his necromantic and construct-crafting skills can birth. Unlike many who share his arcane specialty, Todstein's master has no use for armies of unliving soldiers - his sole taste of political authority was bitter and bothersome, when he was a baron on his own world - and prefers to maintain a low profile, which precludes using his undead to deliver threats or as instruments of terror. (He does keep a stable of animated skeletons in the House of Bones, for manual labor and to soak up trespassing clerics' Turning attempts, before he sends any minions he values against them.) Rather, Meredoth is a collector of the outré and exotic, creating representative examples of as many different types of Obedient Dead or construct as he can steal or recall the plans for. Were it not for his curse, his private menagerie of the unliving would have outgrown Todstein's labyrinth of lava tubes decades ago; even bereft of his imagination, the sea-mage's "collection" is quite bewilderingly diverse, containing reanimated and crafted creatures from the far corners of the Land of Mists, plus a few from his homeland that no native of Ravenloft has ever seen alive.

With the possible exception of the laws of nature that hamper his work, Meredoth doesn't consider himself to have enemies, only inferiors too stubborn or stupid to keep their distance. Of the various neighboring darklords, Azalin and the Lady of Ravens are the only ones mighty enough to warrant the haughty necromancer's regard, and he considers the former a perennial bungler and the latter quite insane. Easan, too, he looks down upon for his careless meddling with unreliable wild magic; nevertheless, word of the Vechorite darklord's experiments with human/golem hybrids has recently reached the sea-mage. Meredoth is now considering whether to seed lebentod spies inside the mad elf's household, or simply have his neighbor's research stolen outright.

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Employing the more verbose of Grabens as ghost-writers, the sea-mage does engage in occasional correspondence with mainland wizards: mostly Hazlani necromancers fed up with their monarch's low opinion of their chosen school, or fugitive Darkonians who had looted the lich-king's arcane secrets in the Shrouded Years, then fled when Azalin returned. However, this is merely a ploy to lure them into his domain to be robbed. A similar invitation to correspond, sent to mainland ruler and known wizard Strahd von Zarovich, never received a reply.

Feigned overtures aside, the master of Todstein has no allies either, only servants and tools ... and the distinction between the two is vague. He accords the Muspelhounds and other spellcasting lebentod additional privileges as an affectation, but still treats them very much as lackeys and underlings; non-spellcasting Obedient Dead, he treats like furniture. Meredoth's handful of living minions (gargoyles and a few summoned outsiders) and those indigenous monsters of the Rock that he has bullied into submission (wild white-fangs, night twists) are seldom trusted to do anything correctly, and tend to become targets for the spectacular arcane temper tantrums he throws when a project ends in failure. Some of his handiwork, he takes great pride in (the nigh-unstoppable Horror among them), yet he treats even such "favorites" like well-trained dogs - barking orders in brusque tones, or directing them non-verbally with a curt snap of his fingers - and with none of the encouragement or praise to which even animals are entitled. In the rare event that the sea-mage does speak to the living, he is gruff and mule-headed in the extreme, communicating either through contemptuous snorts and jeers, or snooty, accusative rants about others' failings.

The one creature in the world for which Meredoth harbors anything that approaches a normal affection is Hoarfrost, a young white-fang he'd found eating his laboratory rodents in the Hall of Flesh, shortly after his death and resurrection. Impressed that the magical beast had found a route through his lair's warded ventilation system, he made this intruder the nucleus of a new magical item to replace ones taken by the outlanders: one

which could defend itself against theft. Given his own recent trauma and brush with mortality, the aged necromancer was not so coldly-indifferent to Hoarfrost as he would have otherwise, even making a fumbling effort to soothe the half-grown serpent's fear and discomfort during its transition. Now, he and the rod of the white-fang are nearly inseparable. Keenly proud of having spared his "pet" from mortal flesh's vulnerabilities, he is actually willing to forgive Hoarfrost's errors - an unprecedented concession, on the exacting necromancer's part - and Hoarfrost (unaware that Meredoth had been the cause of her anguish, when her body was re-made) is sincerely devoted to her master, whose simmering angers and subliminal, desperate loneliness she dimly intuits, yet is powerless to articulate or mend.

Should Meredoth be slain permanently, Hoarfrost is the one and only being that will grieve for him. When her master sleeps, she transforms to her white-fang shape and curls around his body, her lush, snow-white fur soft against his equally-pallid skin; when he shows signs of waking, she leaves his side to return to rod form, knowing he would never consciously tolerate such sappy indignities and "weakness". Even so, rarely - perhaps once or twice a year - the ancient archmage briefly strokes his pet's luxuriant coat, in his sleep: slim proof of caring, and learned two centuries too late, but it satisfies her.

### *Combat*

Meredoth is no tactical genius - with sheer firepower on his side, he's seldom had to be - but he believes in forward planning. Given the chance to choose and prepare his battleground, he seeks to limit opponents' mobility and options, by corralling his foes with minions, traps, and hindering terrain. The smallest and most accessible of his lairs, the House of Bones, is designed as a serial deathtrap and killing field that funnels intruders into vulnerable positions, allowing him to strike at trespassers repeatedly from safe venues.

Maintaining a prudent distance from enemies is a matter of common sense, not cowardice: the necromancer behaves quite

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boldly during such cat-and-mouse games, willingly exposing himself to peril in order to coax his opposition into place for his next devastating fusillade of attack-spells. Using lethal necromantic spells with Arcane Reach is a favorite ploy against weak opponents, particularly if he can observe the bodies afterward to see if Ravenloft's altered magic will animate them. Opponents whom the darklord regards as truly dangerous are bombarded with evocations and arcane fire from long - often very long - range.

Although he fancies himself methodical and stoic, like the constructs he admires, a part of Meredoth craves battle for its own sake, and he can easily get carried away - drunk on his own power and the rising panic of foes who hadn't realized what they were getting into - when high-level spells start flying. At such times, he attacks recklessly and neglects to use his powers of High Arcana; he is most vulnerable to enemy magic then, when he's too busy lashing out to counter hostile spells. Such lapses cease as soon as his adversary gets in a solid strike against him or Hoarfrost, or when he forgets to use Mastery of Shaping and accidentally inflicts heavy collateral damage on his own minions or lair.

If forced into closer combat, the sea-mage uses abjurations, conjured creatures (including Hoarfrost or shrunken construct bodyguards), and his repelling gloves to keep attackers at bay. Unshakable in his belief that melee combat is for drudges, Meredoth has never drawn a dagger in anger in his life; he lashes out with his magical rods only if he has no alternative, and would literally rather die (and be reborn as another clone) than cast Tensor's transformation on himself, applying it to Hoarfrost instead.

Meredoth does not consider his minions to be as expendable as most necromancers - a born craftsman, he detests seeing his finest works destroyed - and makes judicious use of repair damage spells or negative-energy Arcane Fire to keep highly-prized specimens operative. If faced with certain death, the necromancer bids Hoarfrost return to her rod form and uses *teleport object* to transport the rod of the white-fang to a safe hiding place, rather than risk its being taken out of Nebligtode before his clone can thaw out and retrieve his pet. Rendered unconscious or dead, a *contingent teleport* transports the sea-mage's body back to Wright's Hollow, so the Muspelhound clerics can attend to his injuries or (if slain) so his other magical items will be available to his next clone.

### *Dungeon Master's Tips: Too Many Spells!*

While Meredoth's genius lets him keep track of the boggling range of spells as his disposal, the sheer number of magics he can choose from on-the-fly may seem overwhelming to DMs. The following guidelines can help narrow his options, preventing encounters with this volatile villain from bogging down while the DM ponders what to cast next.

- Nebligtode's master is a hard man to catch unprepared. He casts mind blank daily and other abjurations and buffing-spells at the first whiff of trouble; the details of these can be worked out prior to a game-session, freeing him (and DMs) to concentrate on offense and tactical positioning in a fight. Precisely which spells he applies to himself depends on his intentions - does he want the opposition captured, dead, robbed or just plain gone? - and how much he has learned about a foe's abilities beforehand. Note that Meredoth's caster level is so high, most defensive spells' durations can safely be ignored in combat encounters.

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- Beneath his jeers and snobbery, Meredoth's ego is too fragile to stand the humiliation of being slaughtered by "barbarians" again: strategic withdrawal strikes him as less shameful. He always keeps slots open for escape spells (*greater teleport*, *gaseous form*), and others (*wall of ice*, *summon monster*) that keep opponents busy long enough for him to bug out.
- Ever since his spellcasting was altered by the Dark Powers, Meredoth has learned to keep his options open. He avoids expending his last spell slot of any level if another level's spell will do.
- With roughly half of the *Player's Handbook* spell-list constantly at his fingertips, Meredoth milks Mastery of Counterspelling for all it's worth. If his enemies include a wizard or sorcerer strong enough to be a threat, he keeps at least two slots free at each level instead of one (the better to fight fireballs with counter-fireballs), and avoids launching 3rd or 6th level spells offensively, reserving these slots to dispel unfamiliar, prohibited, and non-wizard magics. Confronting casters he deems weaklings, the necromancer dodges area-effects with his ring of evasion as he waits to be targeted individually, then volleys his foes' own magic back at them, potentially claiming victory without firing a shot.
- If a Necromancy spell will do a job, that's what Meredoth uses. He doesn't fear running out of his Necromancy-only spell slots, and is unconcerned by the consequences of such magic's use in the Land of Mists: he's been a darklord since he arrived, so has never learned to be wary of Powers checks, and is frankly intrigued by such spells' creepy side effects.
- After Necromancy, Meredoth's favorite spells are Evocations, the more destructive the better. Blasting things into flinders is a catharsis for this frustrated old grouch, and Mastery of Shaping assures he need not be wary of these spells' collateral damage, unless the battle takes place in a location he'd rather not demolish (like his laboratories). He rarely uses fire or acid if other energies or force effects will do, as the former tend to leave slain foes' bodies in an unusable state.
- Due to his curse, Meredoth is unoriginal even in combat. He often borrows tactical ploys from his enemies, or from things he's done or seen lately; if he's been brewing poison in his alchemy lab, odds are good he'll conjure a *cloudkill* or summon a venomous monster in his next fight.
- Meredoth is a bit of a cheapskate where spell components are concerned, preferring to invest his resources in his projects. If a spell's material components cost over 100 gp, are bulky to carry, or need to be imported, he won't cast such a spell if he can substitute another.
- With Illusion and Enchantment as prohibited schools, Meredoth has few techniques to capture enemies alive. Transmutation is his preferred means of capture (either turning foes into something helpless or ensnaring their feet in snow transmuted to stone), but barriers such as *wall of force* work better if a large number of agile subjects must be corralled at once.

Considered together, these factors should help reduce Meredoth's spellcasting options to a slim sub-set, while retaining his primary asset of adaptability. Later run-ins with this same villain can find him using an entirely different suite of spells, if his projects and goals have evolved in the interim.



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It has been a long time since Meredoth has faced a worthy challenger in a formal wizards' duel, and professional and ethnic pride gives him an uncharacteristic streak of honor, where one-on-one battles against his fellow arcanists is concerned. If an enemy spellcaster who has won his respect has the nerve to challenge him to such a duel, the necromancer will accept ... but only as a fight to the death. Whichever contender falls can never be restored to life, even by a *wish* or as an undead creature - a stipulation which is upheld by the Dark Powers - and Meredoth's spirit will not seek out its next clone, if he expires in this way. If neither duelist is slain by the 12th round of combat, the Mists descend on the 13th round to snuff out both casters' lives, just as irrevocably. Thus, a declared spell-duel is a viable (albeit extremely risky) way in which to vanquish this darklord permanently.

Between the Graben clan and his other lebentod spies, Nebligtode's darklord can potentially learn of unusual developments on Graben Island within hours, and of major events on the coast, Liffe, or Vechor within days. He seldom pays any attention to local matters unless they involve arcana or the undead, however; unless they come across a definite threat to their master, his agents and Muspelhounds stockpile all relevant facts and wait for the darklord to demand them (a rare event). Heroes who do nothing overt to attract attention from Meredoth's spies, and avoid broadcasting their spellcasting power or arcane knowledge, can travel about with impunity in Nebligtode, with negligible risk of running afoul of the reclusive sea-mage. As ever, indifference to the wider world's minutia is this darklord's chief weakness.

Unlike Strahd, Azalin, or other politically adept villains, Meredoth is uninterested in others' blandishments and plea-bargaining. Due to his stunted understanding of human behavior, he interprets offers of appeasement as either cowardice or a prelude to treachery - both of which he violently rejects - rather than exploiting the situation. Likewise, he has no interest in manipulating or deceiving PCs who oppose him, having opted out of such political gamesmanship decades before becoming a darklord. If he should deem his

adversaries potential assets, he murders them outright and revives them as lebentod, thus guaranteeing their loyalty; otherwise, he just stomps them like bugs so he can get back to his work.

### *Lairs*

The aristocratic spellcasters of his native Empire were prone to think big - big spells, big magical items, big palaces, etc - and Meredoth is no exception. Although forced to live and work underground by Todstein's dire weather, he has had over a century in which to adapt the Rock's subterranean lava tubes as he sees fit. A purposeful man, the necromancer has three purpose-built lairs that serve as his residences, workshops and strongholds, in addition to a number of secure bolt-holes in other locations - one on Todstein, three on Graben Island, two on nameless outcroppings in mid-sea, and one underwater near the Serpent's Staircase - well-stocked with curative potions and other emergency supplies. Which such refuge houses his next clone is a secret even the Muspelhounds won't learn until he dies.

Whichever lair he stays in, Meredoth's housekeeping habits are atrocious, and he paradoxically lives like both an ascetic and a slob. He holds physical comfort in contempt and subsists on little more than barley bread, vegetable broths, and tea.

### *The House of Bones*

The only one of Meredoth's lairs not shielded by a permanent private sanctum - a deliberate omission - this humble (by the Empire's standards) complex is primarily a trap for intruders, although the necromancer assembles skeletal or cold-related creations here also. Much of the House of Bones is built from transmuted snow or ice, and its temperature hovers near the freezing point. Major features of this lair include a gigantic "battlefield" chamber where Meredoth tests new spells or rains his evocations down on intruders from the safety of a large balcony; corridors floored in ebony ice (+2 to undead attack rolls and a +4 profane bonus to turn resistance, as per Frostburn); and a sculpted

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"ice palace" of delicate icicle stalactites and columns, that will shatter in an explosion of razor-shards if disturbed by the least sound. Skeletal golems (new monster) back up the traps in defense of this lair, and the qorasshi and its frost salamander pack ("Niflhounds" sidebar) rest here when off-duty.

Labeled crates of bones from men, animals and monsters are kept in storage here, as are a few score undead skeletons. The former are animated only as needed, to soak up intruders' Turning ability and soften up trespassers; the latter perform a variety of menial tasks here and on the surface. Some of the animate skeletons have an Intelligence of 2 - smart enough to flank opponents, or retreat if overmatched - and a handful have Intelligence 4: enough to lay ambushes from cover and direct the others to do the same. Even the mindless majority of the skeletons have been taught sophisticated behaviors via Reign Undead, such as capturing foes alive. Their vulnerability to Turning is partially offset by the presence of ebony ice in much of the underground complex, and a darkskull the smarter skeletons have been taught to carry around to shield themselves.

Meredoth spends relatively little time in the House of Bones, as its frigid conditions make it unsuited to many lines of research. Skeletons, skeletal or snow golems, and many cold-related monsters are constructed or studied here. A number of the latter - imported freaks of nature collected from the Frozen Reaches or gated in from frost-dominated alien planes - are kept in frozen stasis behind the translucent walls of the ice palace: a refrigerated zoo of voracious teeth and claws, poised in timeless menace until the necromancer has need of them. The sea-mage's workshop in the House of Bones is adequate for his work with bones, snow, or ice, and provides bulk storage for various grisly, yet cheap material components. It is also a deliberate "stage set", to lure rivals who scry upon his isle into assuming it is his only laboratory. Meredoth has a bedroom in the House of Bones, but he stores no actual valuables there, apart from draft copies of the grimoires he's reassembling (another bit of stage-dressing), and a decanter of endless

water he uses to re-construct the ice palace after it shatters.

Despite its morbid connotations, the House of Bones is not a Sinkhole of Evil. Meredoth is the only person who goes there regularly, and while the necromancies he employs in its lab are corruption incarnate, his callous lack of emotion whilst working precludes this lair from giving rise to one.

### *The Hall of Flesh*

Focal point for Meredoth's research and birthplace of the lebedntod, this is where the necromancer continues to pursue his dream of purging organic weakness and sentiment from flawed, unreliable humankind. To this end, he probes the mysteries of the body and its workings as diligently as any doctor, but with neither a physician's compassion nor a normal human being's empathy, and with an engineer's habit of "tinkering" with his material. Though well aware of the medical expertise of Ravenloft's native scientists - for fifty years, his domain was linked to the seas off Lamordia by the **Call of the Claw** Mistway, and he's captured Lamordians for interrogation and even read Mordenheim's *Enigma Vitae* - the necromancer (ironically) feels the same about science as that land's scientists feel about magic, so he insists on rooting out his own answers - often literally - from his hapless specimens' anatomy.

A vertical network of annexes branching off a heavily-warded inner shaft, the Hall of Flesh extends from permafrost level to just below sea level. It is normally accessed by teleportation circles, a phase door in the cliff north of Fogview Bay, or an underwater access-tunnel; the last is used by the Graben clan for covert deliveries of corpses and live research subjects, and by the Horror to enter its flooded repair-bay if heavily damaged. Ascending the central stairwell, one passes prison cells for human test subjects, cages of laboratory animals, and reinforced pens for monsters the necromancer is raising for their abilities or body parts. An apothecary's workshop and alchemy lab follow, used by the Muspelhounds for potion-making and by Meredoth to formulate his poisons. A tiny infirmary where the darklord's ailments or

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injuries can be tended adjoins these rooms. The necromancer has a modest bedroom-suite and office here, and Colin Graben and the current chief of the Muspelhounds share a rather dingy office as well.

Next to come are Meredoth's pride and joy - his dissecting theater, complete with over 300 types of cutting, pinning, paring, suturing, cleaving and prying implements in various sizes and metals - and the adjoining reanimation, taxidermy and embalming labs. Here, too, is the darklord's "Inner Museum": a display of over a hundred meticulously-prepared bodies, each preserved with gentle repose and dissected to expose the hidden workings of organs and tissues, joints and muscles. Some are little more than bone and sinew, while others remain intact, save the neatly-carved fistulas that offer views into their viscera, limbs, or brains. Neither fully Obedient Dead nor wholly inanimate, these posed bodies of men, women, children, non-humans and animals cannot fight, but their tissues never dry or rot, and each will shift its posture or move its parts (internal parts included: on command, hearts beat, blood flows, lungs breathe and stomachs churn) to demonstrate the physiological functions of such structures. It is unclear how much life or unlife these sundered cadavers are really endowed with ... but if instructed to exhibit their former life-processes, those that retain both eyes and tear-ducts have a tendency to weep, unbidden.

Above the Museum, more bodies are kept in permanent cold storage at permafrost level, on slabs of transmuted snow that keep them refrigerated. One wing of this annex is occupied by the humanoid dead - future Niflhounds included, preliminary lebendtod-creating spells already cast and equipment already assigned to them - while the other houses carcasses of animals and monsters, ready to be butchered for composite undead and flesh golems. Many of these stockpiled specimens already show telltale signs of the necromancer's work - stitched-up incisions, missing limbs, the stench of formaldehyde - being remnants of projects long finished or abandoned. A portcullis-barred tunnel links the cold-storage rooms to the sub-annex in which Ichabod Graben and his ghastly pack-

mates are caged; a secured secret passage to the Boneyard lets these Hungry Dead out to forage when necessary.

Defense of the Hall of Flesh is provided mainly by creatures, as the vast majority of Meredoth's undead oddities are kept here, and will fiercely defend themselves and their master's lair. In addition to these individual challenges, the central shaft is extensively trapped and warded, and each annex's entry point is defended by a sorcerer ... or rather, part of a sorcerer: a lost scion of the Graben clan, who had developed arcane abilities at adolescence. Too dangerous to leave among the family, lest their erratic powers expose their elders' nature, the youths were turned into lebendtod and sent to Todstein. There, Meredoth - not caring to have a bunch of snot-nosed sorcerer brats in his service, even if they called him 'Master' - stripped each one down to a head, neck, upper torso and lone arm, mounted these parts in niches over the entry halls' inner doors, and recycled the excised bones and flesh to reinforce other creations. Numbed by their conversion into disembodied doorkeepers, these warders are yet shrewd enough to watch for intruders, and to delay them with their spells after sounding an alarm. The doorkeepers are the only beings besides Meredoth who can open the arcane locked entrances to the Hall of Flesh's annexes - they just reach down and touch their doors, and they open - and they will not let strangers pass.

As a place of torture for the living and violation for the dead, and as the birthplace of the infamous lebendtod, the Hall of Flesh is a Rank 3 Sinkhole of Evil (agony). When Meredoth is actively vivisecting a sentient specimen, this rises to Rank 4.

### *Wright's Hollow*

Item-crafting and construct creation are the twin purposes of this, the largest and newest of Meredoth's lairs. (He has thought of building a lair devoted to the study of the Ethereal realm, but never mustered enough interest in incorporeal undead to get around to it.) The darklord usually moves in and out of Wright's Hollow by teleportation, though a physical entryway from the surface is

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located at the heart of the night twists' ice-locked marsh. The ancient night twist<sup>MMIII</sup> that roots itself directly on top of this entrance is the mightiest and oldest of its kind on Todstein. While the sea-mage has managed - just - to badger this dreadful plant into acknowledging his authority, it is slightly senile and does not always recall its place without a reminder or two. Reminding it often expends more magic than teleporting does, so Meredoth prefers not to waste time and spells convincing the tree to move aside.

Far more "livable" than his other lairs, Wright's Hollow is warm rather than frigid, and smells of incense and potpourri rather than blood and embalming fluid. There are rugs on the floors and silken draperies on the walls; continual flames in various soothing colors illuminate the rooms. Furnishings are few and low-built (futons, chaise-lounges); some chambers sport daises or sunken areas with cushions in lieu of furniture. Animated magical servants - humanoid in shape, but with metallic skin and smooth, featureless heads (statistics as per dread guards<sup>MMII</sup>) - stand at attention in the corners, mutely awaiting instructions. Décor is minimalist, reflecting Meredoth's disdain for ostentation and luxury, and the overall impression is that a motif of opulence (if not pampered decadence) has been pruned down to its bare essentials, leaving only those elements most conducive to focusing the intellect and to alleviating anxiety. Artwork is lacking, but enchanted features such as continual flame braziers and arcane lock-secured doors are embossed with the fluid, graceful Todsteiner script and the pictographic sigils of magic.

This exotic, yet mellow veneer is (of course) deceptive. Wright's Hollow is the sea-mage's private sanctuary - one reserved for spellcasters and constructs, alone - and none but the Muspelhounds or Hoarfrost are ever permitted to come here. Many of the draperies conceal hidden passages or niches housing other, more formidable construct defenders; others cloak phase doors, giving the darklord and his minions easy mobility where intruders must take the long way around, or false "secret passages" designed to shepherd trespassers straight into magical

traps and guardians. As a majority of these guardians are golems - hence, invulnerable to most forms of magic - Meredoth pulls out all the stops with abjurations and symbols here. He often pairs his warding spells with constructs that can benefit from their effects (e.g. an iron golem in a corridor full of fire traps), or with brute-force necromancies that only the unliving can endure. One and all, the traps and guardians of Wright's Hollow are tasked to ensure no breathing creature but the darklord may set foot here. Even the Muspelhounds don't dare to maintain their veils of life here, as the relentless constructs take orders only in Todsteiner - Meredoth's natal language - and are programmed to err on the side of caution when distinguishing friend from foe.

Most of the constructs on Todstein were Created in Wright's Hollow, as were most of the darklord's magical items, and Meredoth has invested considerable time and effort in equipping his craft-workshop/lab. Smaller constructs serve as his assistants, and much of his equipment is magically enhanced - knives that can cut stone or metal, floating platforms that move massive golem-chasses from place to place, etc - to facilitate his work. Drafting tables and workbenches for smaller projects are situated off to the sides, as are alcoves girded by mystical sigils, to ward off the unstable energies that might render new-made items cursed (the eldritch equivalent of "clean rooms"). The final animation of each construct takes place at the bottom of a 40' pit (covered when not in use), ensuring it won't damage much if it malfunctions and goes berserk.

A secret vault concealed in this chamber contains the necromancer's most important tool for golem-crafting: the stylus of the Maker, a rare outlander magical item he inherited from his father. This item lets Meredoth engrave his constructs with mystic symbols that substitute for the geas/quest spell. Losing the stylus wouldn't stop the darklord from crafting golems, but it would force him to use wish to finish the process each time ... or to hunt down and "recruit" a lebendtod who can cast geas/quest, a spell which neither he nor his current Niflhounds are familiar with.

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Other highlights of Wright's Hollow include Meredoth's second, more elaborate alchemy lab, complete with a task-trained dread guard assistant; craft workshops for metalworking, sculpture, lapidary and use of the fabricate spell; a sophisticated forge and smelter powered by a bound 18-HD hearth fiend; a large scriptorium staffed by unseen servants and (mundane) library that imposes silence on every occupant but Meredoth; a magical library, housing stolen spellbooks by the dozens, as well as precious master-copies of those grimoires the darklord has been recreating; personal offices for the Muspelhounds and a low-key shrine for their clerical members' use; ritual chambers for planar binding, one for each of the four elements, plus one each for Law and Chaos; and a dust-cloth-covered mirror of mental prowess, that could - potentially - act as an invaluable tool for Meredoth to traverse his far-flung domain, were he not convinced it is unsafe to travel through. (It hasn't answered his questions once since he got to Ravenloft, so he assumes it's broken.)

Meredoth has a bedroom, bath chamber, and kitchen here, but only the latter sees much use. Staying at Wright's Hollow can be relaxing in the wake of his failures and temper tantrums, yet living there for more than a few days at a stretch makes him fear he's going soft. Little actual evil is done here, save the crafting of necromantic magic items, but as the place where a darklord goes to mope, Wright's Hollow is a Rank 2 Sinkhole of Evil (despair).

### *Closing the Borders*

When Meredoth wishes to close his borders, he hurls bolt after bolt of arcane fire into the clouds and surf. Expending 20d6 dice of his power in this way causes violent storms to rise and deadly waves and deep-water currents to churn along Nebligtode's border. Swimming, sailing or flying against the frenzied might of wind and water proves futile, and any ships that foolishly persist in challenging this raging maelstrom invariably founder, shattered by titanic waves and lightning-strikes or sucked down whole into monstrous whirlpools.

By stirring Todstein's icy inshore waters with the rod of the white-fang, the sea-mage can cause the ice floes which gird his home to shift, accreting into the massive Icewalls. Note that the necromancer can only perform this action while he stands on the bone-dust beaches of his isle, not while flying above the waves or on Graben Island. As not even he can teleport past the Icewalls' defenses, this means he must leave Todstein's barriers open if he ventures off the isle.

Ironically, Meredoth hadn't appreciated the fact that he is physically trapped in his domain until fairly recently, having never bothered trying to cross the Mists personally while Nebligtode was yet isolated. When the neighboring islands appeared, he sought to reach the nearest (Île de la Tempête) on his broom of flying, only to feel his joints wracked by the same crippling arthritic pain which once plagued him on his homeworld. Withdrawing from the border eased his agony, but his physical agility and deftness have never wholly recovered, and the dread of losing the use of his hands still lingers. True to his nature, the darklord now avoids thinking about his captivity, like any other disturbing unpleasantness.

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### *Dread Possibility: Strays & Sleepers*

Ever since his grimoires went blank, Meredoth has longed to regain them. If he can find copies of the many spells he'd lost, he fancies his casting abilities might revert to their "proper" state. To this end, he steals spells from other wizards at every opportunity, as he did in the Empire: a habit that cements his reputation as a tactless, unsubtle bully, among rivals who know of his misdeeds.

While none can dispute his bullying or lack of tact, Meredoth's schemes aren't quite so palpable as this brute-force reputation suggests. Well aware he hasn't a hope of persuading other mages to trade spell-knowledge with him - not with his social handicaps - the Nebligtode darklord uses his lebedtod servants as proxies, bidding the Grabens to direct any wizards they meet his way, and dispatching other lebedtod on undercover missions to wrest secrets from arcanists beyond his domain's boundaries. Many of these undead agents attach themselves to wizards' households in the guise of living servants, awaiting a chance for theft, or link up with adventuring bands that include a wizard, lead them into the jaws of one of Ravenloft's horrors, then put themselves back together and claim the fallen mortals' magic for their master.

Just recently, Meredoth has hit on a more insidious tactic: preying on other necromancers' envy of his lebedtod creations. At the instant of his temporary demise, every then-extant lebedtod in Ravenloft sensed their master's death, leaving his Craving-bound servitors aimless and devoid of purpose. His subsequent return in a cloned body re-asserted his dominion over all the lebedtod in Nebligtode, but those few which had been sent off to other regions failed to sense his revival. Lost and confused without a master, these strays took up service with the first villainous arcane casters they could find, eventually spawning new colonies of lebedtod commanded by other evil wizards, sorcerers, or even assassins and bards.

What such substitute masters do not realize is that the loyalty of these orphan lebedtod is wholly contingent on their continued ignorance of the "First Maker's" return. Should a stray lebedtod originally created by Meredoth, or the spawn-descendent of such a lebedtod, learn that the sea-mage has returned to life, its obedience is immediately transferred back to Meredoth, regardless of how many spawn-generations separate it from the First Maker's handiwork, or how little it knows about the origin of its kind. It also receives an intuitive sense of where the First Maker may be found (Todstein), and resumes whatever task - usually theft of spells - it or its 'ancestor' had been pursuing, at the time it lost its way. Ghosts descended from the strays are far too savage to understand who the 'First Maker' is or why they should heed his orders, although their loyalties will shift if they encounter the necromancer in person.

Meredoth learned of his roving minions' fate when a stray and its spawn turned up on Todstein of their own volition, having murdered their substitute master and brought her spellbooks to the First Maker as tribute. Since then, he's realized that leaving such false 'masters' alive - and unaware of their lebedtod minions' altered loyalties - is more productive in the long term, as it allows his reacquired servants to pass on additional new spells as the faux-master learns them. The darklord has his agents investigate reports of lebedtod who aren't "his", and sends a Graben to enlighten such wayward colonies and pass on his order to keep up a pose of servitude. Their undead ability to hide their thoughts is especially helpful in keeping up their ruse, once their loyalty turns.

Note that Colin Graben is uneasy about this latest scheme of the necromancer's, as it requires his fellow lebedtod to play the role of sleeper-agents against their presumptive 'masters' and hence, comes dangerously close to his own dream of escaping Meredoth's control. So far, the darklord's curse and arrogance blinds him to the possibility that his own presumption of absolute mastery over the lebedtod could likewise be taken advantage of.

## Colin Graben

Leader of the Graben Family

### Male human lebentod swarm-shifter aristocrat 3 / rogue 9 CR 14

NE Medium undead (augmented humanoid, shapechanger)

**Init:** +4; **Senses:** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +4, Spot +4

**Languages:** Grabenite\*, Draconic, Mordentish, Vaasi

**Outcast Rating:** 6 if identified as lebentod, 9 if appearance is unveiled

**AC** 21, touch 16, flat-footed 17 (+4 Dex, +3 armor [cardigan], +2 deflection [ring], +2 natural)

**hp** 124 (12 HD); swarm-form shift restores 12 hp; DR 10 / magic

**Immune:** undead immunities

**Resist:** evasion, uncanny dodge, improved uncanny dodge; +4 Turn Resistance (+8 vs. Command Undead) [overcoat]; +5 on saves vs. detect undead or equivalent; continuous nondetection [hair-strap]; feather fall as immediate action [ring]

**Fort** +4, **Ref** +11, **Will** +8 (+12 vs. undead-controlling effects)

**Weakness:** severance (Ref save DC 10 + hp taken by slashing critical hit to avert), veil disruption (Concentration check DC 10 + hp damage taken by spell to avert)

**Speed:** 30 ft. (6 squares), unimpeded by rubble, slopes, or stairs [boots]

**Melee weapon:** +14/+9 +1 rapier (1d6+4; 15-20 threat range w/ keen edge); or

**Melee or ranged weapon:** +15/+10 Splice (1d4+5 plus paralytic burst; 17-20 threat range w/ keen edge); or

**Ranged weapon:** thrown hand (touch attack, 10' range increment; hand may attack in same round if it hits); or

**Melee weapon:** 2 claws +12 (1d4+3) and bite +7 (1d3+1)

**Base Atk:** +9/+4; Grp +12

**Atk Options:** Paralytic burst on critical hit (see sidebar), sneak attack +5d6

**Special Actions:** Assume swarm form, create spawn, detach/reattach body part, feather fall at will as immediate action [ring], keen edge 3/day [scabbard], Quick Draw (hand or weapon), sry on distant body parts (DC 20 Concentration check, 1 mile range), veil of life 2/day

**Combat Gear:** +1 rapier, *ring of the four winds*, *scabbard of keen edges*, *Splice* (see sidebar)

**Abilities:** Str 16, Dex 19, Con -, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 16

**SQ:** Aging, flesh-sheaths, kin-stitching, shapechanger subtype, trap sense +3, trapfinding, undead traits, utter servitude

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**Feats:** Alertness, Quick Change<sup>SaS</sup>, Quick Draw†, Skeleton in the Closet<sup>FoSNS</sup>, Warm One<sup>FoSNS</sup>, Weapon Finesse

[†] -This lets Colin detach one hand as a free action, or both at once as a move action. SaS - *Savage Species*; this lets



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Colin shift in or out of swarm form as a move action.]

**Skills:** Appraise +5, Bluff +14, Concentration +9, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +14, Disable Device +5, Disguise +10, Gather Information +17, Hide +24, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Listen +16, Move Silently +11, Ride +5, Search +16, Sense Motive +9, Sleight of Hand +11, Speak Language (Draconic), Spot +4, Use Magic Device +9 (+11 for scrolls)

**Possessions:** combat gear plus *boots of the mountain king*, *figurine of wondrous power: scrimshaw skua* [as silver raven], *hair-strap of anonymity* [as hat], *magic cardigan* +3 [as magic vest], *overcoat of turn resistance* [as cloak]

**Flesh-sheaths (Ex):** Not long after rousing Colin into undeath, the darklord Meredoth cored out hollow spaces inside each of his forearms, creating a pair of 9" long tubular compartments in which the lebentod could smuggle items. First used to carry written instructions to and from his grandfather Ezekiel, these spaces now act as sheaths for Splinter and Splay, the lebentod leader's magical daggers. Accessible only if Colin detaches his hands, these flesh-sheaths are virtually undetectable if his wrists are intact (Search DC 40), and easy to overlook (DC 25) even if one or both hands are absent.

With his wrist stuffed deep into one of the large pockets of his overcoat, Colin can extract or add to the contents of its flesh-sheath using the corresponding hand as a standard action, on a DC 15 Sleight of Hand check. Failure indicates it takes a full-round action to access the sheath, and witnesses may make an opposed Spot check to notice he's fiddling with something in his pocket. Setting a hand back in place after accessing its wrist's flesh-sheath is a standard action.

If he can use both his hands to access a flesh-sheath, no check is needed to do so discreetly. As "Josiah", Colin had

cultivated the habit of standing with his hands clasped behind his back, to facilitate this minor feat of stealth.

**Kin-stitching (Ex):** As a prerogative of his position as leader and 'public face' of the Graben clan, Colin has been granted the salient ability to replace his own detachable body parts, should they ever be permanently destroyed. Such replacement parts must come from another Graben family lebentod of the same size category as himself (i.e. adults). Once forfeited to him, the substitute part becomes subject to his swarm-shifting and other abilities. Its unveiled appearance transforms to recreate his lost extremity - hack-marks, burned patches, and all - over the course of a week. Only parts that have been destroyed may be replaced in this way, not those which are merely damaged or out of the clan-head's range of control.

Unlike the conventional Stitching salient ability from *VRGttWD*, confiscating body parts of his relatives does not restore any of Colin's hit points. Only Colin Graben, and Ezekiel before him, have ever been endowed with this ability. Like his grandfather, Colin prefers to confiscate replacement parts from Grabens who have already lost parts (like heads) that bar them from public activity.

**Lebentod traits:** (aging, create spawn, detachable parts, severance, veil of life, utter servitude) These abilities are as described in this netbook's revised lebentod template.

Statistics for Colin's body parts, when separated and within 100' of his torso, differ from his intact statistics (above) as follows:

### Colin's Hands

Diminutive undead (augmented humanoid)

**Init:** right hand +9 (w/ Splinter), left hand +7; **Senses:** darkvision & normal sight in 10' radius, deaf; Spot +2

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**Languages:** Cannot speak or hear; can read lips via Spot if within visual range



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**AC:** 28, touch 19, flat-footed 21 \*

[\* - Left hand loses +2 deflection bonus to AC from ring if over 100' from right.]

**hp** 15 (12 HD); cannot swarm-shift; DR 10 / magic

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**Ref** +14

**Weakness:** undead vulnerabilities, veil disruption

**Speed:** 15 ft. (3 squares)

**Melee weapon:** +21 Splinter (1d4+1† plus slow burst; 17-20 threat range w/ keen edge); or

[† - Surprise and first rounds only; Splinter's base damage after that is 1d4-1]

**Melee weapon:** +21 Splay (1d4-1 plus weakening; 17-20 threat range w/ keen edge); or

**Melee weapon:** claw +11 (1d4-2)

**Base Atk:** +9; Grp -5

**Atk Options:** slow burst or weakening on critical hit (see sidebar), +5d6 sneak attack‡ (Splinter) or +6d6 sneak attack‡ (Splay)

[‡ - Colin's hands must climb, jump, or drop onto a target, or be thrown by him as a ranged touch attack, to direct Sneak Attacks at opponents larger than Tiny.]

**Special Actions:** feather fall at will as immediate action\*

[\* - Left hand loses this benefit from ring if more than 100' from right.]

**Combat gear:** Splinter (right) or Splay (left), ring of the four winds (right)

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**Abilities:** Str 6, Dex 25

**SQ:** aging, trap sense +3, trapfinding, undead traits, utter servitude

**Feats:** Quick Draw, Weapon Finesse

**Skills:** Balance +11, Climb +8, Disable Device +5, Hide +39\*, Move Silently +14, Search +16, Sleight of Hand +14

[\* - Both hands' Hide scores drop to +34 when more than 100' from Colin's head.]

### Colin's Arms (w/ Hands)

Tiny undead (augmented humanoid)

**Init:** right hand +8 (w/ Splinter), left hand +6; **Senses:** darkvision & normal sight in 10' radius, deaf; Spot +2

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**Languages:** cannot speak or hear; can read lips via Spot if within visual range

**AC:** 25, touch 20, flat-footed 19 \*

[\* - Left arm loses +2 deflection bonus to AC from ring if over 100' from right.]

**hp** 31 (12 HD); cannot swarm-shift; DR 10 / magic

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**Ref** +13

**Weakness:** undead vulnerabilities, veil disruption

**Speed:** 10 ft. (2 squares)

**Melee weapon:** +18 Splinter (1d4+2† plus slow burst; 17-20 threat range w/ keen edge); or

[† - Surprise and first rounds only; Splinter's base damage after that is 1d4]

**Melee weapon:** +18 Splay (1d4 plus weakening; 17-20 threat range w/ keen edge); or

**Melee weapon:** claw +10 (1d4-1)

**Base Atk:** +9; Grp +0

**Atk Options:** slow burst or weakening on critical hit (see sidebar), +5d6 sneak attack (Splinter) or +6d6 sneak attack (Splay)

**Special Actions:** feather fall at will as immediate action\*

[\* - Left hand loses this benefit from ring if more than 100' from right.]

**Combat gear:** Splinter (right) or Splay (left), ring of the four winds (right)

---

**Abilities:** Str 8, Dex 23

**SQ:** aging, trap sense +3, trapfinding, undead traits, utter servitude

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**Feats:** Quick Draw, Weapon Finesse

**Skills:** Balance +8, Climb +4, Disable Device +5, Hide +34\*, Move Silently +12, Ride +, Search +16, Sleight of Hand +13

[\* - Both arms' Hide scores drop to +29 when more than 100' from Colin's head.]

### Colin's Head

Tiny undead (augmented humanoid)

**Init:** +2; **Senses:** as per intact form

**Outcast Rating:** 4 if disembodied state not concealed, 6 if both exposed and unveiled

---

**AC:** 21, touch 16, flat-footed 19 \*

[\* - Head loses +2 deflection bonus to AC from ring if over 100' from right hand.]

**hp** 31 (12 HD); cannot swarm-shift; DR 10 / magic

**Ref** +9

**Weakness:** undead vulnerabilities, veil disruption

---

**Speed:** 15 ft. (3 squares)

**Melee weapon:** bite +10 (1d3-1); or

**Melee weapon:** slam +10 (1d3-1 nonlethal)

**Base Atk:** +9; Grp N/A

**Atk Options:** none

**Special Actions:** feather fall at will as immediate action\*

[\* - Head loses this benefit from ring if over 100' from right hand.]

**Combat gear:** none

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**Abilities:** Str 8, Dex 15

**SQ:** aging, undead traits, utter servitude

**Feats:** none

**Skills:** \* Appraise +5, Bluff +14, Concentration +9, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +14, Gather Information +17, Hide +30, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Listen +16,

Move Silently +9, Sense Motive +9, Speak Language (Draconic), Spot +4, Use Magic Device +9 (+11 for scrolls)

[\* - Not including possible OR effects on Charisma skills.]

### Colin's Legs (w/ Feet)

Small undead (augmented humanoid)

**Init:** +5; **Senses:** darkvision & normal sight in 10' radius, deaf; Spot +2

**Languages:** cannot speak or hear; can read lips via Spot if within visual range

**AC:** 23, touch 18, flat-footed 18 \*

[\* - Leg loses +2 deflection bonus to AC from ring if over 100' from right hand.]

**hp** 31 (12 HD); cannot swarm-shift; DR 10 / magic

**Ref** +12

**Weakness:** undead vulnerabilities, veil disruption

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**Speed:** 10 ft. (2 squares)

**Melee weapon:** trip attack +10 (-4 size penalty to Strength check if successful)

**Base Atk:** +9; Grp N/A

**Atk Options:** none

**Special Actions:** feather fall at will as immediate action\*

[\* - Leg loses this benefit from ring if over 100' from right hand.]

**Combat gear:** none

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**Abilities:** Str 12, Dex 21

**SQ:** aging, undead traits, utter servitude

**Feats:** none

**Skills:** Hide +29\*

[\* - Both legs' Hide scores drop to +24 if over 100' from Colin's head.]

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Colin doesn't often detach body parts other than his hands, but may use his head to decoy someone into an ambush, or lend it to a relative with the Interchangeable

## *Appendix III Who's Doomed*

Parts feat (see "The Graben Legacy").

Note that even though legs only make trip attacks, Colin may set a leg to flank an approaching target, as these are his only extremities big enough to flank opponents.

**Swarm-shifter:** traits (shapechanger, swarm form): Ever since his carcass was hacked to bits by adventurers in 737 BC, Colin Graben has possessed the swarm-shifter template. This grants him the shapechanger subtype, allowing him to shed polymorph-type effects as a standard action.

Moreover, he may shift from lebentod form to that of a swarm of crawling or flying undead body parts, or vice versa, at will and with a move action. Each such shift floods his body with negative energy, healing up to 12 hp of damage with each transformation in or out of lebentod form. As the number of times he may assume swarm form per day is unlimited, Colin often shifts simply to repair his own injuries. Shifting in or out of swarm form is a supernatural ability for Colin, but remaining in that state and functioning as a swarm is not.

While in swarm form, Colin's veil of life ability is in abeyance. Damage inflicted by spells or other magical effects to his swarm form will not disrupt a veil that was in effect when he split up his lebentod form; instead, his veil resumes working when he reverts to an intact state. Thus, reestablishing his life-like façade when he reassembles himself does not count against Colin's two daily uses of veil of life. True seeing directed at his swarm form reveals both the swarm and the Graben leader's horrific true appearance, but not his living veneer.

Most of Colin's magical items cease affecting his swarm body, when he shifts out of his lebentod form. His ring of the four winds and hair-strap of anonymity are key exceptions, as these may continue to benefit his swarm form, provided the body part that wears them is omitted from the swarm and is in range (100') to share its benefits with the swarm. He has even learned to use the ring of the four winds to reduce wind's impact on his own dispersed body parts.

The Graben clan-head need not take all of his body parts along with him, when he shifts: often, he leaves his hands behind to fight independently, while the bulk of his substance attacks or monitors events from above as a swarm. Body parts that are not incorporated into a swarm retain their usual statistics when detached (above), and they continue to gain the benefit of magical items that have been incorporated into the swarm - even though the swarm, itself, does not - so long as they remain within 100' of it. Colin's torso is the nucleus of his swarm form, so it cannot be left intact while his extremities break apart to create one. If his swarm-form occupies or passes through a space containing one of his own detached extremities, Colin can incorporate that loose part into his swarm form as a swift action, without incurring one-third of the detached part's current hit point damage (if any) as he usually would. The opposite is not true: once an extremity has been incorporated into the swarm, its tissues become inextricably mingled with the rest of its pieces, so he cannot reassemble that extremity unless he returns to lebentod form.

When he shifts into swarm form, Colin can opt to leave the contents of one or both of his flesh-sheaths behind. Any such items are left in the square that he occupied when he assumed his swarm form. The clan-head cannot reconstitute his arm around an object to enclose it inside a flesh-sheath, when he reassembles his body, but must manually put items into them.

Perhaps due to many decades of practice at subdividing his flesh and independently directing its separated extremities, Colin can split his body into either Tiny or Diminutive pieces, using his Tiny part swarm-form to attack or to terrify, and his Diminutive part swarm-form to penetrate secure locations or for retreat. Colin may adopt either condition when he first shifts into swarm-form, and he may switch between these two states as a move action (regaining no hp by doing so).

As is normal for lebentod, Colin's head retains the ability to speak if it is detached from his body. As a Tiny parts swarm, his head remains intact enough to talk, but when his skull splits apart into Diminutive pieces

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this ability is lost. Therefore, only the latter version of his swarm form is mute.

Watching Colin fly apart into pieces or reassemble himself like a gruesome jigsaw puzzle is all but guaranteed to incur Horror saves. Statistics for his swarm forms (Tiny and Diminutive) differ from his lebentod-form statistics as follows:

### *Tiny Body Part Swarm*

Tiny undead (swarm)

**Init:** +6

**Outcast Rating:** 14

**AC:** 22, touch 20, flat-footed 16 \*

[\* - Swarm loses +2 deflection bonus to AC if ring is out of range or included in swarm.]

**Immune:** hive mind, swarm immunities, undead immunities

**Resist:** half damage from slashing and piercing weapons, evasion, uncanny dodge; +4 Turn Resistance vs. Command Undead; +5 on saves vs detect undead or equivalent effect; continuous nondetection [hair-strap]\*; feather fall [ring]\*

[\* - If item is within 100' range and not incorporated into swarm.]

**Ref** +13

**Weakness:** swarm vulnerabilities, undead vulnerabilities, wind vulnerability\*

[\* - Parts are treated as if Small if his ring of the four winds is outside the swarm and functional, or as if Tiny if the ring's benefits are unavailable.]

---

**Speed:** 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 20 ft.(poor)

**Melee weapon:** swarm (4d6 plus distraction plus fear)

**Space:** 10 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

**Base Atk:** +9; Grp N/A

**Atk Options:** distraction, fear

**Special Actions:** feather fall at will as immediate action\*

[\* - Swarm loses this benefit from ring if it is not functional or out of range.]

**Combat:** Gear none

---

**Abilities:** Str 8, Dex 23

**SQ:** aging, hive mind, swarm traits, trap sense +3, trapfinding, undead traits, utter servitude

**Feats:** Alertness, Quick Change<sup>SaS</sup>, Skeleton in the Closet<sup>FoSNS</sup>

[<sup>SaS</sup> - *Savage Species*: this feat lets Colin shift in or out of swarm form as a move action.]

**Skills:** Appraise +5, Bluff +14, Concentration +9, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +14, Disable Device +5, Disguise +20#, Gather Information +17, Hide +29†, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Listen +16, Move Silently +13, Search +16, Sense Motive +9, Speak Language (Draconic), Spot +4, Use Magic Device +9 (+11 for scrolls)

[# - Applies only if posing as inanimate body parts. † - Reduced to +24 if hair-strap is out of range or incorporated into swarm.]

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### *Diminutive Body Part Swarm*

Diminutive undead (swarm)

**Init:** +7

**Languages:** understands as per intact form but cannot speak

**AC:** 25, touch 23, flat-footed 19 \*

[\* - Swarm loses +2 deflection bonus to AC if ring is out of range or included in swarm.]

**Immune:** hive mind, swarm immunities, undead immunities, weapon damage

**Resist:** evasion, uncanny dodge; +4 Turn Resistance vs. Command Undead; +5 on saves vs detect undead or equivalent effect; continuous nondetection [hair-strap]\*; feather fall [ring]\*

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[\* - If item is within range and not incorporated into swarm.]

**Ref** +13

**Weakness:** swarm vulnerabilities, undead vulnerabilities, wind vulnerability\*

[\* - Parts are treated as if Tiny if his ring of the four winds is outside the swarm and functional, or as Diminutive if the ring's benefits are not available.]

---

**Speed:** fly 30 ft.(average)

**Melee weapon:** swarm (3d6 plus distraction plus fear)

**Space:** 10 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

**Base Atk:** +9; Grp N/A

**Atk Options:** distraction, fear

**Special Actions:** feather fall at will as immediate action\*

[\* - Swarm loses this benefit from ring if it is not functional or out of range.]

**Combat Gear:** none

---

**Abilities:** Str 6, Dex 25

**SQ:** aging, hive mind, swarm traits, trap sense +3, trapfinding, undead traits, utter servitude

**Feats:** Alertness, Quick Change<sup>SaS</sup>, Skeleton in the Closet<sup>FoSNS</sup>

[<sup>SaS</sup> - *Savage Species*; this feat lets Colin shift in or out of swarm form as a move action.]

**Skills:** Appraise +5, Concentration +9, Decipher Script +7, Disable Device +5, Disguise +20#, Hide +34†, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Listen +16, Move Silently +14, Search +16, Sense Motive +9, Spot +4, Use Magic Device +9 (+11 for scrolls)

[# - Applies only if posing as inanimate body parts. † - Reduced to +29 if hair-strap is out of range or incorporated into swarm.]

---

The following descriptions apply to both Tiny and Diminutive parts swarms:

**Wind Vulnerability (Ex):** As is usual for swarms, Colin's split parts are susceptible to being blown off course by the wind (*DMG* p. 95). Winds can't inflict nonlethal damage to his undead form, but they can impede his progress and force him to the ground.

**Distraction (Ex):** Fort DC 19, nauseated 1 round. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Fear (Su):** Any creature damaged by Colin's swarm form must make a DC 19 Fear save.

**Hive Mind (Ex):** In swarm form, Colin is effectively immune to spells or effects that target a set number of creatures (including single-target spells like disintegrate) except for those that specifically command, control, turn, rebuke, bolster or destroy undead.

More information on the swarm-shifter template may be found in *Libris Mortis*.

**Skills:** \* As a lebedtod, Colin receives a +5 racial bonus on Bluff and Disguise checks (included). He also has a +12 circumstance bonus on Escape Artist checks, provided he is willing and able to detach his body parts to wrest free from physical restraints; this bonus does not apply to already-separated body parts. Uniquely among his kind, Colin can also use his swarm form to free himself (including any separately-bound parts he can draw into the swarm) from bonds.

When Colin's veil of life is inactive, he receives a +4 competence bonus to all Move Silently checks and a competence bonus to Hide checks (+6 if stationary, +2 if moving), owing to his status as an intact - sort of - Walking Dead (as per *VRGttWD*).

As a Graben, Colin receives a +3 bonus on his Appraise checks involving gems or jewelry, and a +3 bonus on Diplomacy checks made to haggle over the price of such wares (see "The Graben Legacy").

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### More Exotic Magical Items

Just as Nebligtode's darklord equips himself with some unusual enchanted goods, so he has seen fit to give the head of the Grabens a number of items to facilitate the chief leabendtod's deceptions and covert operations. All of the following are of Meredoth's manufacture except the ring of the four winds, a family heirloom and signet Colin inherited when Ezekiel retired as clan head.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Colin's unusual items are from the *Magic Item Compendium*.

**Boots of the Mountain King:** Wearer ignores increased movement costs and skill check DCs for light or dense rubble, and may ascend stairs or slopes at normal speed, and run or charge downhill without making Balance checks.

**Cardigan +3:** As magic vest (*RLDMG*), this woolen garment provides a +3 armor bonus.

**Hair-Strap of Anonymity:** As hat (but less likely to blow off), the band of leather that ties back Colin's hair grants continuous nondetection and a +5 bonus on Hide checks.

**Overcoat of Turn Resistance:** As cloak, this item increases undead Turn Resistance by 4.

**Ring of the Four Winds:** As described in *Stormwrack*, save that it functions only for recognized Graben family members. The wearer gains +2 deflection bonus to AC, feather fall at will as an immediate action, and can generate a stormrunner's ward (+4 to sailing-related skill checks & to foundering or capsizing checks) around a ship, 3/day, for three hours. Embossed with the Graben coat-of-arms, it is normally worn on - or, as the case may be, by - Colin's right hand.

### Splice

Conceived of by Colin, then hinted at until Meredoth "got the idea", Splice is actually two slim, stiletto-style daggers (Splinter and Splay). These twin weapons can be locked together back-to-back into a single blade: a union which forfeits some of their advantages, but melds their critical hit-based powers into one stronger ability. Interlocking or separating Splice's halves is a move action. Both Splinter and Splay have finger-loops built into their hilts, similar to a set of brass knuckles; these let Colin's hands carry and manipulate the blades easily when detached from his wrists. When fitted together as Splice, these loops appear to be ornamental metalwork only.

Note that the Burst effects of Splice and Splinter can affect beings otherwise immune to damage from critical hits, and that a keen edge effect applied to Splice by Colin's magical scabbard also applies to both Splinter and Splay, if the conjoined blades are later separated.

**Splinter:** +1 eager slow burst dagger

**Eager:** Drawn as free action, +2 on initiative, +2 damage on surprise & first round

**Slow Burst:** critical hit slows target for 3 rounds (Will save DC 14)

**Splay:** +1 deadly precision weakening dagger

**Deadly Precision:** +1d6 to sneak attack damage for wielders with that ability

**Weakening:** critical hit imposes -4 Str penalty on target (non-cumulative) for 10 minutes

**Splice:** +2 paralytic burst dagger

**Paralytic Burst:** critical hit paralyzes target 1 round (Will save DC 17)

Colin typically wields Splice as a single piece if he ambushes an opponent in his intact form, and especially if his goal is to kill or convert a lone target quietly. If his body parts attack separately, his right hand wields Splinter while the left attacks with Splay. When he appears in public as "Josiah", Colin conceals the blades in his flesh-sheaths, and wields a more respectable rapier.

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Like the other undead of his clan, Colin Graben maintains the illusion of life through his veil of life power, voluntarily dropping this disguise only to terrorize those he fully intends to dispose of. In his "living" façade, Colin displays the tall, rangy build typical of Grabenites, but the gray-green cast to his eyes and the auburn highlights in his wavy blond locks - gifts from his Mordentish mother - distinguish him from the common run of Islanders. A lewendtod for over eight decades, his false guise has aged but one year in ten; slain and reanimated at 22, Colin now appears to be entering his 30s. Both in life and veiled in undeath, the clan-head is ruggedly handsome, albeit in a self-satisfied, playboyish mode.

Colin's style of dress and mannerisms depend upon the role he assumes. Under his own name - seldom employed these days, except when directing other lewendtod or in audiences with Meredoth - he dons the somber garb of a senior Grabenite, speaking with a strict gravity and formality. In his dealings with the living, he adopts the alias of "Josiah" (a fictitious grandson of the centenarian clan-head), tailoring his clothes and bearing to seem both cooperative and likeable. "Josiah" favors well-crafted, yet casual native garb - comfortable cardigans, sturdy shin-length breeches, and a broken-in sealskin overcoat - and employs a genial, outgoing manner of speech. Only when he feels confident of absolute privacy does the lewendtod leader revert to his narcissistic habits from life, dressing up in imported Nova Vaasan finery to strut about in his bedchamber, acting out the half-remembered adulations, seductions, and games of cruel one-upmanship he'd so relished before his death. In all three modes, Colin wears his hair tied back in a long, jaunty tail: one vanity which he can't bear to forfeit, for the sake of his more sober roles' dignity. Like most Grabens, Colin is partial to black for his garb, although "Josiah" favors the classic Island browns and grays.

Exposed in his unveiled state, Colin's true appearance is horrific even to his fellow undead, as his body graphically displays the mangling that it suffered in 737 BC. Prior to then, he'd shared the "jaundiced zombie"

look of other lewendtod; now, his face and frame are a ghastly patchwork of shreds and hunks of undead flesh - some near-perfect, some raw and ragged, and some blistered or charred by fire - that join up, helter-skelter, along jagged, ill-fitting temporary seams. Battle-veterans can correctly identify these hack-marks as the work of broadswords and axes: weapons with which the adventurers who'd assaulted Graben Manor had chopped Colin's body to pieces. It is along these hewn furrows that the lewendtod leader's body falls apart or re-assembles itself, as he shifts in and out of his swarm form: a grisly, whirling cyclone of fleshy fragments, rent organs and bone-splinters, some fire-seared and blackened, others rancid and slick with noxious ichor.

Because the mincing suffered by Colin's flesh was so thorough, his real appearance as a human jigsaw-puzzle bears almost no resemblance to the one he adopts with veil of life. Even his clothes appear to be in tatters, charred and stained with seeping fluid, when he is not veiled. Thus, only the signet-ring on his right ring finger and the gray-green hue - extremely rare on Graben Island - of his one undamaged eye (the left) betray his revealed form's similarity to "Josiah". Even his voice is different in his true or swarm forms, shifting from a hearty baritone to the gasping, asthmatic rasp of soot-encrusted, frayed vocal cords.

### *Background*

As firstborn son of Matthias Graben and Lydia Wickinson (a Mordentish descendent of the Holsworth clan, swept off to Graben Island by the **Call of the Claw** Mistway whilst seeking her ancestors' legendary isle), Colin Graben was raised in the lap of luxury by Island standards, being the second in line for his grandfather Ezekiel's position as the founding house's patriarch. Handsome and well aware of it, Colin spent his childhood listening enviously to his mother's tales of lands - cultured, wealthy and sophisticated lands - that lay beyond the Mists, and his early adulthood basking in the affections of wealth-bedazzled Grabenite lasses, preening at banquets held for visiting merchant

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seamen, and lording it over the servants and numerous minor cousins living on the fringe of the Graben estate.

Unbeknownst to his elders, the smugly-narcissistic youth also indulged in baser pleasures: betting on horse-fights, sampling tsongha-fruit smuggled in from Todstein, and pressing his unwelcome attentions on village maidens unimpressed by his outward charms or heritage. In order to pay for such pricey "entertainments" without his seniors' knowledge, Colin took to jewelry-theft - first from his family's gem collection, then from foreign traders who stayed as guests of Graben Manor - and to planting his clan's filched valuables upon innocent townsfolk, so he might "stumble over" their "crimes" and extort wealth or favors from them in exchange for his "discretion".

By 672 BC, Colin's refusal to outgrow such hedonistic, irresponsible behavior had come to his grandsire Ezekiel's attention, putting the wayward aristocrat's worthiness to inherit the clan-headship in doubt. While eavesdropping on one of his elders' private discussions, Colin learned his future status was in jeopardy, and he took measures to conceal the worst of his sordid hobbies from them. Within a week, three of the villagers Colin had crossed, but failed to intimidate enough to guarantee their silence, expired in "freak accidents". When his uncle Danar, a Yeomanry officer, became suspicious about Graben-town's sudden surge of misfortunes, Colin sabotaged a cliff-side riding path on which his uncle rode for his daily exercise. Sadly, Danar's wife Brynna refused to stay at home that day, despite being two months pregnant: both riders' steeds plummeted to their deaths at the wave-scoured foot of the Südklippe, leaving the couple's two small daughters orphaned.

Subdued at having killed his aunt (whom he'd rather liked) alongside his intended victim, Colin ceased his string of murders and kept silent; even today, none of his clan suspect his hand in Danar's and Brynna's "accident". But Colin himself couldn't have known his misdeeds would have far more dreadful repercussions: some of the familial gemstones he'd sold to pay off his hidden

debts had found their way into the hands of Meredoth's agents. As gems were a crucial component in many of his projects, news of the Grabens' hidden stockpile of rare jewels settled the issue of whom the sea-mage should "recruit" as his first lebendtod slaves. It was, in fact, the dead couple's funeral-feast that Meredoth poisoned, killing every last Graben in attendance - man, woman, or child, with only babes-in-arms or infants too young to maintain their decorum at such a sorrowful occasion being spared - including the nephew who'd murdered them.

Whether aware of Colin's darker deeds or not, Meredoth certainly knew about the delinquent heir's thefts. And the abrasive darklord told the young aristocrat as much - taunted him for having led the necromancer to his family's very doorstep, every scathing jape weighted with the incontestable sway of a divine commandment - when the fallen kinslayer awoke again from death ... and to his *Master's* voice and service.

For six and a half decades, the voice of his Master was all that Colin Graben knew or could act upon: the once-willful heir felt no motivation, no desire, no curiosity and no fear. Now an uncaring machine of jaundiced flesh, he executed Meredoth's instructions without passion or interest, feigning "life" as the darklord's mandate demanded he must, yet never truly participating in the pretense. Uncomplaining, he submitted to the sea-mage's callous exploitation, complying with even the most demeaning or repellant of instructions without a wince. Insensate and docile, he lay meekly on a dissecting table in the Hall of Flesh as Meredoth bored out twin cavities in both his forearms; his own free-roaming hands dutifully fetched tools and wiped the sweat from his murderer's brow, as the grisly surgery progressed.

On an abstract level, Colin knew that his unliving form's appearance and its ability to uncouple its appendages were grotesque, yet the repellent horror of his state could stir no response from his Craving-numbed psyche. However sorely the helpless ignominy of his enslavement may have outraged his former, arrogant disposition, any impulse to detest the wizard who'd broken and degraded him was extinguished, stillborn, by the alien



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compulsion to heed - indeed, to plead for - Meredoth's all-pervasive commands. For the span of a human lifetime, not even the treacherous Graben's feelings were his own to choose or to influence, and true death - a release from subservience which the aghast and beaten dregs of his pride would have gratefully embraced - was denied him, even as was true life.

Until the Great Upheaval.

In the fulfillment of Hyskosa's second verse, foreign adventurers attacked Graben Manor in 737, destroying many of Colin's lebentod kinfolk. Compelled to fight back by standing orders from Meredoth, the rakish Graben threw himself heedlessly into the fray, perhaps to the relief of the crushed fragment of his being that equated extinction

with release. But the grip of undeath would not be broken so easily: rather than slaying him outright, the intruders struck Colin's head and limbs from his body, then kept right on hacking when his severed pieces refused to lie still. Fortuitously, the ax with which his writhing torso was hewn to bits was not enchanted, and hard put to inflict telling damage on a lebentod; nonetheless, Colin's reanimated carcass was diced like mincemeat, hacked apart and scattered over the grand dining hall in which he and his clan had been murdered. To add insult to graphic injury, the departing intruders set fire to Graben Manor, and the rampant blaze scorched many of his strewn fragments past all recognition, even as they continued to writhe and flop among the embers.

### *Dread Possibilities: Colin's Vengeance, Brynna's Curse*

Though Colin likes to believe that his fierce determination to become free brought him back from death's brink, neither his own rebelliousness nor Meredoth's magic is responsible. His injuries rightly should have destroyed a lebentod like him ... but Colin Graben is not really a lebentod, or at least not exclusively. Just what he *really* might be is left for DMs to decide, but here are two possible reasons why his undeath did not end when his body was sliced to ribbons:

#### *Vengeance Risen*

Evil and narcissistic as he was in life, Colin's personality made him the perfect candidate to rise from death as one of the Restless Dead: either an avenging creature like a dread revenant, or an envious, spiteful entity such as a wight or jolly roger. Had Meredoth *not* singled out Colin - the thief who'd drawn his attention to the Grabens' wealth - as one of the first among his slain family to be revived, Colin might have had time to rise, thus. However, before his own hate could bring him back to animation, the necromancer's magic usurped that prerogative, trapping him as one of the Obedient Dead rather than a free-willed Restless. His lebentod's Craving to obey his Master is at war with the nascent Craving for vengeance of his Restless side, causing his present state of secret rebellion; this same vengefulness also makes him cling to his flesh-bound state, despite the physical damage he takes ... or even his own desire for true death.

If this is the case in your campaign, then in addition to his powers listed above, Colin Graben is entitled to the following trait from *Van Richten's Guide to the Walking Dead*:

**Undying (Su):** The creature cannot be permanently killed by normal means. If brought to -10 hit points or less, it ceases to function but rises on the following night. Even if its body is destroyed (burned, *disintegrated*, etc), its spirit occupies the nearest corpse, rising again in 1d3 nights. The corpse slowly changes, over the course of a week, to resemble the original creature. Creatures with the Undying trait usually have a specific task that must be achieved or a weakness that must be found before they can be permanently slain.

In Colin's unusual case, rather than occupying an intact corpse if his body is destroyed, his spirit might gravitate to the nearest graveyard, charnel house, or battlefield, and reassemble a body from pieces of multiple cadavers in varied states of preservation.

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### *Curse-Bound*

Colin Graben was a murderer *before* he became a lebentod, and the punishment of murderers in Ravenloft is not always left in the care of mortal justice. When Colin engineered the deaths of Danar and Brynna Graben, he unwittingly incurred higher forces' wrath.

After he undermined the Südklippe riding-path, Colin hid behind an outcrop of rock and watched his aunt and uncle plunge over the edge. What he did not expect was that Brynna - Danar's own foreign-born bride, a redheaded daughter of Forfar - had somehow caught a fold of her dress on a tiny lip of rock, after her steed went over. Clinging desperately to the cold stone, unable to make herself heard over the roaring winds, Colin's pregnant aunt peered up to the Südklippe's rim, and saw a human silhouette at the edge, gazing down at the tide-washed rocks where her husband and the horses lay smashed and ruined. Gazing down at her, also, in her desperate plight ... and then turning and walking away, calm and undismayed, even jaunty in its stride.

Though she did not know whom it was who had condemned her, Brynna's soul lashed out at the anonymous figure for its self-satisfied indifference. How dare the onlooker care nothing for her husband's death and her own imminent demise? Her unborn child's demise?! A spirited woman to the last, she cried out her outrage, righteously enumerating all that she would lose in death:

*"True love, family, a child quickened, yet not to live! Life and beauty, hope and hearth! Taken, all taken ... and taken for naught by you! Taken from you then, by Arawn's Maw, if there be justice: taken, that you might taste the consequences of your wrongdoing!"*

These were Brynna's final words. The very effort of spitting them at Colin's retreating back had spent the last of her strength; her grip loosened and she plunged to the rocks beside her husband. Had she not uttered them, Meredoth would likely still have learned of the Grabens' gemstones, but perhaps not for another generation. As it was, the curse of vengeance that Brynna laid upon Colin was answered, and shortly, the necromancer himself provided its means of implementation.

To date, nearly everything that Brynna lamented losing - life, home, beauty, family - has in turn been taken from Colin Graben, as prey to "Arawn's Maw" and the death it symbolizes. Life and beauty were lost when he was rendered undead, home and family when the outlanders burnt the manor and slaughtered his kin. Even her reference to "a child quickened, yet not to live" came to pass, when emergent familial customs dictated that Colin, himself, should personally draw out the life's breath of his only child, Horst Graben - son of the dowdy merchant's-daughter wife whom his elders had foisted upon Colin at 19 - after his heir grew to manhood: doomed to undeath from the cradle by his bloodline. Witnessing Meredoth's abuses of his clan, and feeling Horst's stolen breath grow cold within his own lungs, Colin has most definitely felt the costs of his past crimes. Indeed, his greater self-direction and independence are, themselves, a result of Brynna's curse, as it denies him the sheep-like, contented numbness with which the other lebentod experience their condition, "tasting" nothing of consequences or of loss.

However, in one respect, Brynna's curse has not been, and cannot yet be, fulfilled: Colin Graben has never fallen in love, hence cannot lose his true love to Arawn's Maw. Thus, the very callous, self-centered attitude that led him to murder his aunt and uncle in the first place now stands in the way of her curse's resolution ... and until it is resolved, the dark forces of retribution will not let Colin die. (Whether or not he remains Meredoth's lebentod slave is another story.)

If this scenario is true in your campaign, Colin's efforts to escape his present misery are destined to fail, as escaping his current predicament will only lead him to some other grief. That needn't stop him from trying however, or even temporarily appearing to succeed: his hopes, too, will need to be dashed for Brynna's curse to be fulfilled.

The task to end his unlife may be his killing Meredoth - difficult, given that he's Craving-bound to obey the darklord! - or his weakness may be exposing Danar's and Brynna's, and/or Olsain's, murders to the Grabens.

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What happened next should have been impossible. For half a hundred of his kin - slain permanently by the intruders, beyond even Meredoth's capacity to restore - it did prove impossible, on that bitter day. But something more than the old necromancer's magics seemed yet to be at work, binding Colin's spirit into his sundered flesh and goading his will to resist death's allure. It took hours of hard effort and concentration, during which the flames ravaged much of his tissue, but with phenomenal persistence and no small measure of desperation, the mangled lebentod managed to draw his hundreds of cleft, writhing fragments back together and fuse them forcibly into a whole, much as he'd routinely re-attached his head or limbs.

Perhaps it was outrage at this latest and greatest violation of his bodily integrity, or perhaps it was the sheer force of will which re-assembling his strewn and tattered pieces demanded. But when a reintegrated Colin crawled forth, at last, from the Manor's smoldering shell - his physique, now less a "body" than an animated collage of burned and rotting tissues - he realized he could now bring himself to despise his Master. And when he set out to gather his remaining kin for a retaliatory strike at the adventurers, only to meet his cousin Olsain - grandson of Colin's great-aunt Marietta, and a particular boot-licker of Meredoth's - hastening up from town along the Südcliffe's rim to aid in the recovery-effort, Colin also discovered he could once more commit murder for his own ends, rather than the darklord's.

Pushing Olsain off the cliff gave Colin his first spark of real satisfaction in decades, but actual freedom was not yet his: only the complacent necromancer's failure to forbid his ever-tractable lebentod from destroying one another had made it possible. Not until the intruders had departed, and the Grabens began sifting through the wreckage of their feigned "lives", would Colin fully regain his self-determination, albeit only temporarily. Shortly after the adventurers ended many a Graben's existence - Olsain's included, or so Colin told his kin - the crushing weight of his Master's almighty dominion abruptly lifted itself from the treacherous lebentod's spirit.

Confusion and aimlessness swept the ranks of his fellows as Meredoth's voice fell silent, and an ecstatic Colin felt alone in his own head for the first time since his unholy reanimation.

Had Colin but spoken to Olsain before killing him, the rakish lebentod might have rushed to Todstein immediately, to sabotage Meredoth's ice-locked clone and ensure that loathed voice could never return. Instead, Colin frittered away the storm-tossed week to follow in frantic, yet futile efforts to relish the various earthly vices he'd savored in life ... pleasures which, he quickly discovered, his shredded carcass of a body was long past indulging in. Food bore no flavor, drink conferred no intoxication, beauty stirred no lust. Gambling brought a scant few hours' excitement, but bitter memories of the fine gems he'd collected in Meredoth's service - and slavishly turned over to the sea-mage, with neither pause nor recompense - spoiled his zest for such paltry stakes as the frugal townfolk could be persuaded to play for. Only venial social cruelties still provided him any real amusement, and Colin soon learned that those verbal barbs slung back at him by others - slurs upon his appearance or presumed lack of backbone, as a rich clan's coddled son - which had never stung in life, now pierced his self-assurance to the core, for he knew his true physique was now more hideous than ever, and had long been subject to a greater will's domination.

The barbs were prophetic. A week after Meredoth's control over them had failed so shockingly, Colin and the other Grabens felt their Master's implacable grip assert itself once more, as incontestable and scornful as ever. The other Grabens received this as a soothing return to their normal placidity; for Colin, it was an unliving hell. He'd known true freedom, only to have it ripped away at a stroke. He had known life once - he had even begun to recollect how living had felt - yet he'd been robbed of that precious life by the same will that now mockingly returned, to dominate him once more.

To dominate him... but not completely. Something profound had changed in Colin, with his Master's death and resurrection, or his own sundering and self-assembly. His

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mind was clearer - sharper - as focused as it had been in life. He could scatter himself now, should he wish it, turning violation and defeat into a miraculous new font of power. He could kill on his own behalf, not solely at another's bidding. Colin Graben was still a slave, and still utterly subject to his master-maker-murderer's least whim ... but he was growing Restless within his Obedience.

And Colin Graben could still hate his Master, and the unliving, unwitting, tractable mockery of himself that Meredoth had so long made of him.

### *Current Sketch*

Today, Colin Graben remains one of the Obedient Dead, but one who has developed ambitions of his own. In most respects, he performs precisely as Meredoth's standing orders compel him to: running the Graben clan's business affairs, coordinating the abduction of living specimens and theft of corpses and other foul supplies for the necromancer's experiments, and supervising the darklord's spy network on Graben Island and in neighboring realms. In secret, under the cover of these ongoing plots, Colin also pursues his own personal agenda, seeking the means to free himself from Meredoth's control or - his dearest, unspoken dream - to restore his much-abused body to life. Even a transition to some less-demeaning permutation of undeath would be preferable to his current enslavement; true death is a recourse Colin is no longer (quite) desperate enough to seek out ... at least, not while the hope of true life remains to him.

Were Colin's creator a different sort of man, such double-dealing would long since have been discovered, and the mutinous clan-head would doubtless have been broken down for spare parts, years ago. As it is, Meredoth's callous indifference to affairs on the Island, his ignorance of human nature, and his curse-imposed dearth of imagination have hindered the darklord from either noticing, or conceiving of, the clan leader's subtle breaches of compliance.

Colin loathes his unliving "meat", his forced servitude to Meredoth, and his clan's

placid acceptance of their state, in that order. In regaining his personality from life, he has found existence as a lebendtod to be utterly anathema to his old self, even more so than it would be to most people. Like a vampire, he can walk undetected amongst the living, and he takes a certain wry sport in deceiving them; however, his ruined carcass's inability to either feed like a vampire or make love like a mortal grates at Colin's long-thwarted licentious streak. Like many undead, he can convert his slain victims into creatures like himself; but any spawn which Colin creates fall under Meredoth's control rather than his own, denying this natural bon vivant their accolades and support. Like a pact-bound fiend or genie, Colin can (and does) twist the wording of his Master's orders to exploit whatever loopholes best serve his aims; yet the lebendtod knows the sea-mage's power is so great, he dares not take advantage of even half the opportunities he sees, lest his actions either expose his true intentions or make him seem too inept to bear his present responsibilities. Colin cannot even find any joy in his prolonged undead "lifespan" - to his rediscovered persona, a month's lively debauchery is well worth a thousand years of tedious bookkeeping - although his new powers as a swarm-shifter have brought him a modicum of satisfaction, both as proof of his growing autonomy over his despised, dead flesh, and as a means of terrorizing or eluding his enemies.

Colin's father, Matthias, met with a true death when his storm-tossed dory collided with the Kielbrecher in 708 BC, so Colin is now the rightful heir to the Graben estate, in his family's eyes. His grandfather Ezekiel (whose natural demise was reported to the Graben-towners decades ago) is actually still animate, but he retired as acting head of the clan long ago, entrusting management of the family and its business affairs to Colin. To facilitate his commerce with the townsfolk and foreigners, Colin presents himself as his own (non-existent) grandson "Josiah", only child of the late Horst Graben. Entertaining guests, he passes the semi-senile Ezekiel off as "Colin" and his daughter-in-law Hilda as "Josiah's" widowed mother, all the better to substantiate his "grandson's" image as the

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dutiful, well-meaning successor to an ailing tycoon. Barely any Grabenites on the Island are old enough to recall Colin's face from days when he still bore that name publicly, and the few who have noticed "Josiah's" startlingly-close resemblance to a young Colin Graben are too aged or absent-minded for their claims to be taken seriously.

By eliminating Olsain, Colin inherited his cousin's position as the family's liaison to the Master, as well. It is a role that Colin despises beyond belief, as Meredoth treats him no differently than his golems: barking out orders in brusque, simplistic terms, as if the lebentod leader were no brighter than a zombie, and otherwise ignoring him like a piece of furniture. In the event that Colin's reports (or the hints laced within them) give him useful ideas, the necromancer invariably neglects to acknowledge their true source, but gloats at length over his own "creative brilliance". The darklord's unliving servants all either bore Colin to tears or, frankly, give him the creeps - his misspawnd nephew Ichabod and the other ghastrs make him ill, especially knowing that he could potentially have wound up that way himself - and the sea-mage's pet white-fang strikes him as far more alert and perceptive than either a dumb animal or a construct should be.

Making his regular reports and supply-deliveries to Todstein has granted Colin an educated layman's knowledge of constructs and necromantic sciences. Given the nature of the experiments he's stood as a witness to, and occasionally assisted with, during his visits, he invariably returns to Graben Island thankful that he does not sleep. Chillingly, Meredoth has had Colin deliver randomly-selected members of the Graben family to the Hall of Flesh on three past occasions, so the darklord can dissect them to determine how his undead creations have held up over time. This makes Colin dread the day when his Master might take an interest in how the chief Graben's own swarm-shifting abilities came about. So far Meredoth's curiosity has yet to turn in that direction, but Colin knows that if he does not escape his bondage, it's only a matter of time before he is summoned back to the dissecting table. (His dead flesh would experience no actual pain from such

mistreatment, but Colin doesn't think that he could conceal his revulsion at the wizard's grisly probing... and letting slip even a trace of reluctance to undergo such an obscene examination would expose his capacity for independent thought: a fatal mistake.)

Colin is convinced his independence is a fluke, and unique to himself. Having tried in vain to discern signs of rebelliousness in his relatives, he firmly believes every other lebentod in the family to be as sheep-like and compliant as the necromancer intended; thus, he does not deem the shackled minds of his kin to be worth salvaging. Between Meredoth's periodic dissections, ships lost to the Nocturnal Sea's many tempests, and the decimating attack of 737, nearly all of Colin's immediate relations - both parents, two of his four younger brothers, and two out of three sisters, plus his son Horst and drab, neglected spouse - have met with their permanent ends, and he wastes no affection on the plodding, subjugated husks of his few remaining siblings. Should his service to the darklord or his own covert plans demand the destruction of his relations, Colin does not hesitate to order undead clan-mates to their doom. For their own part, the other Grabens seem oblivious to Colin's ulterior motives or insubordination, obeying his orders simply because he is the clan-head and Meredoth's liaison. They do not ask questions, any more than Colin did before 737.

While catering to the petulant temper of a pitiless, repugnant old hermit abrades his rediscovered pride, the Graben leader knows his position is incredibly precarious as long as Meredoth lives, and has no choice but to play the dutiful, submissive puppet. He has observed his Master for decades, and knows just how to obliquely insinuate ideas into the necromancer's thoughts, thus subtly leading the mighty, yet socially-inept Meredoth to advance Colin's plans, in pursuing his own. It was Colin's hints that greater traffic in Graben-town would increase the long-term supply of experimental subjects (which it has) that led the darklord to refrain from targeting merchants as "research material", facilitating increased trade and the Island's present fishing-boom. That this commercial prosperity gives Colin an excuse to visit or

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spy upon neighboring lands, seeking clues to his liberation and/or resurrection, went quite unnoticed by the unperceptive necromancer.

Although he fully realizes every hint he passes on to the darklord, in this manner, risks exposing his pretense and incurring annihilation, Colin Graben would rather be dead in truth than remain forever an undead slave. If not for his still-greater yearning to live, and reclaim the passions and free will that were stolen from him, the renegade lebendtod would have dispersed his own shredded fragments to the four winds and embraced oblivion years ago.

Ironically, although he detests Meredoth to the core, Colin would far rather see his Master trapped in a frozen, cloned body for eternity than permanently killed. He knows lebendtod whose masters die go searching for some other will to control them, and he wants his freedom from any master, not just Meredoth. That such an outcome would also prevent Neblightode's darklordship from passing to another - quite possibly him - or his native isle from vanishing into the Mists doesn't factor into his agenda: Colin knows nothing of darklords, and believes the sea-mage's power over the domain stems solely from arcane knowledge.

### *Combat*

Until his long-smothered autonomy was rekindled, Colin had fought with the witless, suicidal heedlessness of a zombie, ultimately leading to his near-destruction in 737 BC. Since that trauma and his swarm-shifter transfiguration, his survival instincts and rogue's cunning have reasserted themselves, and Colin now fights like the back-stabbing, eye-gouging, down-and-dirty bastard he is at heart. Honor and fair play mean nothing to him, nor does causing pain or humiliation to his opponents, for that matter: he fights to win, not to impress.

Only if Meredoth's direct or standing orders gainsay his strategy (e.g. if his Master is in peril, the lebendtod must immediately fight in the darklord's defense) will Colin attack recklessly, or stand his ground if he does not have a solid expectation of success.

When Meredoth does give him an order, the swarm-shifting Graben follows it exactly and to the letter, both to maintain his façade of willing servitude, and because - despite all his covert loathing and defiance - Colin is still an Obedient Dead, and his Craving of compliance still binds him. He cannot defy or ignore a direct order from his Master, no matter what the cost to himself or his plans might be.

The Graben clan-leader concentrates on flanking for sneak attacks when fighting in concert with others, or hit-and-run strikes and incitement of terror through his swarm-shifting, when battling alone. If striking an intended victim in secret, he conceals one or both hands or arms near his target's expected position, then distracts the quarry at the right moment to give his extremities their chance for surprise. Cellars and workrooms with shelving are a favorite ambush site, as they provide places for his detached hands to lurk at waist-level or higher; thus, they need not climb up their opponents' legs or be thrown into position to strike. When conducting an ambush in Graben-town, Colin takes steps to conceal his identity, by wearing a mask if he fights as an intact whole, or by removing his head and/or dropping his veil of life, if his pieces fight separately. Should he believe a target is vulnerable enough, he may let his hands carry out an attack alone, turning the signet ring of the four winds to face his palm so that it, too, will not be exposed.

Should his hands' attacks not suffice, he uses his swarm form to distract and confuse his enemies, whirling into the fray as a cyclone of guts, charred meat, and ichor, and sweeping up any body part that is damaged or in danger of destruction. Depending on whether his foes have magic weapons, Colin either uses his Tiny parts form for additional punch, or his Diminutive parts form for its invulnerability. While he rather enjoys his swarm forms, Colin is well aware that he is susceptible to area-effects and - by harsh experience - to fire when in such a state. He hesitates to adopt swarm form when facing enemies with the potential to launch area attacks, something he assumes all wizards to be capable of.

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If engaged in a prolonged battle, Colin shifts in and out of swarm form as often as he can, to restore his hit points and confuse his foes. He likes to coalesce in one of the four squares he occupies as a swarm, then explode outward to encompass a different set of four, each time. (Note that expanding or contracting one's space is not the same as moving in or out of squares; hence, he does not provoke attacks of opportunity by doing so.) If his Tiny parts swarm crawls along on the ground, any independently-fighting body parts within the swarm's space - not just his own, but any leibentod's extremity, or even other "body part" monsters (e.g. crawling claws) - receive all the benefits of cover, as picking out specific bits to strike is not easy. Attackers who just try to hit "everything" automatically strike at Colin's swarm form, not specific autonomous pieces that might be hiding in the gruesome crowd.

Colin may use a free action to shed one of his hands before reverting to swarm form. If he opts to try this in the heat of combat, an opposed Sleight of Hand check allows him to do so without his opponents noticing the appendage is left behind. If he successfully fainted earlier in that round, any opponent who fell for his Bluff receives no Spot check to notice the hand has been dropped. If unnoticed, Colin's hand then has a chance to catch opponents flat-footed; it starts out its actions at floor level, however, so is unlikely to be in a position to achieve a sneak attack unless a target is prone or otherwise within reach. A trick like this will only work once for a given opponent.

In the rare event he is called on to fight in the role of Josiah Graben, Colin feigns having only limited familiarity with combat, wielding his rapier in the manner of a sport-fencer rather than a warrior. He may forego making an attack of opportunity when the chance arises, or miss a strike on purpose, to hide "Josiah's" true level of competency. If he eludes a spell via evasion or a sneak attack with uncanny dodge, he fakes injury to allay suspicion or marvels at his "luck", after-the-fact. More often, Josiah summons a score or so of hefty cousins for backup, if threatened at home, or promises villagers

that their familial debts will vanish if they defend him, whilst in town.

Faced with destruction, Colin does not hesitate to abandon his relatives, riches, or plans. So long as Meredoth's orders do not explicitly forbid him to retreat, he saves what-little remains of his hide. Colin will use any means necessary to deter pursuers, up to and including slaying a few innocent bystanders, stealing their breath, and then kicking the corpses before he flees, leaving his foes to deal with it when his victims rise up - as ravenous ghosts - moments later.

### *Lair*

Colin's chambers in Graben Manor are among the grandest on the crowded estate, second only to venerable Ezekiel's. While he grudgingly honors his grandsire with a fancier suite, Colin's personal quarters are equipped with extra security-measures and escape routes, built into the Manor during its post-fire reconstruction. Should his home ever be invaded again, he can flee through concealed passages to the west side of the house or the tunnels beneath it; in a pinch, he can rapidly slip through the air-vents in swarm form to any room in the house.

Servants are strictly forbidden to enter the Graben leader's quarters, and with good reason: ever since he regained his former self-determination, Colin Graben has been a wannabe hedonist. Deprived for so long of the earthly satisfactions he'd once lived to indulge, he accumulates whatever tawdry or high-priced amusements he can find, in the hope that something - drugs, horse-racing, exotic liquors, spicy foods, alchemical cure-alls, racy novels, anything! - might provoke some vestige of pleasure or exhilaration in his ruined flesh. Once these playthings have disappointed him, Colin casts them aside in disgust and sulks until his obligations, or a temptation he hasn't yet tried, pry him out of his funk.

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### *Dread Possibility: Transpossession Temptation*

Search though he might, Colin's hopes of restoring his rent corpse to life are all but guaranteed to be in vain. Even restoring the truly-dead is a miraculous rarity fraught with risks, in Ravenloft, and without the inborn resiliency inherent to living creatures, such mighty magics as *resurrection* would merely cast him into some other undead form ... most likely, one which cannot even pass for human. Were he but guaranteed to return as a vampire (and free of Meredoth's control), he'd jump at the chance, but Colin has heard horrific tales of life-restoration gone awry, so the thought of becoming something even worse than what he is now - possibly even something as repellant as Ichabod - makes divine magic a gamble he won't dare to take, unless faced with no alternative save a return to the darklord's dissection theater.

However, a far older story has recently come back to Colin: one which holds the promise of true, breathing life. A century ago, Lydia Graben (née Wickinson) told her eldest son a tale from his great-grandfather's youth, of a terrible device that had Converted the inhabitants of her birthplace of Mordentshire into fell creatures out of legend. Large parts of Lydia's account were confused or distorted, and Colin's mother passed away some time before her kin became undead, barring him from pressing her for details. Still, the key to her swarm-shifter son's salvation may well lie embedded within this old nursery-story ... for the infamous device in question worked its evil by exchanging the minds of upright townsfolk with those of wicked night-predators, trapping the innocent in bestial or unliving shells, even as monsters walked freely in the bodies of men.

Recently, Colin's ongoing search for deliverance from his own putrid, tattered shell led him to a secret cache of documents in Egertus, which imply that an individual (identified only as "M") is on the trail of the very device Lydia Graben described. Though the papers are unclear as to who "M" is - or, indeed, whether "M's" intention is to possess this device or destroy it - their contents have convinced Colin that the device (which "M's" papers refer to as 'the Apparatus') may not be the mere legend he'd always thought it to be.

Having heard the tale of the Apparatus only three generations after the events in question, Colin actually has a fairly good idea of what the original device did; he knows that its inventor's notes are what "M" is looking for, and that the Rod of Rastinon (which "M" also seeks) would not be required, for his body-switching purposes. He also knows that Meredoth would almost certainly be up to the task of constructing such a mechanism, if properly motivated - for instance, with the promise of separating humans' "flawed" side from their "rational" side - and that Graben Island, not Todstein, is the only reasonable place for the necromancer to assemble it, as the device needs to be accessible to natural lightning-strikes, yet safe from the Rock's negation flurries.

Of course, Colin still needs to find the Alchemist's notes - hopefully before "M" does - and talk Meredoth into utilizing something as distastefully-scientific as a machine of any sort. Finding a suitable body to usurp is also an issue, and could be difficult: no mere villager will do, and most of his kin are either lebentod already, or slated to become so in the next few years. Claiming the life of a sea-merchant - even a prosperous one - is hardly the best realization of his desires, after so many decades of humiliating servitude and years of stymied defiance and frustration.

A prince-in-waiting, on the other hand, would be perfect. If Othmar Bolshnik's naval ambitions are realized (see "Plans of a Prince" Dread Possibility), and Graben Island becomes a protectorate of Nova Vaasa, the Vaasi ruler's son Ingemar might well return to Kantora after his governorship with far more experience, ruthlessness and ambition than Othmar intended...



Beneath its clutter of discarded clothes, half-done paperwork, drained wine bottles, and crumpled sheets of imported erotica, Colin's chambers are decorated in a lavish Nova Vaasan style, with nary a trace of Grabenite motifs or influences to be found. His personal wardrobe, too, contains dozens of sets of imported Vaasi finery, in addition to his everyday Grabenite wear as Colin or Josiah. Based on all he's heard of that realm since Nebligtode joined the Core - its sordid and vice-riddled underbelly, in particular - the lebentod leader has come to regard the vast nation to the west as something of a paradise-on-earth, for a hedonistic lothario like he once was, and he regularly dresses the part in private, fantasizing about leaving dreary, backwater Graben Island for the mainland once his body lives again.

## Virundus

(Darklord of the Drowning Deep)

### Male aberration

CR 27

NE Colossal aberration (aquatic)

**Init:** -2; **Senses:** blindsense 30', darkvision 120'; Listen +50, Spot +50

**Languages:** Telepathy, Xalote, Aquan, Draconic

**Outcast Rating:** 24 (8)

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**AC:** 30, touch 0, flat-footed 30 (-8 size, -2 Dex, +30 natural)

**hp** 540 (40 HD)

**Immune:** fire, acid; regeneration 10

**SR:** 25

**Saves:** Fort +27, Ref +14, Will +29

Weakness dread hunger, hand of the Old God, light-based damage

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**Speed:** 0 ft [Trapped]

**Melee:** 2 tentacles +46 (2d12+20 plus constrict); or

**Melee:** 4 slams +45 (1d20+10) and 1 slam +45 (1d20+10 plus poison spine); or

In addition to his own suite, Colin maintains a lavish (very respectable) office at Graben Manor, along with satellite offices in two of the rooming-houses his family owns in town. "Josiah" keeps a light dory moored at Graben-town's docks, for appearances' sake, though his Strondganger rarely leaves port, being too flimsy to complete the journey to Todstein. In the Hall of Flesh, his Master has assigned the clan-head a desk at which to transcribe documents and keep inventory. Colin has no actual quarters on Todstein; at night, the indifferent wizard simply tells the lebentod to stand in a corner - exactly like a serving-construct - as his maker slumbers. This, the Graben clan-leader does, without hesitation: he has no choice.

**Melee:** 1 bite +45 (5d10+10 plus swallow whole)

**Space:** 30 ft; Reach 20 ft (120 ft with tentacles)

**Base Atk:** +25; Grp +65

**Atk Options:** Blood frenzy, constrict, improved grab, improved grapple, poison



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spine (Fort DC 24, 1d6 Con/1d6 Con),  
swallow whole

**Special Actions:** abyssal taint, bioluminescence, close the borders, ink cloud, mask of the past, voice from the deep

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**Abilities:** Str 50, Dex 6, Con 28, Int 20, Wis 20, Cha 20

**SQ:** malefic visage, master of the deep

**Feats:** Alertness, Blind-fight, Cleave, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Multiattack, Improved Trip, Iron Will, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (tentacle)

**Skills:** Concentrate +25, Intimidate +50, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (nature) +14, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +14, Knowledge (religion) +14, Listen +50, Sense Motive +25, Spot +50

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**Abyssal Taint (Su):** Three times per day, Virundus may attempt to apply the Sea-claimed template (see New Monsters) to a humanoid or monstrous humanoid, simply by making a successful touch attack. A Will save at DC 25 prevents the transformation.

The nature of the victim's taint depends on his or her primary character class: fighters, barbarians, and rangers get the Reaver taint, wizards and sorcerers get the Sahuagin taint, clerics, druids and paladins acquire the Anguillian taint, and monks, rogues and bards get the Wereoctopus or Wereray taint. If the character's main class is an NPC class he or she gains the Locathah taint. For multiclass characters, or prestige and non-*PHB* classes, DMs should choose whichever taint best fits the subject's class abilities.

If this ability is used on a willing subject of at least 12 Hit Dice, the creature becomes an abyssal horror of a type determined by the Dungeon Master (aboleths, kopru, kraken, morkoths, and master sea spawn are among the possible choices, but any malignant deep-sea

creature may be selected). Only Virundus' most capable and powerful servants are extended this great 'blessing'.

If used on a subject of less than 12 HD that has sworn service to him, Virundus may select which of the five Sea-claimed taints to apply. The Deep darklord uses his power in this way only rarely, to promote or demote his minions between castes.

**Bioluminescence (Ex):** At will, Virundus can cause his flesh to luminesce, emitting light of any intensity and color up to the equivalent of a light spell.

**Blindsense (Ex):** Because of his familiarity with the currents in and around his prison, Virundus can detect anything displacing water within 30 ft of any appendage of his body. Otherwise, this power functions as normal blindsense.

**Blood Frenzy (Ex):** Virundus may (and sometimes must) enter a blood frenzy, dashing himself against the walls of his throne room and lashing out at everything that comes near. While in his frenzy he gains +20 to Strength and Constitution; each round he deals 10d10 bludgeoning damage to himself and anyone in the throne room who fails a DC 30 Reflex save, in addition to his attacks. He can only end the frenzy by beating himself unconscious, then regaining consciousness as he regenerates. While in his blood frenzy, he loses control of all creatures dominated by his Master of the Deep ability.

The blood frenzy is triggered if Virundus chooses to enter it voluntarily, if he takes or deals a total of 400 hp damage in combat, or if he fails either a Concentration check while using his Mask of the Past ability, or a Dread Hunger Will save.

**Call of the Abyss (Su):** Once Virundus has used his Abyssal Taint ability on a given creature, he retains a degree of telepathic control over it. Once per day, he may instruct the creature to follow one simple course of action ("Return to me", "Detain intruders" "Visit the high priest"), and the

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creature must make a Will save at DC 25 or obey immediately. More complicated instructions must be given "in person" via telepathy.

Any instruction Virundus gives in this way is treated as equivalent to a lesser geas spell. This compulsion remains in effect even if the subject is in another domain with the border closed; however, if the subject is somewhere where he cannot hear the sound of the sea beating at the shore, the only message Virundus can convey is "return to the sea".

**Closing the Borders (Ex):** Virundus has no supernatural ability to close the borders. He may, however, telepathically instruct his minions to search for anyone attempting to leave the domain.

**Constrict (Ex):** Virundus deals automatic tentacle or bite damage (his choice) with a successful grapple check, after using his Improved Grab ability successfully to seize hold of a victim.

**Dread Hunger:** Whenever any living intelligent creature comes within range of Virundus' telepathy, he must make a Will save at DC (25 + the number of rounds the creature has been present) or try to seize and devour the unfortunate. Each week he does not devour an intelligent creature, his own Intelligence drops by two points; each such creature devoured restores 2 Intelligence points, up to his natural score of 20.

**Hand of the Old God:** Weapons blessed by a cleric of the Old God of his homeland, or wielded by a faithful worshipper of the Old God, deal damage which Virundus cannot regenerate, as do spells cast by such a cleric.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, Virundus must hit with a tentacle or bite attack. He can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he wins the grapple check, he establishes a hold and can constrict or attempt to swallow his opponent whole.

**Ink Cloud (Ex):** Virundus can emit a cloud of jet-black ink 120 ft high by 120 ft wide by 120 ft long once per minute as a free action. All vision within the cloud is obscured, providing total concealment.

**Malefic Visage (Ex):** Seeing Virundus' true form for the first time demands a Horror check at base DC 34.

**Mask of the Past (Su):** With a successful DC 30 Concentration check, Virundus can regain a measure of his humanity, briefly taking on the appearance of a gigantic, but well-formed merman. This change lasts one round for each point by which he exceeds the check's target number. Failing the check sends Virundus into a blood frenzy.

While using Mask of the Past, Virundus loses all use of his tentacles, bite, and poison spine attacks, as well as his Malefic Visage. He retains his four non-venomous slam attacks and his other abilities. While in his 'giant merman' guise, his OR drops to 8.

**Master of the Deep (Su):** Virundus may telepathically control up to 160 HD of water-breathing creatures of Intelligence 1 or 2, at any location within the Drowning Deep. Assuming control of a new creature or releasing a previously-controlled creature is a move action. When he attempts to take control of any creature, it gets a Will save at a DC of 1 per 10 fathoms below the surface (a fathom is six feet, or roughly two meters). Thus, near the surface his control is tenuous, but in the deep ocean his grip is inescapable. He receives full sensory input from creatures controlled in this way and may control all their actions, compelling even suicidal actions. A controlled creature is dominated until Virundus chooses to release it.

**Poison Spine (Ex):** One of Virundus' five slam attacks is delivered with a poisoned spine like that of a lionfish. In addition to its base damage, this attack deals primary damage 1d6 Con, secondary damage 1d6 Con (Fort save DC 24 negates).

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**Regeneration (Ex):** Virundus takes lethal damage from damage-dealing spells with the Light descriptor, such as searing light, sunbeam, and sunburst. Such spells damage him as if he were undead. He also takes lethal damage as described in the Hand of the Old God special quality.

**Swallow Whole (Ex):** Virundus can try to swallow an opponent of a smaller size by making a successful grapple check. Once swallowed, the opponent takes 2d12+20 points of crushing damage plus 10 points of acid damage per round from his digestive juices. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using a light slashing or piercing weapon to deal 20 points of damage to the Deep darklord's gizzard (AC 25). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out. Virundus can swallow 2 Gargantuan creatures, 8 Huge creatures, 32 Large creatures, 128 Medium creatures, 512 Small creatures, and any number of Tiny or Fine creatures.

**Telepathy (Su):** Virundus has the power to communicate mentally with any intelligent creature (Int 3 or higher) within 120 feet in a way that the creature finds intelligible, if unpleasant. Being contacted in this manner by Virundus does not provoke a Madness save, as his actual thoughts are not being conveyed, only what he chooses to 'say'. He is too large to communicate verbally, at least under normal circumstances; his voice produces subsonic vibrations outside of the human hearing range.

**Trapped (Su):** Virundus cannot leave the throne room in which he is imprisoned. He can, however, use his two longest tentacles to reach well outside of its doors (up to 120 feet). When extended outside his chambers, Virundus's tentacles are treated as separate opponents, with statistics that differ from those above as follows :

### Tentacle

Huge aberration (aquatic)

**Outcast Rating:** 8

**Init:** 0; **Senses:** blindsense 30'

**AC:** 20, touch 8, flat-footed 20  
(-2 size, +12 natural)

**hp** 60

**Saves:** Ref +16

**Base Atk:** +25; Grp +57

**Space:** 10 ft; Reach 120 ft

**Atk Options:** improved grab, constrict

**Special Actions:** bioluminescence

**Abilities:** Dex 10

Spells which alter their target's size or dimensions (*reduce/enlarge person*, *polymorph*, *shapechange*, etc.) have no effect on Virundus and cannot be used to help him escape the throne room.

**Water Breathing (Su):** Virundus may grant or remove water breathing to any humanoid anywhere in his domain. An air-breathing creature with other provisions for breathing underwater does not lose them if Virundus grants, then removes, this ability

### History

Virundus' account of his history is largely accurate; he was born the son of the Emperor and Empress of Parathalassa, the greatest empire on the world of his origin. The emperors of Parathalassa were descended from the great sea-deity Oceanus, also known as the Old God, who was patron and protector of the Empire; Oceanus had built their great palace and promised that it was a fortress that would never fall so long as a single man remembered his name and worshipped him, and all the Empire of Parathalassa worshipped him in remembrance of his great generosity toward them. Virundus was thus born to rule a prosperous and happy country; and if this were not enough, his birth was accompanied by signs and wonders indicating that the child born would be no ordinary man; he was the bearer of a mighty destiny, and if any of the signs and portents were ambiguous, or hinted that the newborn prince might bring destruction and woe not only to his enemies

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but to his people-the astrologer and soothsayers who came to pronounce their visions over the child were wise enough not to say so in front of the proud parents.

Of course, the dark side of these prophecies were heard and considered by many, but as Virundus grew to manhood he seemed to put the lie to any dark speculation. He was widely accounted noble, generous, and brave, and if he was over-impetuous and refused to crossed or counseled in anything, such things are no great fault in a young man of great ability; after all, an emperor must be his own best counselor.

Virundus grew to be a man strong, handsome, intelligent, and charismatic. Between his native gifts and his princely station he found no-one willing to criticize him or deny him in anything, and many flatterers who were eager to rehearse his many successes and point to the signs at his birth as evidence that the divine blood which had founded his lineage had, at last, reached a new apotheosis; and Virundus did nothing to disappoint expectations. When his father died he immediately began a campaign of conquest, turning the empire's allies into client states and warring on its enemies. He led navies and armies to victory after victory, and those who opposed him were killed or enslaved, their cities looted and burned and their lands given over to those of Virundus' servants whom it pleased him to reward. Seeing that all of his endeavors prospered, Virundus became more and more convinced that he was, in truth, a god on earth, and that he was meant to take his place not alongside, but above, the god who his ancestors had worshipped.

Being himself an emperor and a god in embryo, Virundus resolved to make a sacrifice more precious than any that had ever been made before to his forefathers' god; and, knowing that the lifeblood of a human being was accounted the most valuable of all things on earth, he ordered it spilled out in "reverence" to Oceanus. In awe of his prowess, and deceived into believing him truly divine, the priests of the Old God carried out his wishes and slaughtered a hundred captive enemies,

pouring their blood into the saltwater spring which flowed from the temple of the Old God. In sorrow and anger the Old God cursed the fountain, and from that time forward it gave forth only blood, hot and stinking; but Virundus convinced the priests that this was a sign that their offering had been accepted, and encouraged them to continue, and to offer the heart's-blood of their captives not only to Oceanus, but to him as well. Within a few short years the worship of the old god had been almost entirely supplanted by worship of Virundus, and those who adhered to the Old God and the old ways kept it secret for fear of the mobs who formed, throwing down the statues of Oceanus and stoning those who refused to acknowledge Virundus as both Emperor and God.

Virundus' ambition and aspiration to godhood would not, could not be slaked by anything less; he summoned to him the prophets and wise men of a hundred lands and demanded of them that they tell him how he could take his rightful place as a divinity. Those who refused their counsel when they heard his goal were imprisoned until they spoke; those whose counsel he followed, but whose counsel proved fruitless, he drowned in the spring of blood flowing in the temple which had once been the Old God's; while those who revealed to him some new secret which augmented his power he covered in gold and jewels, and kept with him.

Still he could not achieve his goal, until one morning when he summoned his priests and wise men to him and told them that he had had a dream, in which a shadow had revealed to him the way in which he might obtain eternal life and godlike power. On the day of the summer solstice twenty-four thousand slaves and prisoners were brought forth from their prisons, and the freemen of his capital city of Xalot gathered themselves together, ten men for each slave, and awaited the sign which was to be given them; at noon of that day the twenty-four thousand were to die, and the power of their lives were to make Virundus a god.

As he stood in the throne room of his forefather's palace Virundus exulted at his coming triumph; but as the sun rose the sea

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retreated, far below the lowest neap tide, leaving the shore bare. Virundus took it to be the sea doing obeisance to him; but he was disastrously wrong.

Just as the ceremony the shadow had revealed to him was to begin, the first of the tsunamis struck Xalot. The first earthquake followed immediately thereafter. The thousand islands of Xalot were being reclaimed by the sea. But Virundus would not be so easily defeated by the god he now realized to be his enemy; even as the water swirled around his knees he finished the ceremony and called on the power which had promised him eternal life to make good their end of the bargain. As he did so the sea swallowed Xalot once and for all.

### *Current Sketch*

Once human, the darklord of the Drowning Deep is now a 100 foot long nightmare of flesh. Generally shaped like a merman, Virundus' body is covered in tentacles, scales, mouths, eyes, suckers, fins, claws, shells, and other features of aquatic lifeforms, constantly growing, shifting, and being reabsorbed. Thousands of symbiotic lifeforms grow upon Virundus' flesh - shellfish, barnacles, tubeworms, corals, sponges, anemones, and more. Virundus' head sports a gaping maw combining the features of a shark and a toothy deep-sea fish. He is so large that he cannot fully straighten himself within the confines of his throne-room prison.

First and foremost, Virundus is a megalomaniac; he truly believes that godhood is his destiny, and that other beings exist primarily as tools for his use in achieving that end. The ironic humor of the Dark Powers has twisted that goal by appearing to grant it; Virundus' subjects worship him as a deity and claim to do miracles in his name, their clerical power granted by the Dark Powers themselves. Virundus, totally unwilling to reveal his fundamental helplessness, pretends to be the god his slaves believe him to be, but the masquerade is bitter to him; his deformity, imprisonment and isolation combine to remind him in every moment of his essential

weakness, and nothing could be so galling-or frightening-to a man accustomed to absolute power over all he saw. He knows well he had more power as a mortal man than he has now as a "god", and he alternates between wrathful determination to break his prison and achieve godhood and the debilitating fear that this is all there is-that he has actually become a god, and hates it.

Virundus has made many plans (some self-contradictory) to end his curse. One of the most important is his ongoing attempt to track down and convert or kill any worshipper of the Old God who remains; he remembers full well the prophecy that his forefather's palace could not fall while a single worshipper remained faithful to the Old God, and he hopes that by ending the worship of the Old God he will at last be free from his prison-house. In addition, he is making efforts to spread worship of himself throughout the Core. Although this has only been effective in a few small villages on Graben Island and the Darkonian coast up to the present, he is persistent; after all, he has nothing but time. He also seeks continually for ways to raise Shay-lot from the ocean floor, thereby reversing the curse of the Old God, or, failing that, to drag all of the surface world below the waves-into his territory. He works mostly through wereray and wereoctopus spies who trade along the coasts and islands of the Nocturnal Sea, getting information and such of man's wares as are useful beneath the waves, but he also sends the occasional raiding party of reavers and sahuagin against surface villages, to teach them fear of the sea.

He is also conducting a long-term guerilla war against those few creatures (most notably whales, the aquatic elves of the Darkonese coast, and the triton of the Vechor coast) which resist his rule, although he pursues the struggle in a rather cursory fashion-more out of habit and for the training of his troops than for any pressing strategic reason.

Virundus' principle attacks are with his long, hooked tentacles, with which he can reach well beyond the limits of his palace prison; if anyone is foolish enough as to enter his presence to attack him there, he can

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also attack with a massive bite or up to five extra attacks per round, extruding arms, tentacles, stingers, toothy maws, and other natural weapons from whichever part of his body his enemies are near as needed (all of these attacks are listed as slam attacks, above). Because of the tentacles' great length it is actually possible to "encounter"

them without meeting with Virundus face to face; statistics for an isolated tentacle are also given. Any serious combat with Virundus will almost certainly end with him going into a blood frenzy; the chances of anyone within reach of his attacks surviving such a frenzy are not high.

### *Geography of the Deep*

The great abyssal plain is home to two main groups of intelligent humanoids not in thrall to Virundus, a group of aquatic elves living in the shallows along the Darkonese coast and a group of tritons living in the shallow, warm water in the "plain" between Liffe and Vechor. Because they live in shallow water, Virundus finds it very difficult to control his deep-sea minions well enough to spy on them; he sends patrols into their territory regularly, but has not yet found it worth his while to attempt to conquer them. The elves of Nevuchar Springs are aware of their aquatic neighbors and carry on some trade with them, but are careful not to reveal their presence to outsiders. The principal settlement of the aquatic elves lies just south of the mouth of the Vuchar River, mirroring the placement of Nevuchar Springs.

The triton, having no air-breathing allies, are in a more precarious position; they have no permanent settlements, ranging for the most part across the shallow water between Liffe and Vechor. They rely on their mobility to keep them out of the reach of Virundus' patrols.

Hadalpelagos (the four rift valleys, plus the central deep of Shay-lot) consists mostly of normal deep-sea terrain, but is dotted with the remnants of the great cities of Parathalassa. A careful observer can see the remains of roads and buildings here and there on the ocean floor; some of the most intact buildings have been restored enough to be usable by Virundus' slaves. (There are enough deep-sea menaces not under Virundus' control to make the deep a hazardous place, even for them, and they have fortified some buildings to make them secure against predators.) As one goes down these valleys toward the center of Hadalpelagos these ruins become more frequent, until one reaches Shay-lot proper, a more-or-less level depression of roughly twenty square miles covered with ruins.

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### *In the Drowned City*

Many of these ruins were levelled in the tsunamis and earthquakes that ended Parathalassa and they can hardly be recognized as being of human construction, but large parts of the Drowned City are surprisingly well-preserved. The architecture is beautiful but often rather eerie; oceanic motifs (sea creatures, waves, storms, seabirds and the like) are ubiquitous, and there is a strong architectural emphasis on curved lines rather than angles and corners.

Much of Shay-lot is simply empty, or occupied only by deep-sea animals; the city was once home to hundreds of thousands of humans, but is now populated only by roughly ten thousand intelligent creatures. The anguillian clerics, or hieroi ("holy ones"), of the highest caste live in and around the Great Temple of the God Below, a huge domed building near the center of the city. (Because of the stream of blood which flows continually from beneath the central altar of the temple the sahuagin cannot enter here without being driven into frenzy, and those of lower castes are not considered pure enough to enter the temple itself, although all the denizens of Shay-lot may come to the outer courtyard of the temple to worship the God Below.)

Behind the temple lies what remains of the great palace of the Emperors of Parathalassa. In the earthquakes that sunk Parathalassa forever a rift was opened beneath the palace, and the throne room now lies at the bottom of the rift, its roof below the level of the surrounding seafloor. Virundus' servants have cleared passageways from the throne room to the remainder of the palace, and with his great tentacles Virundus can reach into rooms in those upper levels of the palace. This rift is referred to as the Most Low Place by the priests of the God Below, and only those most (or least) fortunate ever enter there for an interview with the "god". The priests of the God Below devote themselves, first and foremost, to the rites of worship, but also are responsible for communicating the wishes of the God Below to the rest of the denizens of Shay-lot.

The House of Glass was an observatory used by the wise men of Parathalassa in ages past to predict the future from the motion of the fixed stars and planets. The night sky no longer reveals any truth to the sahuagin-wizards (hydromagi, "water-wizards") who serve Virundus, but they still make their homes here, and keep their libraries of learning inscribed in tablets of stone and plates of glass or gold. (It was here that Paul Dirac was held, in a cell set aside for meditation in better days. Alone, unarmed, and stripped of his spellbook and magical items, his captors did not even bother to set a guard on him, although they looked in on him fairly frequently. Prisoners considered to be a great flight risk would be held in the House of Sand under continual watch, or even in the Great Temple.) When the peripateioi, or "wanderers", return to report to Virundus they also make their home here or near here; despite the difference in physical appearance the hydromagi and peripateioi are considered to be equivalent to each other in caste.

The House of Sand is the former gladiatorial arena of Shay-lot; because it remained largely intact and had dormitories and armories for the gladiators, it has been converted into a barracks for Virundus' reaver servants, known as the thorakoi, or "armored ones". The Strategos, general of Virundus' troops, makes his home here, as do the majority of those reavers present in Shay-lot at any given time. It lies a little more than a mile southeast of the Great Temple, in a relatively flat and well-preserved part of the city. Many of the city's locathah (ichthymorphoi, "fish-formed ones") live near here, because it is one of the safer and more densely populated parts of Shay-lot and because, as low-caste and impure, they are not welcome nearer the temple except for worship on certain specific occasions. The reavers patrol the city regularly in groups of four, on the lookout for the deep-sea predators which enter the city regularly; if they see any which they cannot defeat themselves they raise the alarm. More interesting visitors may be captured with nets and taken to be interviewed by the sahuagin wizards.

The Sea-Garden, where the locathah under-caste tend sponges, polyps, and fish for the feeding of the city's inhabitants, occupy a miles-long bench to the east of the House of Sand where the earth shifted, leaving the eastern part of the city roughly a hundred feet higher than the western part. The slope created by this shift quickly became home to numerous sponges and similar



creatures feeding on organic detritus "raining" from higher in the ocean, which provide the basis for feeding most of Shay-lot's inhabitants. Unfortunately, the abundance of food also draws in numerous predators, and the area is heavily patrolled by reaver guards, supported by whichever sahuagin wizards and anguillian priests are out of favor with their superiors at the moment. (Serving with the lower-caste reavers and locathah is considered deeply shameful and is avoided by anyone of a higher caste who can arrange to do so.)

Generally, a member of a lower caste must never touch a member of a higher caste (this is relaxed somewhat for the wizards and priests, but strictly enforced at all other levels), nor speak to a member of a higher caste unless spoken to first. A member of a higher caste who touches a member of a lower caste must make ritual purifications afterward; the length and rigor of this purification depends on the degree of difference in caste. (After beating a locathah sponge-farmer for insolence, a reaver foot soldier would probably mutter a few prayers and get back to business, but an anguillian priest doing the same would have spend a week purifying itself after doing something so demeaning.) Any order from a member of a higher caste must be obeyed immediately and without question, although giving overtly self-serving or unnecessary orders will often result in "unfortunate misinterpretations", especially when the sahuagin-wizards are those being commanded. A member of a lower caste must not enter a room in which a member of a higher caste is present until invited; no-one may handle the weapons or personal items of someone above (or below!) themselves in caste without defiling either the item (in the first case) or themselves (in the second). This caste system makes the Hadalpelagic social system extremely rigid and slow to adapt, but actually somewhat dissipates the cruelty of the upper classes toward the lower, as too much interaction or interest in the activities of those of lower caste is demeaning to those of high caste.

Virundus' closest servants are changed by their ruler to abyssal horrors (kraken, morkoths, aboleths, and so forth), and are not considered to have any caste in the normal sense; having been touched directly by the power of the God Below, they are considered beyond mere considerations of caste and may interact with those of any other caste however they see fit.



*Appendix IV*

*Graben Legacy*

## Appendix IV Graben Legacy

*"Even at our birth, death does but stand aside a little. And every day he looks towards us and muses somewhat to himself whether that day or the next he will draw nigh."*

– Robert Bolt, *Sir Thomas More*, Act II

When the darklord Meredoth committed mass murder at Graben Manor in 672, the living bloodline of the once-prolific Graben clan was *almost*, but not quite, wiped out. Of an extended family of more than ninety souls, only a handful of infants – too young to dine upon the poisoned feast or be of any use to the necromancer – escaped death and reanimation as *lebensdod*. In the wake of their transformations, the undead Grabens continued to raise these surviving children, keeping them ignorant of the malign change that had overtaken their parents. Thus, the Grabens preserved their lineage's posterity, while safeguarding their evil Master's future supply of undead servants.

To date, a full five generations of the Graben household have become *lebensdod* – all forcibly converted by their undead kin, after fulfilling their procreative duties to the clan – and the latest cohort of new parents have unknowingly been slated for imminent conversion, now that an adequate number of seventh-generation heirs have been birthed. The few living Grabens who have stumbled upon their elders' terrible secret have been transformed also, and ahead of schedule, so even young, childless members of the family are not always as they seem. In particular, a number of "long-lost cousins" have recently begun attaching themselves to the Grabens' estate: in truth, children who *did* attend that fatal banquet, and are only now reaching a state of physical maturity, having concealed their unnaturally-slow aging for decades.

Although never "nobles" in the technical sense, the Grabens' stature as the founding family of the Island grants them much the same air of prestige and entitlement as other lands' hereditary aristocrats. Their staunch refusal to integrate fully into the Grabenites' culture, even before Meredoth transformed them, has always set the reclusive clan apart from other Islanders. Symbolic of their self-imposed distancing from the "late-comers"

of the villages, the undead Grabens prefer to arrange their (living) children's marriages to foreigners or even outlanders, wedding other Grabenites only if no presentable alternative is forthcoming. Likewise, their snobbish insistence that anyone – male or female – who marries into their family *must* adopt the clan's surname estranges them further from the settlers, amongst whom neither gender forfeits his or her patronymic at marriage.

Notoriously reticent about their clan's early history, the Grabens' strict silence on this issue has spawned rumors of scandal, banishment, or even curses and fiendish pacts. Once idle fancies and slander have been filtered from the morass of speculation, a persistent tale emerges: that the original sponsor of Graben Manor's construction, revered clan forefather Efraim Graben, was never truly a 'Graben' at all, but a master jewelry-forger and thief, fleeing prosecution in his corrupt and imperialistic homeland. By this account, "Graben" had merely been the original name of the island (= "trench") rendered in Efraim's birth-tongue: a name he adopted for his alias, after investing his ill-gotten gains in the Manor. In Graben-town's early days, this rumor would have been met with furious denunciation by the affronted clan, but umbrage over this slur to their ancestor's honor has abated with time. (Less-credible tales that Efraim's wife was, in fact, one of the enigmatic *zwerge* of the Zaubereiwald, still provoke violent outrage in the Grabens, living or otherwise.)

True or not, the Graben family's strong mercantile affinity for jewelry, primarily silverwork and gems, has held true from the earliest days of their residency on the Island. The family is said to operate a small, yet lucrative silver mine on their estate – no non-Graben knows precisely where – and to possess an astonishing heirloom-trove of exotic gemstones, including minerals found nowhere in nature. More prosaically, they hold proprietary claim on nearly all Graben Island's real estate, being legally entitled to pre-empt most natives' attempts to sell land or pass it on to their children. The Grabens are also the closest thing to "investment bankers" available to Graben-town's rising entrepreneurs, so can potentially foreclose

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on any number of businesses founded with their start-up capital, should their loans' recipients offer any offense. That they do *not* take such action is lauded in public, but ensured with many discreet "expressions of gratitude" – i.e. bribes – by the prudent.

### Fitting In

Due to generations of intermarriage with non-Grabenes, the Grabens are much less homogenous in appearance than other Island folk. Palest hues of skin, hair and eyes still predominate in the family, but Lamordian sea-green or Mordentish gray eyes crop up on occasion, as do brunette or red highlights in Grabens' pale-blond hair. In stature, also, many Grabens stand apart, being a bit short and stocky by local standards, albeit not in comparison to mainlanders. Grabens' hair tends to go gray rather early, then remain with them till death (or long after, in undead Grabens). As with certain other renowned Core families, even non-lebentod Grabens are famously long-lived. Unlike the Boritsis or Hiregaards, Grabens' longevity doesn't entail extended youthfulness, but merely a prolonged old age, often culminating in years of invalidism.

Alloof and tight-knit, the insular Grabens assiduously maintained their distance from the bucolic settlers for over a century, and they are still getting used to the proximity of other upper-class households in neighboring domains. Living or otherwise, Grabens have been without any social peers for so long that the appearance of such foreign gentry makes most a bit overcautious: wary of the motives – or secrets – which *other* powerful lineages may be concealing. The extreme ages of all the influential (lebentod) family members mean that the Grabens' collective habits and attitudes are slow to change; barring outside impetus, it will likely take decades before most of them adjust to their realm's emergence in the Core. Until then, leerness of the unfamiliar keeps them close to home, shielded from foreign strangeness by their well-known distaste for trespassers and the safety of their own numbers.

For living members of Graben Island's premier household, the pressure to remain

within the family circle is especially strong. Lebentod Grabens are compelled by their condition to stay wherever their Master's orders might dictate; however, they worry that letting their still-breathing relatives drift too far from the nest could tempt the clan's living heirs into abandoning their familial responsibilities. Younger Grabens' lives are tightly monitored by their undead elders, who prohibit them from socializing with the ordinary townsfolk or leaving the estate unchaperoned. Many, in fact, are so sheltered from the world's realities as to constitute a potential danger to themselves, ignorant as they are of risk. Strong-willed Graben heirs might rebel against this stifling attention, dodging their babysitters' scrutiny to seek interludes of merriment or romance among the non-gentry.

Should Graben youths fail to take the wisest route, and desert the clan – a tricky proposition, as the lebentod are loath to let their kin escape from Meredoth's service – then the whole of their futures will be meticulously scripted by their elders: an arranged marriage, children (preferably five or more; large broods are a family tradition), and eventual death and undeath. Potential spouses of Grabens are either drawn in by the lure of the family's great riches – while they hide the fact, the undead elders *prefer* "gold-diggers" for in-laws, as unscrupulous fortune-hunters often have skills useful in the clan's darker doings – or coerced into marriage by threat of foreclosure, blackmail, false criminal charges, etc. Living Grabens and their mates are transformed at the same time, to ensure neither has the opportunity to notice a change in the other's temperament. By grim custom, the actual conversion of new lebentod is regarded as a "parental responsibility" by the clan's undead, best carried out by the Graben-born parent of the heir to be animated. Living "recruits" are drugged unconscious and suffocated, mouth-to-mouth, to guarantee a successful spawn-creation and to minimize unsightly wounds.

For rare, lucky Grabens who slip their familial bonds in time, emerging into the world at large can be a revolutionary event. Adjusting to life without constant direction and supervision from their elders can be

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liberating for some, disorienting and even frightening to others. One Graben may take to independence whole-heartedly, savoring a life not circumscribed by boundaries and traditions; another may become intimidated by the dark, unforgiving world beyond the family's estate, and naively flee home to its presumed "security". Should a Graben with a high Sense Motive score experience the close company of non-Grabens for long, the character may develop a nagging suspicion that there's *something* amiss – perhaps in non-Grabens, perhaps in the character's own family – on comparing strangers' behavior to that of Graben Manor's residents.

Alternately, a Graben player character may not have grown up on the clan's estate at all, in which case the PC's formative years will have surely been quite different. Aside from possible illegitimate ancestry – a rarity in this bloodline, given how tightly its living heirs' activities are overseen – a PC could also be a descendant of Araby Graben, who left Graben Island to run off with a sea captain in 661 BC. Her fate, and even her nautical paramour's name, are a mystery to the rest of the family. As Araby renounced her heritage when she left, PCs descended from her will likely know little or nothing of their ancestress's roots on Graben Island ... let alone, of the chilling alterations which her kin have undergone since she left.

### *Claiming Membership*

As Graben lebendtod are wholly subject to a darklord's control, they are unsuitable as PCs, even in those campaigns where an undead player character might otherwise be permitted. Likewise, even if Graben elders should allow a lapsed or long-lost relation to officially join the family, it is only so that they can add the newly-recognized scion to the ranks of Meredoth's unliving minions. Thus, if an unwitting PC seeks to establish formal membership in the Graben clan, it is the DM's job to conduct a mystery-scenario around this endeavor, laying subtle, ominous clues in the character's path: clues, which will slowly reveal the awful truth, hopefully before it's too late.

Illegitimate descendants of the Grabens (including the disowned Araby) are only reluctantly acknowledged as such by the highly-conservative clan. This fact actually grants such characters a degree of protection from conversion – the lebendtod prefer not to have such "embarrassments" remain part of the family for centuries, so do not attempt to convert them without a good reason – but it also earns them scorn and disrespect from "proper" Grabens. Such illicit relatives will be grudgingly tolerated, but freely exploited by the family, especially if the relative has class abilities and/or skills unknown to the undead clan-members.

A peripheral relation could easily spend years serving the clan's agenda, performing donkey-work related to its public business dealings, while remaining blissfully ignorant of the dark side to his or her "long-lost cousins". True acceptance, conversely, will be slow in coming, strenuous to earn, and ultimately rewarded only by an attempt to convert the would-be Graben into one of the undead. Should such distant relatives grow prematurely suspicious, the aspiring Graben will be converted into a lebendtod to secure his or her loyalty ... or (if deemed useless) simply murdered outright, with the remains delivered to Todstein: fresh components for Meredoth's other ghastly creations.

To date, no non-human Graben has ever been born on the Island, not even a caliban. If a Graben who was born elsewhere is other than human, even in part, the hidebound clan refuses to have anything to do with the "embarrassment" to their bloodline, even as raw materials for their Master's work.

### *Graben Family Traits*

**+2 Constitution, -2 Wisdom:** Living Grabens are a robust lot, hardened by the bleak conditions of their native Island, but their secluded upbringing leaves them ill-prepared to cope with or recognize dangers in the outside world. A PC Graben who was not raised on Graben Island will lack this family trait (both modifiers).

**Go Not Gently:** Grabens' lifespan is longer than is usual for their race. A human

## Appendix IV Graben Legacy

Graben adds 7d10 to 70 years to determine maximum age, as would a possible half-Vistani descendent of Grabens. A half-elf Graben (should such a person exist) has a lifespan of 125 + 5d20 years, and a hypothetical Graben caliban's life lasts 60 + 3d12 years. Age-brackets and starting ages remain unchanged, and aging effects apply normally to living Grabens.

**Keen Eye For Quality:** Fine jewelry has been a mainstay of the Grabens' fortunes from their beginnings, and almost a century of grave-robbing for Meredoth has further honed their eye for evaluating and trading in such treasures. A Graben has a +3 bonus on Appraise checks to determine the worth of jewelry or gemstones, and on their Diplomacy checks to haggle over the price of such wares (see *Complete Adventurer* for haggling rules).

**Bonus Language:** Young Grabens on the Island are all taught the Draconic tongue by their elders: ostensibly as a part of a "classical education"; in truth to facilitate their postmortem service to Meredoth (who hates speaking the "barbarian" languages of Ravenloft). This is a free bonus language that does not require any skill ranks. A Graben PC who grew up away from the Island will lack this bonus, but may know Grabenite as a bonus language, should their Graben parent have passed on his or her ancestral tongue.

**High-Grade Materials:** Though few Grabens (and no live ones) are aware of this, a deceased Graben's remains are unusually receptive to reanimating magics, which makes the clan's dead members ideal "raw materials" for the production of both Obedient Dead and the grislier varieties of construct. A Graben cadaver animated as any type of skeleton or zombie always receives maximum hp for its first hit die, and constructs built out of the earthly remains of Grabens receive one HD at maximum, for each such corpse used in the construct's assembly.

For undead who retain their class abilities, such as Slain skeletons or lebendtod, an Obedient Dead Graben always receives

maximum hit points for the first hit die, or for its first two HD if the base creature is "elite" and already entitled to such a benefit. If the template normally imposes ability penalties on the base creature, one such penalty (DM's choice) becomes 2 points less severe; for example, the various lebendtod Grabens suffer either a -2 Int or -2 Dex modifier, but not both.

**Deathly Heritage:** With their tissues' high affinity for necromantic energy, the Will DC for intelligent undead to recognize a Graben with the Cold One feat as living is 16, not 13. A Graben does not need to know the *animate dead* spell to select the Deathly Pallor feat, or to lose a level to an energy-draining attack before selecting the Cold One feat.

If subjected to effects that would directly transform them into Obedient Dead (such as the *zombify* attack of a zombie lord) or constructs (such as a living wall's power to absorb victims), living Grabens suffer a -2 penalty on any saves made to resist succumbing. This does not apply to indirect effects such as *create spawn*, in which the Graben must actually be killed before the reanimation can commence.

### Family Feats

While a Graben character is unlikely to associate with his or her family for long, without falling prey to it, members of this clan are particularly drawn to the following feats, whether or not their family ties are close:

Agile, Alertness, Back To The Wall<sup>RLPHB</sup>, Cold One<sup>RLPHB</sup>, Deathly Pallor<sup>CoD</sup>, Deft Hands, Diehard, Diligent, Dirge Of Woe<sup>CoD</sup>, Eschew Materials, Improved Trip, Investigator, Jaded<sup>RLPHB</sup>, Machiavellian<sup>CoD</sup>, Mimicry<sup>CoD</sup>, Nimble Fingers, Persuasive, Quick Draw, Scent Of The Grave<sup>VRA</sup>, Silent Spell, Skeletal Dread Companion<sup>CoD</sup>, Stealthy, Still Spell, Threatening Presence<sup>LoTB</sup>, Unseen<sup>VRA</sup>, Unwholesome Ichor<sup>CoD</sup>, Weapon Finesse.

## Appendix IV Graben Legacy

Because so few of their adult number are actually *alive*, Grabens have developed feats suited to lebenttod rather than mortal clan members. The following feats are exclusive to the Graben family, or perhaps some of Meredoth's other unliving servants:

### *Borrowed Parts*

[monstrous]

**Prerequisite:** Dex 15, lebenttod, Interchangeable Parts

The undead Graben is able to join body parts from other lebenttod to its own body in their normal anatomical positions. The "donor" lebenttod must willingly contribute the loaned body part, but it need not have this feat to do so. The recipient lebenttod may direct the borrowed part as if it were its own, or may forfeit control to the donor if the two lebenttod are no more than one mile from one another and in the same domain. If permitted to direct the loaned body part, the donor senses the part's surroundings and controls its movements, just as if the donor were in range to autonomously direct that appendage (see revised lebenttod template). The recipient of a borrowed head perceives whatever the head's eyes and ears perceive, whether or not the head's speech and facial expressions are under its own control. If a loaned part is detached from its borrower, then the part becomes inert until it can be re-attached to its *true* owner: re-connecting it to the recipient does not work.

While joined to the recipient, the part's ability scores become those of the borrower, but its skill ranks, weapon proficiencies, and Run (legs only) or Focus (Skill, Spell, or Weapon) feats remain those of whichever lebenttod directs its actions. Grabens who take this feat often borrow the hands of relatives who are their superiors at specific talents – anything from swordsmanship to picking pockets to playing the piano – so they can apply the skills in settings where the rightful owner of the hands would not be admitted or welcomed. Alternatively, a sly-tongued Graben's head could be lent to an ineloquent relation who has this feat, to talk the borrower's body past social impediments it cannot circumvent on its own.

Only skills, weapon proficiencies, and feats listed above may be shared in this way. Attacks, spellcasting, armor proficiencies, or class abilities are not acquired along with borrowed body parts. Donors and recipients must be of the same size category.

### *Interchangeable Parts*

[monstrous]

**Prerequisite:** Dex 13, lebenttod

The undead Graben is able to re-attach its appendages – head, arms, legs, hands and feet – at any location where another of its parts has been removed, not just their usual anatomical positions. Parts retain their full mobility and normal function when attached in abnormal positions, provided their locale is not inappropriate to the task (e.g. a leg joined to a neck can't reach the ground).

Rearrangement of parts is primarily of use as an intimidation-tactic, as foes who are inured to the sight of Grabens' limbs falling off may still be appalled at the sight of these same limbs joined to bodies in unnatural ways. In addition, lebenttod which have the Interchangeable Parts feat may extend their Reach by building end-to-end chains out of their limbs. Each limb after the first that is added to the chain increases Reach by 5 feet, to a maximum of +15 Reach (two legs and two arms). A lebenttod that attaches its head to its wrist may peer around corners without forfeiting either the protection of total cover over its torso (successful attacks on the peeking head reduce only its head's hp), or the superior Dexterity of its intact body (so the head's usual Dex penalty when detached does not apply). A lebenttod that inverts and exchanges its legs leaves tracks that point backward, and a DC 25 Survival check is needed to discern this discrepancy and realize its true direction of travel.

**Normal:** Lebenttod's parts must be re-attached in their natural anatomical positions and orientations.

### *Skeleton In The Closet*

[monstrous]

**Prerequisite:** Must be an Obedient Dead with an Intelligence score, created by a 15<sup>th</sup>+ level spellcaster

## Appendix IV Graben Legacy

The undead Graben does not “leak” traces of necromantic magic, so no lingering aura can be discerned by *detect magic* from its body or from locations where it has been (“Detecting Undead Presence”, *VRGttWD*). If subjected to *detect undead* or equivalent effects, the Graben receives a +5 bonus on any saving throw it makes to conceal its undead nature from that spell or effect.

**Special:** This feat can only be selected with assistance from a 15<sup>th</sup>+ level spellcaster who knows *animate dead*. This caster may be itself.

### Warm One

[monstrous]

**Prerequisite:** Cha 13, lebentod, Skeleton In The Closet

The undead Graben’s *veil of life* ability is exceptionally persistent. When damaged by a spell or magical effect, the Graben may make a Concentration check (DC 10 + hp of damage dealt) to maintain its disguise as a living being. The Graben’s *veil* also hides all outward signs of injury from contact with holy water or quintessence, although hit points are still lost.

### Family Classes

Its landscape and climate may be harsh, but Graben Island is a fairly serene locale by the Land of Mists’ fearsome standards, and adventurers are not liked by most residents. The savage attack against their estate by outlanders in 737 has given even the living Grabens particular grounds to detest such “brigands”; their lebentod elders, of course, have ample cause to be wary of prying dogooders.

The majority of the living Grabens are either commoners (those so sheltered they scarcely leave the house) or aristocrats, but Grabens who fixate on a particular interest or hobby may opt to acquire levels in the expert, fighter, bard or ranger classes, in that order of frequency. The lebentod Grabens outright forbid their heirs from pursuing any sort of religious calling or wizardry, heading off the risk that such knowledge might lead them too close to the truth. A few living

Grabens take after their thieving ancestor, Efraim, acquiring rogue levels without their elders’ knowledge. Any Grabens youths who exhibit sorcerous talent are *immediately* converted into lebentod, even at an early age, to ensure their emergent abilities won’t inadvertently disrupt their lebentod elders’ *veils of life*. A Graben who successfully keeps such power hidden, be it out of shame or secretiveness, might avoid such a fate long enough to gain sorcerer levels.

While Obedient Dead do not normally advance in levels, lebentod are sufficiently active and intelligent to do so, particularly if service to their creators provides frequent challenges for them to overcome. Those Graben lebentod whose responsibilities are sufficiently demanding to earn experience usually advance in the rogue, fighter, bard, expert or warrior classes. A few lebentod rangers also gain levels, and are sometimes assigned to patrols alongside the Niflhounds. Graben sorcerers are sent to Todstein after conversion, never to be heard from again by their Island kin. Meredoth can’t stomach teaching and never takes apprentices: only if a Graben’s talent shows exceptional promise would he even consider having one of his Muspelhounds or spies take time out to teach an undead Graben wizardry.

Whatever their initial class, a breathing Graben who remains in contact with the clan is unlikely to earn enough levels to qualify for *any* prestige class, before conversion. A Graben who leaves home in time could wind up pursuing virtually any class or prestige class, thereafter. Lebentod Grabens most often pursue the assassin, court poisoner<sup>Ga4</sup>, crypt raider<sup>VRA</sup>, deceiver<sup>LotB</sup>, dirgist<sup>VRA</sup>, duelist, propagandist<sup>CoD</sup>, or recruiter<sup>LotB</sup> prestige classes, whichever is dictated by their public and covert duties to family and Master.



*Appendix IV Graben Legacy*

*Appendix V*

*Nocturnal Sea Timeline*

## *Appendix V Nocturnal Sea Timeline*

This timeline summarizes key dates in the history of the Nocturnal Sea and those domains which are now part of it.

Key sources for its content include *Domains of Dread*, *Darklords*, and *JWM's Timeline*. All dates, whether of genuine or false history, follow the Barovian calendar.

### *Table 1: Timeline of the Nocturnal Sea*

<b>Mid-300s</b> <b>(Nebligtode, false history)</b>	Svidi Full-Sails of the Anatal leads his tribe to colonize Graben Island, displacing the resident monastic community at the Black Chapel. The nuckalavee is conjured by the expelled clergy, then geas-bound and sent into hibernation by the Anatal. To placate malign powers such as it, the Anatal begin sacrificing condemned humans, creating the Strangled.
<b>Mid-400s</b> <b>(Nebligtode, false history)</b>	Svidi's colony is wiped out by a plague, leaving behind ruins and the Island's ancient runestones. The nuckalavee remains quiescent.
<b>Mid-500s</b> <b>(Isle of Ravens, questionable)</b>	The first report of an encounter between shipwrecked sailors of Darkon and a "fell sorceress surrounded by ravens" date to this time period. Unfortunately, all such references must be false history, as Darkon did not yet exist ... but is it false history for Darkon, meaning the Lady was already present in the Mists, or false history of the Isle of Ravens, belatedly grafted into Darkon's past? Even more puzzling, this encounter refers back to previous legendary or folkloric encounters of a similar nature: stories allegedly dating back centuries. Similar reports are occasionally given throughout the next two centuries.
<b>580</b> <b>(Nebligtode, false history)</b>	Graben Manor is built on Svidi's former island by a wealthy jewel-thief from the south.
<b>Pre-600 BC (Vechor)</b>	Time of Good Dreams
<b>600 BC (Vechor)</b>	<b>First Time of the Outlanders:</b> Vechor enters the mists. Barovian and Darkonian references put the first appearance of Vechor as an island in the Mists at about this time.
<b>610? (Vechor)</b>	<b>War of the Mud-Men:</b> The Vechorites claim to have struggled against humanoids made of river clay for a period of several years soon after the First Time of the Outlanders.
<b>620-650? (Vechor)</b>	<b>The Red-Sky Years:</b> For decades Vechor's sky was usually red, with a green sun.
<b>610</b> <b>(Nebligtode, false history)</b>	The Graben family moves onto the Island full-time, adopting the island's name for their own.

## Appendix V Nocturnal Sea Timeline

Table 1: Timeline of the Nocturnal Sea

630 (Nebligtode, false history)	Ancestors of the Grabenite villagers arrive on Graben Island, as refugees fleeing the Óvinur Ódn (= "enemy storm") besetting the "North Wild" (March). Graben-town is founded (August). Settlers are initially led by clerics, with assemblies filling an advisory role.
630 (Île de la Tempête)	Monette is born on a foreign material plane, the son of a ship builder.
633 (Nebligtode)	Meredoth attains the status of supreme master and is granted a barony in the "North Wild" by the Empire, including an isolated isle he names "Todstein".
635, New Year's Day (Nebligtode)	Meredoth murders his own vassals en masse in order to reanimate them as undead, becoming the darklord of Nebligtode. Todstein and Graben Island emerge from the Mists as an Island of Terror.
635 (Nebligtode)	Genuine Graben Island history begins. The 336-day Anatal calendar loses step with the seasons. The All-Father's Muting strips the <i>godi</i> of both clerical and political powers, leaving assemblies in charge of Grabenite government. The nuckalavee awakens, but finds itself confined to the Aassumpf and Senkenwiese.
640 (Nebligtode)	Lars Viggson and the Óndskapur discover Todstein, visiting it again each year until 644, when the vessel fails to return to Graben Island.
643 (Nebligtode)	Curious about Viggson's repeated trespassing, Meredoth investigates Graben Island and its natives. Early reports of "Aegir's Jackdaw" circulate in response to the wizard's broom-mounted flights over the Island.
647 (Nebligtode)	First reports of Meerdorf on Knammen Isle.
651 (Nebligtode)	Kirchenheim is settled permanently after one previous failed attempt.
654 (Île de la Tempête)	Capitaine Monette earns his title, and ruthlessly leads the <i>Ouragan</i> to commercial success.
657 (Nebligtode)	The Yeomanry is organized after a series of reaver attacks on Graben Island.
658 (Nebligtode)	First documented trade between Graben Island and vessels from the Sea of Sorrows. The <b>Call of the Claw</b> Mistway connects Nebligtode to the Core at this time.
659 (Nebligtode)	Seeheim is founded as a bolt-hole, also in response to the reaver attacks.

## Appendix V Nocturnal Sea Timeline

Table 1: Timeline of the Nocturnal Sea

660? (Vechor)	<b>Visit of the Yellowbirds:</b> The Yellowbirds were supposedly small yellow birds who spoke with human voices; they visited Vechor for "a year and a day," prophesying and speaking as oracles, and then departed to the sky.
661 (Neblightode)	Araby Graben runs off with a sea captain, whose vessel disappears into the Mists.
672 (Neblightode)	Colin Graben murders his aunt and uncle, only to be murdered in turn by Meredoth, along with the rest of the Graben clan's adults. The darklord reanimates them as lebendtod, and tasks the undead family to secure research supplies for his experiments.
675 (Île de la Tempête)	Capitaine Monette viciously beats an innocent young sailor, leaving him half-dead in the next port. His crew's intimidated respect turns to mortal fear.
675-680? (Vechor)	<b>The Long Summer:</b> The seasons vary relatively little in Vechor, but this was a long period of extremely high temperatures and relatively little rainfall.
677 (Île de la Tempête)	Having nearly been slain by his crew, Monette wakes on Île de la Tempête, then an isolated Island of Terror. He contracts lycanthropy from the island's bats, then murders his nephew, an act of evil solidifying his darklordship. He finds and rebuilds a ruined lighthouse and places his nephew's gleaming skull within, and the <b>Lighthouse's Beam</b> - a deadly Mistway - is born.
680? (Vechor)	<b>The Mirrored City:</b> An empty version of the city of Abdok--identical to the one then existing save for its being uninhabited--appeared at this time in the jungle and endured for roughly one year. This ended the Long Summer.
690? (Vechor)	<b>Plague of Butterflies:</b> There were so many insects in this plague that they broke the limbs of trees and poisoned large numbers of people simply because their bodies could not be adequately cleaned from any kind of food.
690 (Île de la Tempête)	The merchant ship Dragon's Gold enters Ravenloft in the domain of Île de la Tempête, and its crew falls victim to Monette.
697 (Liffe, false history)	The College of Liffe is founded. Its School of Business will open in 752, and the School of the Physical Sciences in 753. The college's first female students will be enrolled in 753, the first non-humans in 756.

## Appendix V Nocturnal Sea Timeline

Table 1: Timeline of the Nocturnal Sea

700? (Vechor)	<b>Year of Singing Stones:</b> Numerous monoliths appeared in random locations throughout Vechor and sang for several months before disappearing as quickly as they had come.
705? (Vechor)	<b>War of the Omophagists:</b> The Vechorites were attacked by a tribe of cannibal savages, supposedly from beyond the Mists, and fought them for several years before exterminating them.
705 (Île de la Tempête)	Monette is slain by a powerful necromancer, but revives after a period of time thanks to his Undying Soul special quality. He will loathe spellcasters from then on.
705-715? (Vechor)	<b>Second Time of the Outlanders:</b> Unlike the other two Times of Outlanders, this does not correspond to any larger event in the Land of Mists.
708 (Nebligtode)	Matthais Graben loses his (un)life in a shipwreck, leaving Colin Graben as acting head of the Graben family.
715? (Vechor)	<b>River from the Sea:</b> The Nostru River reversed its flow and carried water from the sea to the highlands, causing a near-famine as it killed much of the vegetation in its course.
717? (Vechor)	<b>The Year of Five Earthquakes:</b> This is fairly self-explanatory; the river reversed course again after these tremors.
720? (Vechor)	<b>The War of the Trees:</b> The forests of Vechor went to battle against each other for several months.
725? (Vechor)	<b>The Plague of Serpents:</b> A enormous number of serpents, many poisonous, infested Vechor throughout this year.
730? (Vechor)	<b>The Year of Bad Births:</b> A very great number of calibans and other freaks were born this year, both to humans, animals and plants.
732 (Isle of Ravens)	The Lady of Ravens has a falling-out with one of her chief servants, the earth-spirit Kalibos (reported in some records as "Kalipos", "Kalipan" or "Kaliban".) She throws him from the top of the Tower of Flint; unknown to her at the time, he survives and makes his lair in a burrow-cave at the extreme southern end of the Isle of Ravens.
734 (Nebligtode)	The outlander Captain Garvyn breaks his oath to deliver bodies to the Graben crypts for the third time. Garvyn's ship, the Endurance, becomes the latest <i>Ship of Horrors</i> .

## Appendix V Nocturnal Sea Timeline

Table 1: Timeline of the Nocturnal Sea

735? (Vechor)	<b>Year of the Dreamstone:</b> A huge meteorite fell a few miles outside of Abdok; it was blamed for sickness and a rash of disappearances which occurred soon thereafter.
736-738 (Liffe)	Formation of several of Liffe's component domains.
736 (Liffe)	A werewolf ravages its way through the population of Moondale before being dispatched by a group of adventurers.
737 (Nebligtode)	Meredoth and many of the Graben undead are killed by adventurers. Sleet and gales wreak havoc throughout Nebligtode for a week. Captain Garvyn's curse is broken and the Endurance vanishes out of Ravenloft; it is presumed lost to the storms.
737 (Nebligtode)	Meredoth revives via the Clone spell, acquiring some new traits in the process, and begins tightening up his defenses. His Obedient Dead minions gain some intelligence (as per <i>VRGttWD</i> ), both as a result of his death and the older specimens' reaching 100 years of age.
737 (Nebligtode)	Colin Graben becomes a swarm-shifter in the process of recovering from the adventurers' attacks. He regains enough intelligence and self-direction, due to Meredoth's temporary demise, to begin plotting his own future resurrection behind his master's back.
740 (Nebligtode)	The <b>Call of the Claw</b> Mistway is severed (or, at least, becomes far less reliable) due to the Grand Conjunction.
740 (Liffe)	After a short period of peace, a number of dhampires, spawned from a vampiric infestation a generation earlier, come of age and reduced the town of Moondale to chaos.
740 (Vechor)	<b>The Plague of Nightmares:</b> This corresponds to the Great Upheaval.
741 (Liffe)	Several fragments of dying domains begin to merge, creating the composite island of Liffe.
743 (Isle of Ravens)	Kalibos forges the sword Felauragoth and enters the Tower of Flint, intent on killing the Lady. He fails; the earth-spirit escapes with his life, but leaves Felauragoth behind.
750 (Liffe)	The Beast Cult' sacrifices attract the attention of heroes. They root out the cause of the sacrificial victims' disappearances and slay the cult's leader, Malisha.

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*Table 1: Timeline of the Nocturnal Sea*

<b>750, New Year's Eve (Nebligtode)</b>	The Nocturnal Sea emerges from the Mists. Nebligtode's shape is altered drastically to accommodate the new coastline and islands. Lebentod are dispatched by Meredoth to gather new secrets of magic and undeath from the mainland.
<b>750, New Year's Eve (Isle of Ravens)</b>	The Nocturnal Sea forms, and the Isle of Ravens becomes situated in it. This is the first time the Isle can be assigned a definite geographic location and a "true" history.
<b>750, New Year's Eve (Île de la Tempête)</b>	The Île de la Tempête becomes fixed in the Nocturnal Sea. Still trapped, Monette is unaware of any changes, only that more ships now "visit" his island.
<b>750, New Year's Eve (Liffe)</b>	Liffe is revealed to the Core as an island off the Darkonian coast. Trade soon commences with this, the most accessible of the new Sea's islands.
<b>750 (Vechor)</b>	<b>The New Sea, or the Third Time of the Outlanders:</b> This obviously corresponds to Vechor finding itself on the shore of the Nocturnal Sea.
<b>751</b>	Arriving in the Nocturnal Sea via the newly-discovered Wake of the Loa, Captain Teach commences a long career of piracy.
<b>751 (Nebligtode)</b>	Lebentod scouts are sent to Il Aluk to investigate reports of mass undead transformations, but fall under Death's control and fail to return to Meredoth's service.
<b>751 (Liffe)</b>	Borcan merchant Sulo Boritsi of the Boritsi Trading Company stayed briefly in Armeikos, to open a local branch of the Boritsi Trading Company.
<b>751 (Nebligtode)</b>	Colin Graben appoints "Josiah Graben", his alleged grandson, as his proxy in Graben-town, allowing him to take a more active hand in the port's economic transformation from backwater to boomtown.
<b>752 (Isle of Ravens)</b>	The Lady of Ravens disposes of Felauragoth by sending it to the mainland with a shipwreck survivor, Babette l'Jeunese. The castaway leaves it in the boat which brought her to shore; when she returns to retrieve it, it has disappeared. Its current location is unknown.
<b>752 (Darkon)</b>	Would-be mayor Weick and his lieutenant HewBeard unsuccessfully tries to colonize the ruined coastal city of Rookhausen, with tall tales of buried riches (the city was abandoned in 757).
<b>752</b>	The Mouse's notoriety as an expert burglar begins spreading along the eastern sea's coast.



## *Appendix V Nocturnal Sea Timeline*

*Table 1: Timeline of the Nocturnal Sea*

753 (Vechor)	<b>The War of the Sea Demons:</b> Humanoid aquatic invaders harassed Vechorite coastal settlements throughout most of this year, withdrawing as mysteriously as they had come after several months of intermittent conflict.
754 (Vechor)	<b>The Year of the Dead:</b> For a week, the dead came out of the cemeteries and resumed their former life.
755 (Neblightode)	Azalin returns to Darkon, and animosity grows between him and Meredoth.
756 (Liffe)	Protest riots erupt at the University (formerly College) of Liffe. Breaking in to steal back his tuition under cover of the unrest, a student watches his coin purse explode in a cyclone of gold, which slays him and his companions.
757 (Liffe)	Foundation of the Patriots of Liffe secret society.
759 (Liffe)	Factors of the Carlyle Trading Company arrive in Armeikos and begin acquiring storage facilities and ships, threatening the Boritsis' dominance of the local shipping industry.
760	The Fraternity of Shadows explores the Nocturnal Sea, seeking the fugitive lich Van Rijn.

Appendix Vg

Further Reading

## Appendix V of Further Reading

For complete rules on maritime adventures and ships, WotC's *Stormwrack* is highly recommended.

### Official Ravenloft books:

The whole of the Nocturnal Sea is briefly presented in the *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* and *Ravenloft Player's Handbook*.

#### Liffe

*Book of Crypts* ("Rite of Terrors", set in Aferdale; "Cedar Chest", set in Armeikos; "Blood in Moondale", set in Moondale; "Death's Cold Laughter", set in Risibilos; and "Living Crypt", featuring Nightblood), *Children of the Night: Demons* (Straw God), *Ravenloft Monster Compendium II* (Andres Duvall), *Children of the Night: Created* (Lucre).

#### Vechor

*Secrets of the Dread Realm*, *Domains of Dread*, *Ravenloft Monster Compendium II* - "Golem, Mechanical (Ahmi Vanjuko)". Davion first appeared in *Book of Crypts* and then in *Domains of Dread*.

#### Île de la Tempête

Monette and Île de la Tempête were first presented in *Darklords*.

#### Isle of Ravens

The 2nd edition sourcebook *Domains of Dread* mentions the Lady of Ravens in its overview of the Nocturnal Sea.

#### Interludes

Selbstmorde Reef and Tidemore are places taken from the *Children of the Night: Werebeasts*, in its entry for Hilde Borganov. Mavalga is briefly described in *Children of the Night: Demons*, in the adventure "Bad Wind".

#### Nebhigtode

The *Ship of Horror* adventure first introduced these islands, and many NPCs were borrowed from this book. The 2nd edition sourcebook *Domains of Dread* also reviews Meredoth and his domain. Additional (out-of-setting) inspiration came from *The Northern Reaches* and *Dawn of the Empires*, both supplements for OD&D, and from the cult film *Dead & Buried*.

#### Fan-made articles

For further information about the Isle of Ravens, see the *Book of Sacrifices* articles "Felauragoth" and "The Isle of Ravens". Also, the *Quoth the Raven* #13 article "The Isle of Ravens" recounts Dirac's first visit to the Lady's domain.

Vechor's Hypatia complete stats were presented in Complete Misty Warrior article (*Quoth the Raven* #10) by Mark Graydon.

## *Appendix V Further Reading*

The accursed ship, *Crescent Moon*, was introduced by James Wyatt in the *Haunted Sites* Kargatane netbook.

The *Eternal Torture*, first glimpsed in *Ship of Horror*, was elevated to a full domain by Stefan Mac in 2001's *Undead Sea Scrolls*.

The domain of Locknar Cove, created by Stephen C. Sutton, is described in the *Book of Sacrifices* Kargatane netbook.

The *Chained Captain* was first presented in "Sword, Fist and Mist" (*Quoth the Raven* #1), by Mark "Mortavius" Graydon.

The Mouse debuted in *Quoth the Raven* #4, in "Love, Labour and Lynch Mobs", Captain Teach in *Quoth the Raven* #9 ("Scourge of the Misty Seas"); both were created by Stephen C. Sutton.

Nedragonne, a domain by Adam Garou, is from *Quoth the Raven* #9, as are the monsters of "Terrors of the Deep: New Nautical Nightmares" by Uri "Shadowking" Barak.

The Carlyle Trading Company was created by Mikhail "NeoTiamat" Rekun for *Van Richten Society Research Files: Doppelgangers*.

## *Appendix V of Further Reading*

*Table 1: Book References Used*

<b>BVD</b>	Book of Vile Darkness
<b>CAr</b>	Complete Arcane
<b>CWa</b>	Complete Warrior
<b>DoD</b>	Denizens of Dread / Darkness
<b>Dra#</b>	Dragon Magazine and issue number
<b>DragC</b>	Dragon Magazine Compendium
<b>DTDL</b>	Dark Tales and Disturbing Legends
<b>EPH</b>	Expanded Psionics Handbook
<b>FiF</b>	Fiend Folio
<b>FRMF</b>	Magic of Faerûn
<b>FoSNS</b>	Fraternity of Shadows Nocturnal Sea Report
<b>Fro</b>	Frostburn
<b>Ga#</b>	Ravenloft Gazetteer and volume number
<b>JWM</b>	New monster by J W Mangrum
<b>LiM</b>	Libris Mortis
<b>LoM</b>	Lords of Madness
<b>MM1</b>	Monster Manual
<b>MM2</b>	Monster Manual II
<b>MM3</b>	Monster Manual III
<b>MM5</b>	Monster Manual V
<b>OrA</b>	Oriental Adventure
<b>PIH</b>	Planar Handbook
<b>QtR#</b>	Quoth the Raven and issue number
<b>RCS</b>	Ravenloft 3e Campaign Setting
<b>RLMCIII</b>	2 Edition Ravenloft Monsterous Compendium III
<b>RSt</b>	Races Of Stone
<b>RWi</b>	Races of the Wild
<b>San</b>	Sandstorm
<b>SaS</b>	Savage Species
<b>SpC</b>	Spell Compendium
<b>Sto</b>	Stormwrack
<b>VRA</b>	Van Richten's Arsenal
<b>VRFSM</b>	VRS Research Files: Sea Monsters (netbook planned by the FoS)
<b>VRGSF</b>	Van Richten's guide to the Shadow Fey
<b>VRGWD</b>	Van Richten's guide to the Walking Dead

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# Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

Set a course for  
the danger and join the Expedition  
to the Nocturnal Sea. Follow the enigmatic  
Fraternity of Shadows as they sail the frigid waters  
and travel to the strange lands that lie beyond the horizon.  
Marvel at the mutants of Vechor, plumb the depths of the  
Drowning Deep, and challenge the might of Meredoth, lord of  
Todstein. But be warned: Only the bravest will survive this  
journey into the unknown and live to tell the tale.

For use with these Dungeons and Dragons® core books :  
Players Handbook™, Dungeon Master's Guide™, and  
Monster Manual™ as well as the following Ravenloft  
core books: Ravenloft Campaign Setting 3<sup>rd</sup>  
edition™, Ravenloft Player's Handbook™  
and Ravenloft Dungeon Master's  
Guide™