

Quoth the Raven



Volume Nineteen



Quoth the Raven

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There's more than one way to skin a cat, but only one way to make it into a book.

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Races of the Mists: Paka

Hunters Amongst Prey

By David "Lester" Gibson

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The Paka

Introduction

Greetings once again my Esteemed Brothers.

It has been some time since I have been sent into the field. I fear I have grown soft in my position at the manor, having not left Souragne for years. It was good to be on the road again, although my assignment was more difficult than many of my early assignments.

As you know, while translating a few rare Vaasi documents for our Brotherhood, I stumbled across an unfamiliar word. I had come across it a handful of times and most often seen it translated as "lycanthrope" or "werecat," but the description in this text did not seem to match what is known of werefolk. I turned to our notes on lycanthropes, thinking I had discovered a new sub-species but it was not until I read our copy of the first draft of Rudolph van Richten's *Guide to*

*Werebeasts*¹ that I realized the term referred not to a werebeast but a similar people of shape changers: the paka. Paka are a secretive race of shapeshifters that live invisibly among us. Doctor van Richten had originally grouped the paka with werebeasts but excised them from the final text as they differ from true lycanthropes in a number of respects. Having discovered a gap in our knowledge, I brought the information to my Brothers, and was immediately dispatched to learn more. I immediately set out from Souragne and across the Core from Dementlieu to Nova Vaasa.

As I travelled, I quickly discovered why we knew so little of the paka and how their existence had gone undocumented for so long.

¹ I am very curious as to how the Fraternity acquired a copy of the handwritten first draft of *Guide to Werebeasts*, but am even more curious as to the blood-stained state of the cover.

Folklore

Unsurprisingly, when confronted with a paka, most folk believe them to be a werecat or similar lycanthrope. They are commonly mistaken for werepanthers and weretigers, especially in Valachan.

There are many journals of failed hunters, whose silver weaponry and prepared antigens failed. Attempts to hunt paka during the day have no more success than night-time hunts, and avoiding the full moon has no effect.

Given the paka's noted indifference to the moon, most journals assume they are true lycanthropes that can change freely between forms, or have an unusual trigger not tied to the lunar cycle. There are numerous theories with one of the more common being the presence of canines or sexual arousal.

A Darkonian hunter surmised that the paka are a prolific clan of werecats, likely with a single progenitor that has spread their curse throughout numerous bloodlines over the generations: a single extended family of unusual lycanthropes.

The animal form of paka is also subject to legend. As they are assumed to be werecats, most hunters believe they can turn into something resembling a large wild cat, a Vaasi plains cat, or a larger cat such as a lion, panther, or tiger. Another theory holds that paka can assume the tiny form of a mundane house cat, running in contrast to most werebeasts whose mass does not change much between forms.

As several hunters pursuing a paka have been assaulted by packs of cats, another legend holds they can assume the form of a swarm of regular housecats, and that, to kill a paka, one must find and kill every cat in the swarm or the paka will simply attract more

common house cats and strays to reform its body². All the above legends are wrong, because the paka are not lycanthropes.

The Truth

Paka are a separate species, one that is remarkably similar to lycanthropes but fundamentally different. Both lycanthropes and paka are creatures that can change their form, altering between the appearance of a unique human and that of a man-animal hybrid. Paka, like werecats, have a hybrid form resembling a cross between a feline and a human.

Unlike lycanthropes, paka do not have an animal form and can only vary between human and hybrid forms. While infected werebeasts can also only change into a single alternate form, they also have no control over their transformation – or themselves – while in their alternate shape. Paka have full control over their transformations, having no “triggers”, such as a full moon, and remain in control even while in their hybrid form. And while werebeasts are either fully human, hybrids, or animals, paka are always partially feline, retaining keen night vision and retractable claws in all forms.

Both forms are a paka's true form. When slain a paka typically remains in the form they were in when killed (although there have been cases where they reverted to human forms). When viewed through magic that dispels illusions (such as *true seeing*), paka look

² In my searching I also discovered some preliminary research that surmised paka were not lycanthropes, but swarms of housecats that could assume a humanoid form, which is certainly an interesting imagined hypothesis for their origin and true nature. However, I could find nothing confirming this.

mostly human, although some feline traits are more predominant under careful inspection.

If pressed, I would class paka in the growing category of werebeast-like creatures, including such beings as red widows, skin thieves, and wolfweres. Perhaps we need to rethink our classification and make lycanthropes into a sub-category of human/animal shapeshifters. But that is a discussion for another day.

Similar to true lycanthropes, paka are a separate species that lives amongst humanity but keep their own hidden society. This is similar to an enclave of immigrants that maintains a tight, insular community in larger city, but hidden and secretive. It is equal parts secret society and subculture.

In addition to their shapechanging, paka can speak with cats and command them to follow simple commands. Paka use cats as spies and messengers, in addition to a number of other malicious yet creative uses. This magical communication is not limited to domesticated cats and works with larger animals such as lions and plains cats, but can be less effective. Paka cannot command felines to do something outside of their nature, making it more difficult for the paka to pacify any creature that might see them as prey.

This feline affinity also works on werebeasts, most notably wereleopards. A number of paka prides employ small packs of wereleopards as enforcers or bodyguards. Nomadic and wandering paka (typically males) will occasionally gather a pack of wereleopards around themselves as a makeshift pride. These mixed prides are always dismissed by true prides. The relationship between paka and wereleopards is always one-

sided: paka never work for wereleopards.

Paka grow quickly, reaching physical maturity in thirteen or so years. While this is faster than humans, they do not age so quickly as to draw attention to themselves. However, paka also grow old far more quickly, reaching middle age in their mid-twenties and seldom living beyond fifty. The shortness of a generation and their multiple births have allowed the paka to swiftly spread across the Land of the Mists. It does not take long for a paka pride to establish itself in a city.

Surprisingly, the Vistani know all about the paka and label them "cat people." The Vistani are the one folk who are immune to the paka's regular assassinations and strong feelings of revenge, for reasons discussed below. Interestingly, this has made the Vistani an unusually reliable source for information. While they deal fairly with the cat people, they have few qualms on revealing their secrets and did so with little required payment.

Society

First and foremost, the paka wish to remain unknown, a whispered legend told in hushed tones by the firelight. They never reveal their true natures to outsiders. Those who discover a paka are hunted and killed. Even those who might only suspect one is not entirely human are killed or discredited. Often the latter is followed by an accidental death some time later after memory of the claim has faded.

During my research, I was covertly threatened several times. Never directly, mind you, but accidents followed me as if to discourage me from my investigation. I had to give the

appearance of abandoning my quest and pursue significantly more subtle tactics for my investigation. I had to move slowly and frequently change locations, never staying in one city too long. Even with all my precautions, I believe my research would have met with ultimate failure due to the scarcity of information, had I not met an invaluable informant who shall remain discreetly nameless in the document, for both their safety and mine.

Despite their secrecy, paka are social creatures like their feline kin. While they are solitary hunters and enjoy privacy and personal secrecy, they are most comfortable in groups, be it of other paka (known as a pride) or humanity. However, the tenets of their society prevent paka from spending too much time overtly with their own kind, so they must do the majority of their socialization with humans. When they do socialize with other paka, this is done covertly, away from prying eyes and witnesses. Paka often use the excuse of distant relations to explain the common builds and hair colouration of other paka, a likely cause for the claims of a shared lycanthropic bloodline.

The paka resemble lithe and thin humans in appearance. All have yellow or orange hair, especially the women. A few rare men have hair that is darker red or light brown but most have the same orange-blonde hue of the females. Extremely dark hair, blacks and dark browns, are unknown. As paka age, their hair greys, becoming streaked.

When paka assume their hybrid form they take on feline characteristics such as slit pupils, golden eyes, pointed ears, whiskers, and pointed teeth, and their nose darkens and becomes upturned. There is a little diversity to their animal form. Some paka develop a slight

muzzle while others have their ears shift more to the top of their head. A few even grow a tail.

Paka crave attention, seeking forever to be adored or placed in the spotlight. This is at odds with their secretive nature and desire to blend invisibly with humanity, but the desire for adulation is irresistible. As such, paka refrain from displays of agility or coordination where their inhuman prowess might be noticed. Instead, they seek excellence in other activities and find places for themselves in environments where they can be respected or praised. If they are not the best, they will spend time improving their skills when needed, while also often arranging for an accident to befall their major competitor.

Like many cats, paka have an innate desire for cleanliness. Most bathe frequently, at least once a day if possible. They prefer sponge baths where they do not have to immerse themselves in water. Urban creatures, paka are repelled by filth and take great pains to avoid dirty work. When dirt is unavoidable they clean themselves as soon as possible and are unhappy and irritable until they have done so. Stay out of the way of a paka when it is unclean.

As mentioned earlier, paka prefer to hunt alone. When the paka kill someone it is seldom over quickly. Like their feline relatives, paka torture and prolong the death of their prey in an elaborate and playful hunt. Often the prey will feel safe, believing they have eluded their pursuer or that their tormentor has lost interest, before the paka moves in for the kill. They use their natural claws when possible but are equally adept at using manufactured weapons, especially when claws wounds would be noticed.

Revenge is the one time that paka do not hunt alone. An entire paka pride can

join in to enact revenge on someone who wronged a paka. Depending on the severity of the slight, the aid might come from the paka's closest friends, their immediate family, or the entire pride. The pride will act as one, stopping for nothing until revenge has been satisfactorily filled.

Revenge is deep-seated part of the paka psyche. It is extremely difficult for them to resist their dark urges for vengeance. To right a wrong, the paka will scheme and plan the offender's downfall. What a paka considers to have been an offense varies, but most common examples are harm (either emotional or physical), ruining their plans or ambitions, or harming one of the paka's possessions. The fate of the victim also depends on the severity. While humiliation sometimes serves, as does impoverishing the offending party, most offenses end in death. If a paka is killed, then the entire pride will step in to avenge them, all desiring revenge. Woe to the poor fool that ends a life of a paka, for the entire pride will extract slow, painful retribution. Death is not merely enough and the pride often ruin's the victim's finances and reputation first, before moving on to physical punishment.

Only the Vistani are immune to the paka's wrath. While the paka still feel the burning rage to avenge themselves on the Vistani, they dare not. Neither do the Vistani invoke curses or retribution on the paka. Both deal with the other cordially and honestly, if tersely and quickly. I managed to persuade some Vistani to discuss the matter and it seems that cat people and the Vistani were once caught in a cycle of revenge, an endless feud that cost many lives. Vistani seers read the future of the conflict and found it only escalated endlessly until both

sides were destroyed. To preserve themselves, the paka and Vistani swore off retribution and now deal honestly with each other, because restarting the feud will only lead to death.

Lifestyle

Paka live invisibly in human communities, dressing in the local fashions and working in the local trades and professions. They have no settlements of their own. There are not even paka neighbourhoods, as they distance themselves publically from other paka. Still, they have tight bonds and hidden kinship with each other.

However, in one rare case,paka claimed an entire town. They killed or drove away every non-paka inhabitant and claimed the entire community for themselves. The hamlet is still owned by the paka to this day although I will not commit its name and location to writing, already having revealed too many secrets of the paka. I would not be surprised to find this had happened before, or that an entire small neighbourhood in a large city was dominated by paka posing as an ethnic minority from a distant domain or very extended family.

Prides keep in contact under the guise of social clubs, gangs, guilds, or other secret societies where they can meet privately. A few operate clubs or gathering places where they can host functions. Wealthier paka have large homes and host elaborate parties where they invite other members of the pride to keep in contact and share news and concerns. More erudite paka in observant domains communicate through other more covert means, such as newsletters or coded messages in newsheets.

The largest grouping of paka is in Nova Vaasa, where the species seems to have originated. In the cities of Nova Vaasa, most paka act in a manner similar to a criminal family, with the pride coordinating their business dealings under the eye of a single matriarchal figure. The mother in charge, referred to as "The Queen" by her followers, maintains order in her pride and ensures that all paka are working together for the betterment of the pride. All paka in the pride must swear fealty to the Queen, accepting her as their mother's mother and worthy of unquestioning loyalty and respect. Vaasi paka are much more likely to engage in felonious activities, such as smuggling, the import and export of opium from Hazlan, extortion, and the like.

There is also the Cult of the Cat Lord (which I will describe more in the Beliefs section below). In Nova Vaasa the cult is masked behind worship of the Lawgiver. Small chapels dedicated to that god are frequented by paka who hold private sermons or back room ceremonies.

Richemuloise paka frequently act as information brokers, using their affinity with house cats to gather information to sell to the highest bidder or use for blackmail. While most paka have their own occupation and skills, they still keep their ears (and their pet's ears) open for anything of value. The paka are not popular in Richemulot's cities and take extra pains to conceal their true natures. They view themselves as the inheritors of that land, superior to its current leaders, and are beginning to undermine its government and business while trying to position themselves in places of power and authority. A silent, invisible war is brewing in Richemulot and I am thankful to now reside in Souragne.

The cat people of Dementlieu are organized in a much more loose fellowship. They communicate with each other only via letters, making use of both code and their native language to disguise their words. The pride, while connected, cannot easily be identified and individual members might be overlooked if anyone were to start hunting them. They are aware of the cunning of Dementlieuse folk, and take pains to be that much more cunning and deceitful. I found it curious that they relied on mundane letters to communicate when they could far more easily courier messages invisibly via house cats, until I realized the paka's intent: they were besting humans at their sport, proving their superiority while daring opponents to unlock their secret.

There are a few small groups of paka living in Tepest. There were larger numbers before the Great Upheaval, but the paka have found the region inhospitable of late. Many have been burned as fey for their animalistic natures, or as witches after being seen talking with cats. The few that remain walk a fine line between sowing distrust and causing misfortune to their neighbours and casting guilt away from themselves.

I believe there to be a few paka in Markovia, trapped there after the Mists yanked that nation from the Core and thrust it into the Western Sea. In an ironic twist, they must retain their hybrid animal forms in that land, masquerading as cat people, and disguising their ability to change shape. These unfortunates are continually seeking means off the island and back to the mainland and have been known to approach shipwrecked survivors or explorers, hoping to commandeer vessels and escape.

The paka of Valachan keep to smaller numbers. They are aware that Baron von Kharkov's Black Panthers are not entirely human, and use this to their advantage. A few have infiltrated the Black Leopards or offered their services to Baron von Kharkov, but invariably their true allegiances lie with the pride. Paka have an affinity with wereleopards, so it would not surprise me if the paka were plotting a coup in Valachan, or even a much more open seizing of the nation.

The diet of paka consists almost exclusively of meat. For would-be adventurers, this would be a vital identifying feature. Paka cannot easily digest plant matter or grains. While they prefer raw meat, they can eat cooked meat and often do, especially in the company of others. While paka enjoy dairy, most do not properly digest milk or cheese leading to gastric distress. For the sake of their disguise, they will consume meals of human food, but cannot do so every day without impacting their health. And certain human foods are poisonous for cats. Garlic, grapes, and chocolate are all partially toxic to paka³.

Like most cats, a paka's idea of entertainment typically involves cruelty of some kind or another. Paka take great pleasure in the pain and suffering of others, be it physical or emotional. Watching a rival break down as their business goes bankrupt or they are humiliated in front of the social elite is the greatest of pleasures for a paka.

If pain cannot be afforded at the moment, paka make do with games. They enjoy a challenge of skill and luck, testing their wits against an opponent.

³ The toxicity of garlic and grapes are likely the reason why there are few paka in Borca.

Gambling is highly addictive for the paka and they often make unwise wagers, although cheating a paka (or even beating them fairly) can often result in the paka seeking revenge.

Paka also entertain themselves with hunting. Most wealthy paka engage in all manner of blood sports, typically hunting deer and rabbits but occasionally different prey. There are rumours of a group of paka that make use of a small island off the coast of Lamordia to hunt people.

Family

Paka prides are extended families and familial friends that work together for mutual benefit and protection. Paka try to put the wellbeing and benefit of the pride above all else, but in practice they are too selfish to work entirely for the group and not themselves. However, it is a truly rare paka that works against their pride or works solely to benefit themselves at a cost to the pride.

Female paka give birth to litters, typically three but ranging from one to six children. Single births are rare, and those young are seen as being poor members of the paka. It is believed they killed and ate their siblings in the womb, and thus will be antisocial loners who will not work for the benefit of the pride. They are often killed outright, but other times they are simply raised with the other children but treated much more harshly to ensure they know their place as part of the pride.

Occasionally, runts are born to a litter. No special treatment is awarded these smaller and weaker paka – in fact, many are treated callously than their siblings – and many do not survive to adulthood. Those runts that manage to survive remain physically weaker and

less hardy than their brethren. Many hold resentment to their kin, for not enabling or encouraging them⁴.

In crowded cities, or locales where the pride has become too incestuous, male paka will set out to find new places to live, a new pride to join. As paka have a matriarchal society, the males have to prove their value to the new pride as well as their fitness and cunning. Typically prides will assign a short series of tasks to challenge a new tom. Often they are used to deal with problems the rest of the pride cannot be seen as involved with. Many male paka are nomadic and simply move from city to city, earning a brief living and siring the next generation before moving on.

Paka do not mate for life, and females prefer to remain allied with the pride rather than their mate. Paka go into heat annually but most bear only a single litter during their lifetime. Fatherhood is unknown to paka, as children are raised by the entire pride. Men are just a means to an end. While many paka can identify their male ancestor, they share no special bond with that individual. In contrast, motherhood is an important role and the bond between mother and children is incredibly strong.

Marriage is unknown to the paka except as a means to further their position in the world. As such, paka typically only marry non-paka. Female paka will often marry into positions of stature and wealth. If they dislike their husband there will often be an accident

leading to the paka inheriting the desired wealth.

Occasionally paka do fall in love, sometimes even with other paka. These passionate relationships are dangerous for both parties involved, but can last a number of years. They very seldom lead to marriage and always eventually end. Paka are not faithful creatures, and adultery is often the cause of divorce.

Government

As mentioned earlier, paka are a matriarchal species, with each pride led by an elder known as the Queen.

This is not a hereditary position but one gained due to wisdom and cunning, alliances with the rest of the pride, or financial power. Some queens wield the most temporal power in the pride and use it to gain rulership. Others rely on their social skills and a web of favours and debts between the rest of the pride to ensure their authority. A few prides have elected the most wise and experienced member of their pride as Queen.

The method of choosing a queen is largely determined by the success of prior queens. If the previous few queens had relied on social alliances but had been poor queens the pride might opt to push someone with proven financial power and skill into leadership. It's a reactionary system.

A large number of prides also have theocratic elements, with the Queen also being the pride's high priest of the Cat Lord. Many of these Queens have clerical powers, but an equal number are simply lay followers of the Cat Lord. While there is an element of a Mandate of Heaven in these Queen's lordship, with the Queen's commands being seen as the will of their god, many paka only

⁴My informant, who made much of this document possible, is a runt who did not mind betraying his kin after a lifetime of suffering and perceived unequal treatment. He actually proved quite invaluable and skilled at magic. I'm sending him to Souragne to see if he might be of further use to our Brotherhood.

give the Cat Lord token adoration. Their belief in the divine is not strong.

There is no set hierarchy below the Queen. Larger prides occasionally have overseers who look after particular neighbourhoods or regions and report to the Queen. Even in these situations it is common for all paka to have access to the Queen and for the Queen to issue direct commands.

Defence

Paka rely on the pride for mutual defense and protection. They prevent problems by hiding their true natures and never revealing their talents to anyone who is not minutes from death.

For many threats, paka rely on strictly mundane defenses. They use financial and economic acumen to cripple or defeat a business rival, diplomatic and social means to defeat political rivals, and the like. While they are always willing to commit physical violence to solve their problems, it is often not their first choice, being both overt and messy.

In addition to their own invisible numbers, paka use and rely on mundane housecats. Through magical means, paka can see and hear through the eyes of cats. Additionally, cats can be commanded and directed by the will of a powerful paka. These are both the spies and accomplices of the paka: an army of unseen felines. Enemies of the paka might find themselves tripped by a stray cat, distracted at an inopportune time, or kept awake for days on end by howling and noise. The cats might even act as assassins, knocking over heavy objects onto the unwitting or as a swarm of angry felines pouncing on the target.

Language

Paka speak their own language, known as *Aumes*, as well the language of whatever lands they dwell. Natural linguists, paka frequently know two or even three languages. Well-travelled or elder paka might know a half-dozen different human tongues or even all the languages of the Core.

I admit to being more than a little envious at the ease by which paka can master a new language. Skill paka can also shed and assume accents with ease, assuming entirely different vocabularies including regional slang and phrasing. A cunning paka can easily play the role of naive foreigner in their homeland or long-time local in a place they've been living for months.

Aumes itself is a difficult tongue, one even my skills found difficult to master. I admit that I cannot speak it, lacking the ability to reproduce the catlike purrs and chirps needed for most of the words. It is an interesting language with few words and much of the meaning denoted by tone and usage of catlike noises.

History

It is uncertain when the paka entered the Mists or if they entered at all and were not created whole cloth by the Watchers in the Dark. The paka themselves seem uncertain and know little of their past save that they were once greatly wronged.

I could learn very little about this mythical "Great Wrong". I would not be surprised at all to learn the paka themselves were uncertain of its details or veracity. All I can confirm was that this insult was committed by humans on the paka, and the vengeful cat people

have never forgiven humanity. Thus, paka take every opportunity to belittle and revenge themselves on humans. For this reason they have infiltrated human society and are doing their best to impose suffering and hardship. The only reason paka are not responsible for more human suffering is their innately selfish natures, their desire to be loved and adored. It's hard to get the attention they crave from each other, which just leads them into competition for attention they are unwilling to give; paka are forced to rely on humans to satisfy their feline base natures, tempering their desire for revenge in order to maintain their social status and personal comfort. However, it is the long-term goal of every pride to decimate the human population, reducing them to more manageable numbers, if not eliminating humanity altogether.

The history of individual paka prides is difficult to trace, in part due to their desire to be invisible and remain unnoticed by humanity at large. They leave few traces in history books - just tales of accidents and misfortune, which could easily be fate or other malign forces.

From what I can gather, the paka originated in Nova Vaasa when that land joined the Core in the 680s, moving into neighbouring lands in the early 700s. They moved first into Hazlan and Tepest and then into Barovia and farther west. If you know what to look for, there are reports of paka as far away as Zherisia and Nosos, urban lands well suited for the cat people.

I estimate it was during this early time of expansion that the paka ran afoul with the Vistani, although I cannot confirm this. It is possible the feud took place before Nova Vaasa entered the Mists.

Paka left their largest mark on Nova Vaasa. According to what I've gathered, centuries ago, humans mistook the paka worshiping their god as humans imbued with feline powers and formed a cult to the Old Vaasi cat god⁵. There was a short rivalry between this human cult and the paka that culminated with the theft of a paka holy relic, the *Cat's Paw*. The paka have been searching for it ever since. My source tells me that the paka now believe it is in possession Sir Tristen Hiregaard, making its acquisition difficult.

The Requiem was a dark time for Paka. Being urban creatures, many had migrated across the Core and found themselves in Il Aluk. It soon became the center of paka activity, the focus on their efforts and ambitions. As the Shroud traps shapechangers in whatever form they possessed at death, most Slain paka look human and have lost their ability to become hybrid cats. This is seen as truly a fate worse than death and the unfortunate paka in Il Aluk are viewed by their living kin as being little better than humans. Much effort and magical research has been undertaken by paka with arcane talents to lift the Shroud and put their kin out of their misery. In the generation since the Requiem, paka have grown to loathe undead and view them as a worse enemy than humanity.

Besiefs

Paka believe in few abstractions and philosophies, being creatures of the here and now. The one exception is Revenge, to which much of paka writing and thinking has been devoted. The paka are

⁵This would be the same cat god who inspired the criminal group the Claws of Sehkmaa several hundred years later.

passionate and reactive, and revenge is an essential part of their being. It is more important and real than love or sorrow. Entire treatises have been written on vengeance, the righting of wrongs, and justice.

Related to revenge is the paka need to hunt. Consummate hunters, it is the only sport they truly enjoy. Unlike revenge, they do not think about the hunt or wax philosophically about the hunt. You simply hunt. It is an action, learned by doing and perfected over a lifetime.

Paka view many mundane activities through the lens of the hunt. This is not spoken of or acknowledged. I do not believe they even recognize this behaviour as different from humanity. It is just what they do. They do not look for a misplaced item: they stalk it. They do not run after a missed carriage: they pursue it. They do not seek gossip: they trail it.

Religion

The only deity paka revere is The Cat Lord, a god unique to them but bearing similarities to the old Vaasi god Sehkmaa. The paka know little of their god or its origins. Even the dogma seems fluid and temporary. The Cat Lord is portrayed as a dark trickster god, a malicious troublemaker and manipulator. While the leadership of many prides falls to members of the clergy, most paka give the Cat Lord little more than lip service. He is respected and most paka seem sincere in their praise and prayers during religious services, but few give the Cat Lord any thought between sermons.

This is all I could learn of paka, although, as always, I am attaching my compiled notes in the event my summary missed some pertinent piece of

information. From my research I believe the paka to be a threat to our brotherhood. While they are often complacent in their position, the overall goal of their species is the extinction or enslavement of our own. Their cunning should not be underestimated.

Respectfully as always,

Jonathan Shakespeare

Running Paka

Paka can serve multiple roles in a campaign. They can be behind-the-scenes manipulators serving as evil masterminds. They can also be lone monsters responsible for a wrong, or dark reflections of a selfish and bestial side of humanity. They can also fill the role of secret societies in a campaign, sharing many of the same conventions and tropes.

Paka make good reoccurring villains, with later paka attempting to avenge the death of a paka at the hands of the PCs or gain revenge for some slight incurred by the heroes. A paka might single-out the PCs for revenge after they unwittingly foiled one of its schemes. Or perhaps the PCs are stealing the limelight from the paka and it hopes that by eliminating or shaming them more attention will be directed to itself.

As all shapechangers, paka can also make for a good investigative adventure, hunting down a monster in an urban environment and having to discover which of the suspects is the inhuman creature.

Pathfinder Rules

Paka Runt Racial Traits

+2 Dexterity, +2 intelligence, -2 Strength: Paka are agile and quick-witted but not physically strong.

Medium: Paka are Medium creatures and receive no bonuses or penalties due to their size.

Normal Speed: Paka have a base speed of 30 feet.

Low-Light Vision: Paka can see twice as far as humans in conditions of dim light.

Change Shape (Su): A paka can assume the appearance of a specific single human form of the same sex. The paka always takes this specific form when she uses this ability. A paka in human form gains a +10 racial bonus on Disguise checks made to appear human. Changing shape is a standard action. This ability otherwise functions as alter self, except that the paka does not adjust her ability scores.

Claws: Paka have retractable claws, granting them two claw attacks (1d4 damage). These are primary natural attacks.

Jumper: Paka are always considered to have a running start when making Acrobatics checks to jump.

Lick Wounds (Su): As a standard action, a paka can stop to lick her wounds. She gains fast healing 2 for 1 round. A paka can heal up to 2 hit points per level per day with this ability, after which it ceases to function.

Speak With Cats (Sp): Paka with a Charisma of 11 or higher can talk to cats, as per the spell *speak with animals* but limited to felines. This ability is usable 1/day, the caster level for the effect is equal to the paka's level. **Sneaky:** Paka receive a +2 bonus to Stealth checks.

Languages: Paka begin speaking Aumes and a regional language. Paka with high Intelligence scores can choose any

languages they want (except secret languages, such as Druidic).

Paka Runt

CR 1/3

XP 135

Female Paka Warrior 1

NE Medium Humanoid (shapechanger)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception -1

DEFENSE

AC 15, flat-footed 13, touch 12 (+2 Dex, +3 armor)

HP 6 (1d10+1)

Fort +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** -1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee rapier +3 (1d6-1/18-20) or 2 claws +3 (1d4-1)

Ranged dagger +3 (1d4-1/19-20)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 1st)

1/day – *speak with animals* (felines only)

STATISTICS

Str 8, **Dex** 15, **Con** 12, **Int** 11, **Wis** 8,

Cha 11

BaseAtk +1; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 12

Feats Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +6, Bluff +4, Stealth +3

Languages Aumes, Vaasi

SQ lick wounds (2 hp), jumper

ECOLOGY

Environment temperate forests and hills

Organization solitary or pair

Treasure NPC gear (studded leather armour, rapier, 4 daggers, other treasure)

Paka

CR 4**XP 1,200**

NE Medium Humanoid (shapechanger)

Init +7; Senses low-light vision;

Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 16, flat-footed 13, touch 13 (+3 Dex, +3 armour)

HP 27 (5d8+5)**Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +0****SR 15****OFFENSE****Spd** 30 ft.**Melee** rapier +6 (1d6-1/18-20) or 2

claws +6 (1d6-1)

Ranged dagger +6 (1d4-1/19-20)**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 5th)**1/day** – *charm animals* (felines only)

(DC 12)

At-will – *speak with animals* (felines only)**STATISTICS****Str 8, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 8,****Cha 13****BaseAtk** +3; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 15**Feats** Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack, Weapon Finesse**Skills** Acrobatics +9, Bluff +6, Stealth +6**Languages** Aumes, Vaasi**SQ** lick wounds (10 hp), jumper**ECOLOGY****Environment** temperate forests and hills**Organization** solitary or pair**Treasure** NPC gear (studded leather armor, rapier, 4 daggers, other treasure)**SPECIAL ABILITIES****Canine Animosity** Paka suffer -5 penalty of all Charisma-based skill checks when dealing with canines, such as dogs, but also including wolves, werewolves, wolfweres, and the like.

Cat Swarm

CR 2**XP 600**

N Tiny animal (swarm)

Init +6; Senses low-light vision, scent;

Perception +6

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 12 (+2 Dex, +2 size)

hp 16 (3d8+3)**Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +2****Defensive Abilities** swarm traits (as a swarm of tiny creatures, a Cat Swarm takes only half damage from piercing and slashing attacks)**OFFENSE****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** swarm (1d6 plus bleed)**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.**Special Attacks** bleed (1d4), distraction (DC 12)**STATISTICS****Str 2, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 2, Wis 13,****Cha 7****BaseAtk** +2; **CMB** —; **CMD** —**Feats** Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Acrobatics)**Skills** Acrobatics +10, Climb +7, Perception +6, Stealth +14; Racial Modifiers +4 Climb and Stealth, uses Dex to modify Climb and Swim**ECOLOGY****Environment** any**Organization** solitary, clowder (2–5 swarms)**Treasure** none

Derek Falstaff

CR 4**XP 1,200**

Male Paka Runt Rogue 2, Wizard (illusionist) 4

NE Medium Humanoid (shapechanger)

Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision;
Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 13, flat-footed 10, touch 13 (+3 Dex)
HP 35 (2d8+4d6+12)

Fort +3, **Ref** +7, **Will** +3

Defensive evasion

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee rapier +7 (1d6/18-20) or 2 claws +6 (1d4)

Ranged dagger +6 (1d4/19-20)

Special Attacks sneak attack 1d6

Spells Prepared (CL 4th; concentration +6)

2nd—hypnotic pattern (DC 16), invisibility, minor image (DC 16), touch of idiocy (DC 14)

1st—color spray (DC 15), grease (DC 13), mage armour, silent image (DC 15)

0 (at will)—dancing lights, detect magic, ghost sound, mage hand, read magic

Opposition Schools Evocation,

Necromancy

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th)

1/day—speak with animals (felines only)

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 17, **Con** 14, **Int** 14, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 16

Feats Greater Spell Focus (illusion), Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (illusion), Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +8, Appraise +9, Bluff +5, Disable Device +8, Escape Artist +8, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (local) +11, Linguistics +7, Sense Motive +4, Spellcraft +9, Stealth +10 Languages Aumes, Balok, Mordentish, Vaasi

SQ arcane bond (amulet), extend illusions +2 rounds, lick wounds (12 hp), jumper, rogue talent (surprise attack), trap finding

Combat Gear mwk rapier, 4 daggers, scrolls of hold person (3), scrolls of identify (2), wand of magic missile (CL 3rd, 25 charges)

Other Gear spellbook, thieves tools, spell component pouch

Born in Mortigny, Derek Fallstaff was the runt of his litter, weak and small. He barely survived infancy and was cruelly raised by his pride. He was repeatedly abused and humiliated by his siblings, forced to do all the work while they relaxed. His sisters took special pride in forcing him into the dirtiest sewers and holes they could find in an effort to further the pride's conquest of the city.

Despite the attempts at indoctrination by the pride, Derek grew up resenting the paka and his mother. While he did not wish them harm, he wanted little to do with his pride and considered leaving. He had heard tales of wandering paka but could not stomach the thought of truly being alone.

Several months ago he was given a new assignment: scare off a human wizard investigating their kind. Looking into the human, Derek discovered he was not working alone, that the human was a part of a larger organization. The Queen wished to know more, as killing the man outright might only attract more attention. For reasons unknown to even himself, Derek quickly volunteered, uncertain if he wanted to prove himself to the pride or if he saw an opportunity to escape. Exchanging information with the wizard, Derek discovered the Fraternity of Shadows. It was a way to belong to something without having to stay in the pride. Without hesitation Derek joined the wizard, Jonothan Lochspare, in his research.

At the back of his mind Derek knows the pride has not forgotten him. If they

suspect he has betrayed them, his death will be slow and legendary. If they find him, he might be able to convince them he was infiltrating the Fraternity for the benefit of all paka. When that day comes he will face a hard choice: return to the pride and betray his new Fraternity, or completely turn his back on his species and become a hunted outcast.

4th Edition Rules

Paka

Racial Traits

- Average Height:** 5' 4"-6' 0"
- Average Weight:** 130-170 lb.
- Ability Scores:** +2 Dexterity; +2 Wisdom or +2 Intelligence
- Size:** Medium
- Speed:** 6 squares
- Vision:** Lowlight
- Languages:** Common, Aumes
- Skill Bonuses:** +2 Bluff, +2 Stealth
- Shapechanger:** You are a shapechanger; you can alter your appearance. As such, you are subject to effects and conditions that affect shapechangers.
- Catform:** You have the *catform* power.
- Lick Wounds:** You have the *lick wounds* power.

Catform

Racial Power

Your shape flickers as you grow whiskers and your ears elongate and become pointed and a light fur covers your body.

At-Will ♦ Polymorph

Minor action

Personal

Effect: You alter your appearance into either the form of a unique Medium

humanoid or a cat-human hybrid. The new form lasts until you change form again. You retain your statistics, and all your equipment including clothes, armour, and possessions do not change.

Lick Wounds

Racial Power

You clean your wounds with your tongue, magically healing your injuries.

Encounter♦ Healing

Minor action

Personal

Special: You must be bloodied to use this power.

Effect: You can spend a healing surge to regain hit points.

Racial Feat

Cat's Claw

Prerequisite: Paka

Benefit: You have trained yourself to use your natural claws as weapons (+3 proficiency bonus and 1d6 damage). For purpose of feats and powers, your claws are treated as light blades. You can enchant and disenchant your claws as a weapon. When you disenchant your claws they are not reduced to dust.

Cat Swarm

Level 1 Skirmisher

Medium natural beast (swarm) XP 100

HP 27;

Initiative +5

Bloodied 13

Perception +6

AC 15; Fortitude 11,

Low-light vision

Reflex 15, Will 13

Speed 6, climb 3

Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerable 5 to close and area attacks

Traits

◊ Swarm Attack ♦ Aura 1

Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 4 damage. If the swarm deals this damage to an enemy two turns in a row that enemy is knocked prone.

Cyoth the Raven 19

Swarm

Swarms can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space but it is difficult terrain. Melee or ranged attacks cannot pull, push, or slide the swarm. The swarm can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of its component creatures.

Str 11 (+0)	Dex 17 (+3)	Wis 13 (+1)
Con 10 (+0)	Int 2 (-4)	Cha 11 (+0)
Alignment unaligned Languages –		

Standard Action

M Swarm of Claws ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, or 1d8 + 9 damage if the target is prone.

Move Action

Dash ♦ **Encounter**

The cat swarm shifts 3 squares.

Skills acrobatics +8, stealth +8

The Friend

If you are Lost, I will find you

By Rock

Tenebris@hotmail.com

From the case files of Dr. Newhausen, Barovia Asylum of Shattered Souls.

Last session between Dr. Newhausen and patient Liesl Storkwacht.

N: "Liesl? Liesl, can you hear me?"

L: "... Yes?"

N: "Liesl, do you know where you are?"

L: "No ... yes? The walls scream. The screams of torment are always going on, in the stone ... the air ... the people ..."

N: "Liesl, you are in the asylum near Vallaki. Do you know why you are here?"

L: "I was sad when my man, Pjotr, disappeared. My family brought me here so you could make me better."

N: "Yes, Liesl. But you couldn't handle the reality of Pjotr's leaving you, could you? You couldn't handle it at all, so you spiraled down into yourself. You -"

L: "I was lost. I was broken. I was a Lost One."

N: "But you've been making great progress these past few days, Liesl. When your family comes here to visit, I'm sure they'll be pleased to see how well you're doing under our care."

L: "They will not come here. They have not been here for years. It has told me they have moved on, which is for the best."

N: "Liesl, there is no "it". You are in a safe place, in the care of professional healers."

L: "My friend has told me otherwise. You hold people here who are broken, but then don't try to make them better, you try to make them into what you think they should be. There are people here from other worlds. You make them believe they are insane. You get people like me, who are fragile. You break them for sport, then glue them back into something new, that you like better."

N: "Liesl, you are with good, kind people who are trying to make you better."

L: "It has told me otherwise. I believe my friend over you. Where the air has faces that scream, you have two faces with forked tongues."

N: "Tell me about "it", Liesl. I'll help you see that it doesn't exist. It's good that you're able to speak and move again, but you aren't well yet."

L: "It came to me when I was broken. It spoke to me and I could hear it through the madness, through the breaking."

N: "And you have talked to this 'friend' in your cell. Your locked cell, after lights out."

L: "It does not care about stone, wood or iron! It moves through them like a ghost!"

case note: patient Liesl Storkwacht was injected with a mild sedative by the orderlies at this point, since she was becoming agitated

N: "Tell me more about "it", Liesl. I will help you see that this friend is completely imaginary. You need to face reality if you want to be healed."

L: "What is there to say? It came to me, found me because I was screaming with the rest of the people. It came to me and spoke in my head, made me wake up to reply. It asked me questions."

N: "What did it ask you, Liesl?"

L: "It asked me why I was broken. I answered that it was because I was sad, because my man was gone; he had left me all alone and disappeared. It told me my Pjotr hadn't abandoned me. A woman tricked him into following her into the woods, and there she ate his flesh until he died from the pain. She fed what was left to a farmer's hogs."

N: "No, Liesl, we've talked about this. Pjotr did leave you, we've talked about his reasons to -"

L: "It asked me if I would like it to be my friend. It asked me if I would like to feel different than sad. It said it could make me feel angry, instead, if we became friends."

N: "Angry, Liesl? But why would you be angry? You don't have any reason to be angry, no right to -"

L: "It told me it would give me anger. And power to do what needs to be done."

N: "Liesl, you have no power -"

L: "My friend told me I could be its fist. My friend told me how angry it was, how sad, to see so much evil done in this horrible, evil place."

N: "Liesl, the asylum is not a -"

L: "Not just the asylum! This land! This world! It is evil, that woman who ate my Pjotr alive is evil! You are evil! My friend told me that it would give me power to find that woman, to annihilate her, and my friend only asked that I annihilate you as I go! That was its price and I pay it with PLEASURE! I WANT MY BEST FRIEND TO BE AS HAPPY AS I AM!" [End case notes]

This is the last piece of evidence I can give you, Mr. Ray. After she said those last words, Miss Liesl Storkwacht, a Barovian girl of no more than twenty-five summers, her body weak and thin from a starvation diet and a lack of exercise, just snapped the iron

chains we'd bound her with, got up out of her chair and broke the doctor's neck. She kicked the door down afterwards and just walked out. I was there, I saw it happen, and I'm grateful that all that she did was dislocate my arm when the other orderly and I tried to stop her. She killed one of the others who tried, down at the front door. I don't know where she went but I think she might not have left entirely. Sometimes, when I look in at some of the other inmates, there's a look in their eyes that reminds me of her. I don't feel safe here anymore...

The Friend

Incorporeal Outsider (Chaotic Neutral)

The Friend is but one of many outsiders ensnared by the Mists of Ravenloft. It has forgotten its own name and origins during an eternity of imprisonment in the rolling fog of the Near Ethereal. When it was finally released into northern Darkon, the creature experienced a relief so deep as to be almost painful. And then the madness began.

Wherever the bodiless creature went, it encountered cruelty, depravity, and evil in all shapes and orders of magnitude. Even in the most remote stretches of nature it sensed corruption. When it tried to hide in the bosom of the most civilized places, its senses were violated by horror. The creature desperately sought some way to shield itself, to lessen the tide of darkness that burned its essence.

The creature found kindred souls: Lost Ones. These poor souls were capable of hearing it, if it just 'pushed' against them a little. By sharing the suffering of the Lost Ones, the creature could temporarily drown out its own agony. To this creature, to share is to care and while it was incapable of improving its own situation, it could help its 'Soul-mates' to claim justice. Should that cause a Lost One to be lost no longer, they would be unable to hear their sad Friend. When that happens, the

Friend consoles itself that at least someone is a little happier from its presence and that there are always plenty more Lost Ones.

The Friend drifts through the Realms of Dread, a thunder cloud looking for a place to rain down on. When it finds a Lost One, it can help them 'come back' a little, just enough to talk to it. It finds out the reasons for their madness and investigates the matter. The Friend is as patient as the grave and can spy unobserved, gathering all sorts of information. While doing so, the Friend is visible only to those who have the Ethereal Empathy feat, and even then only as a faint shadow on the air. Once it believes it knows exactly what happened to a Lost One, it may choose to 'help' them. It refuses to assist those it believes to be evil, but all others are fair game.

If a Lost One agrees to 'be Friends' with the bodiless Outsider, the creature merges with them, turning the Lost One into a 'Soul-mate'. The Friend may be merged with many people simultaneously, and it can depart one Soul-mate without dissolving the link by depositing a kernel of its essence inside its host. It tends to hover around its most recent Soul-mate, hoping to see justice done. The link can be temporarily

suppressed by a Protection from Chaos-effect. A Magic Circle Against Chaos can stop the Friend from approaching someone, though it cannot hold out once the link has been established. Dispel Chaos-effects terminate the link if the host fails a saving throw. The Friend is immediately aware of such terminations, even if it is not currently inside the host thus affected. In such instances, the Friend will re-establish the bond as soon as possible.

Only two events can permanently sever the link between the Friend and the Soul-mate. First, if the Soul-mate reaches the source of its distress and achieves whatever justice it can get. Once the Friend can assist the Lost One no more, it departs. Second, the Lost One regains their sanity. Some fortunate Lost Ones may achieve a measure of sanity from the cathartic act of violence they perform against their tormentors. Once the Lost One is lost no more, the Friend withdraws completely, allowing its former Soul-mate to enjoy life as they will.

To create a Soul-mate, add the following template to a base creature:

Soul-mate

Hit Dice: As base creature

Speed: As base creature

AC: As base creature

Attacks: As base creature

Damage: As base creature

Special Attacks: The Soul-mate gains the following special attacks:

Rage: The Soul-mate gains the ability to Rage as a Barbarian of equal level. The Soul-mate may use the Rage ability a number of times each day

equal to the character's Constitution modifier.

Special Qualities: The Soul-mate gains the following special qualities:

Immunities: The Soul-mate gains immunity to subdual damage and Poison immunity

Trackless Step: The Soul-mate may use the Trackless Step ability as if they were a Druid.

Saves: As base creature

Abilities: The Soul-mate gains the following ability bonuses: +8 Str., +4 Con., +4 Wis

Skills: The Soul-mate gains a +8 racial bonus to Listen, Search, Sense motive, Spot and Survival.

Feats: The Soul-mate gains the bonus feats Alertness, Ethereal empathy, Improved Unarmed Strike, and Track.

Climate/Terrain: As base creature

Organization: As base creature

Challenge Rating: +1

Alignment: As base creature, any non-evil

Advancement: By character class

The Soul-mate typically heads directly towards the source of its agony and madness, the sole thought in its mind the death of the opponent(s). Alternatively, a Soul-mate might seek out people who have abandoned them without outright malice, or people they had abandoned, asking directly for forgiveness or justification. Whatever the Soul-mate decides on doing, it will not stop until it has reached its goal or died trying.

Gute Enough to Kiss

History and Background of the Fensha

By James T Stearns

theemperor@springading.com

"We were perhaps seven days on the road when Bertrand found the thing, tangled in some bushes and mewling all pitiful like. The soft hearted fool started picked it up, and of course it cuddles right into his shoulder like it had known him for years. When Bertrand started to look poorly I thought the thing carried some kind of disease, especially when others in the caravan began to fall ill as well. But then I woke up and found the beast sitting on my chest. Its eyes were glowing orange like fire, even with no light in my tent. When I tried to sit up it ran, and I gave chase on trembling legs. Phillippe managed to shoot it, for all the good that did. It just carried on right out of camp as though nothing had happened. We found the body the next day, a half an hour from camp.

No one's getting better, though. We post extra sentries, and still it comes. We've killed it at least half a dozen times now, but it always returns the next night. Our guards can see the little orange eyes in the dark. And we continue to get weaker by degrees. Two nights ago, Rachelle never woke. She looked as though she'd been in the desert for weeks. But that is not the worst of it.

Last night, the first night since she died, there were two of them."

--Journal of Alix Rande, found amid the remains of a ruined caravan in eastern Darkon.

Appearance

A fensha appears to be a normal housecat, running the gamut of sizes from kitten to slightly larger than is normal for a housecat. Although the few visual representations of them always depict them as coal black, they actually vary significantly in color. One is just as likely to encounter a fensha in the guise

of an orange tabby as the stereotypical black. The two defining characteristics of the fensha are its eyes and its wings.

The fensha in its natural form has a set of raven black wings. They span nearly four feet at full extension, and are fully capable of flight, although they cannot be used for combative purposes. The fensha can retract these wings completely within the creature's body and only reveals the wings when it is

travelling outside the company of humanoid 'masters,' or to make a quick getaway.

The other common characteristic of the fensha is their eyes. Unlike normal cats, a fensha's eyes reflect neither yellow nor green, but a fiery orange. Fenshas can control this reflection, however, and usually only use it to unnerve those they wish to frighten or to taunt a helpless opponent. Combating a fensha with its eyes aglow is cause for a DC 9 Fear check.

History of the Fensha

The origins of the fensha are unknown, but a few theories have emerged. One curious tale tells of a necromancer named Anatole Vigne from Souragne. According to the story, Vigne had a familiar, a black cat, to which he had sewn a pair of owl's wings. He would send the creature flying out at night, where it would seek out open windows and fly into the houses looking for children. The familiar would perch on their chests and steal their souls, then carry them back to Vigne, who would warp the children's spirits into various forms of incorporeal undead to do his bidding.

A band of heroes dragged Vigne from his manor and hung him from a tree in 697, but the last entry in his journal indicates that his familiar had just birthed a litter of kittens. The first verified reports of the fensha come from Mordent, so how the creatures migrated from one domain to the other remains a mystery, if they did indeed originate in Souragne.

Several outlanders have noticed the resemblance that fenshas bear to the tressym, and some have theorized there may be a connection. The theory that

the fensha are a corrupted form of tressym has merit, for the creatures both show the same drive to form bonds with humanoids, even if the fensha's relationships do tend to end with betrayal and death. Fenshas are smart enough to exploit this similarity if they discover their target to be familiar with tressyms, and will pretend to be one in order to gain their victim's trust.

Society

Fenshas are cowardly creatures. They feed on the life essence they take, and so long as they have a ready supply of it, have no other ambitions. They do enjoy seeing the effects of their feeding.

In the wilderness, fenshas are persistent hunters. They stalk groups of travelers for days, returning night after night to feed on them. They will feed from as many victims as possible, spreading their attacks as much as possible. The fensha shadow their prey for great distances, taking a perverse delight in the growing weakness and eventual death of their victims.

In larger cities, fenshas will often adopt a person or a family as a protector, and will go out at night to feed from victims foolish enough to leave their windows open. Since they seldom feed from the same victim more than once, they are rarely discovered unless they drain an already sick or weakened target, resulting in the victim's death.

Much like the tressyms that they resemble, fenshas enjoy bonding with other creatures, and will often work for other, more powerful enemies. They typically act as forward scouts for bandits or monsters, both spying on the intended victims as well as softening them up for when their allies attack.

Combat

Fenshas avoid combat whenever possible. If attacked by an opponent they feel they can defeat, they use their Tackle ability over and over again until their target is immobilized and then kill their victim at their leisure. They prefer, however, to drain the Constitution of their victims over several days, eventually killing them.

If forced into fight, they will use their Tackle ability to create an opening and flee. If they are prevented from fleeing, they will use their Transfer Life ability to escape. They resort to tooth and claw combat only as a last resort and abandon it as soon as another opportunity presents itself.

Fensha

Tiny-size Magical Beast

Hit Dice	3d10+3 (19 hp)
Initiative	+5 (+5 Dex)
Speed	30 ft., fly 40 ft. (average)
AC	20 (+5 Dex, +3 natural, +2 size)
Attacks	2 Claws +5, Bite +0
Damage	Claw 1d2, Bite 1d3
Face/Reach	2.5 ft. by 2.5-ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks	Tackle, Drink Breath
Special Quality	Transfer Life, Create Spawn
Saves	Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +3
Abilities	Str 10, Dex 20, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 17
Skills	Balance +12, Climb +7, Hide +19*, Listen +5, Move Silently +11, Spot +5
Feats	Dodge, Mobility
Climate/Terrain	Any land or underground
Organization	Solitary
Challenge Rating	3
Treasure	None
Alignment	Usually Neutral Evil
Advancement	4-5 HD (Tiny), 6-10 HD (Small)

Tackle: If it charges, a fensha can make a special Tackle attack. This acts

as a single claw attack which also allows the fensha to make a trip attack. This trip attack uses the fensha's Dex modifier but is not modified by its size penalty, and so is made with a +8 to the opposed trip roll. The fensha may use its Drink Breath ability immediately on any opponent who is tripped its Tackle attack.

Drink Breath: If a fensha sits on a prone opponent's chest, it may draw breath from the target's lungs, draining its life force. This attack automatically inflicts 1 point of temporary Strength damage. The first time per day that a target is the victim of this attack, they also suffer 1 point of permanent Constitution drain. A target of a Drink Breath attack who is sleeping will awaken with a successful DC 20 Fortitude save. While using Drink Breath, the fensha is denied its Dex bonus to AC.

Create Spawn: Any humanoid creature killed by the fensha's Drink Breath attack may become a fensha themselves. If there are any normal cats (whether domestic or feral) within a one mile radius of the victim, then the victim's spirit possesses the body of the nearest cat. This new fensha's alignment changes to that of its parent, although it is under no particular allegiance to that parent. The fenshas will usually cooperate to destroy a small group, especially if prey is scarce, but then tend to go their separate ways. This ability does not function on animals that are not normal housecats, nor does it work on cats that have been enhanced in any way (such as familiars).

Transfer Life: A fensha may transfer its life essence to another house cat as a standard action. The fensha may use this ability if there is any normal cat (whether domestic or feral) within a one

mile radius of the fensha. The fensha's previous body will revert to being a normal cat, or if it has sustained 3 or more points of damage, it will fall over dead. This ability does not function on

animals that are not normal housecats, nor does it work on cats that have been enhanced in any way (such as familiars).

Vampire Cat

A Prowler in the Dark

By Kadarin

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Thanks to Alanik Ray (for the nice vampire cat picture) & Manofevil (aka Bunny the Vampire Cat Slayer, for Bunnicula). A first draft of this article was published in the Fraternity of Shadow Forum Cafe de Nuit. Thanks to all of the members who read it or commented on it.

Vampire Cat

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any inhabited land
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Nocturnal
DIET:	Blood
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (15-16)
TREASURE:	U
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic Evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	3
MOVEMENT:	18
HIT DICE:	3+6
THAC0:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-2/1-2/1-3 (claw/claw/bite)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	5%
SIZE:	T (1' tall)
MORALE:	Unsteady (5-7)
XP VALUE:	6,000

Note 1/Treasure: magical items are almost always cat-sized necklaces, and the chance is only 9% (for vampire cat mages, 99%). There are, of course, other possibilities of magical items a cat could use: paw-rings, artificial teeth, body armor...

Note 2/XP Value: XP Value may change considerably with age and salient abilities (see below).

Vampire cats (also called ultha) look just like ordinary domestic cats (see Cat, Small), some of them (~5%) having silver-grey fur and blue eyes, like Siamese cats (those are vampire cat mages, see below). They also behave as normal cats do (with a few exceptions), as long as some intelligent creature might be watching them. However, they

are never seen in sunlight and are active only at night. They do not show most of the usual vampiric traits (no elongated eye teeth, their image is reflected in mirrors, they cast shadows, they are not repelled by garlic cloves or bulbs...), but they are clearly afraid of water – any water; and, unlike other cats, they show a strong distaste of catnip.

Vampire cats may communicate with all cats and cat-like beings (e.g. paka, weretigers...) freely, but most of these dislike them (with the exception of midnight cats and luck-eaters).

Combat

Vampire cats normally flee from any open combat with creatures larger than themselves.

Opponents receive a -9 penalty on surprise rolls against vampire cats. Vampire cats are never surprised, always move silently, can spider climb 1×/night and climb and jump as a normal cat. They can always hide in shadows (at 100%) and have a chance of 90% to hide even without shadows.

Vampire cats feed on humans (or demi-humans or humanoids) only when their victims are sleeping and when no one is watching them. Any of their three attacks (which always succeed on a sleeping victim) will paralyze the victim (saving throw at -9). They then lick their victim's blood (for some unknown reason, these cats prefer male victims), draining 1 hp each round. For each successful attack, there is a 33% chance that the victim loses a level or HD; for each round of licking, there is 9% chance. As soon as the cat stops licking, the wounds will close themselves without leaving a scar; the victims themselves may never know they were attacked.

Vampire cats infect their human (demi-human, humanoid) victims with a kind of bloodlust if the victim fails a saving throw against poison at -9. After the first attacks, this will manifest only in a lust for bloody food, such as raw meat; further attacks drive the victim to actually drink blood. After the ninth (successful) attack, the thirst of the victim can only be stilled by human blood. He does not turn into a vampire, nor does he turn into any other kind of undead. They must, however, consume at least 6 hit points worth of blood per day or lose a HD or level. For restoring lost HDs/levels consult Van Richtens's Guide to Vampires. An ultha will not lick the blood of someone "cursed" this way.

There is no known cure for this affliction, although a tea made from blood-sucking plants (such as the blood rose) is said to suppress the symptoms for a time. It is said, however, that a magical ritual, in which garlic flowers, catnip, holy water, and some other rather rare ingredients are needed, as well as the spells remove curse and cure disease.

To look directly into the eyes of a vampire cat can be dangerous, for it may charm anyone who does so.

Vampire cats are extremely sensible to magic. As all undead, they are immune to mind-affecting spells, such as hold or sleep. They are, however, not immune to charm. A charm spell cast upon a vampire cat has a 10% chance of success if the caster strokes or feeds the cat as part of the casting.

Vampire cats know exactly when a spell is cast upon it as well as the intended effect. The ultha will react accordingly; so if it is target of a sleep spell, it will pretend to sleep. A detect undead spell will drive a vampire cat away. Ultha are also not immune to cold.

Vampire cats can be repelled by water, by catnip, and by symbols of lawful or good cat deities (e.g. Bast) or Lawful Good witch deities (like Hala). They cannot cross a line of catnip leaves or garlic flowers. Normal weapons cannot hurt a vampire cat, but enchanted, blessed, or even cursed weapons can. Surprisingly, given their fear of water, holy water does not harm vampire cats except when they are immersed in it, and even then it isn't more harmful than normal water. Vampire cats can be turned as shadows, although that may change with age.

To hold them under water, or to expose them to sunlight, will "kill" them, but they will rise again after nine hours or at the next nightfall, whichever comes later. A vampire cat loses one-ninth of its maximum hit point score per round if immersed in water, and loses 9 hit points per round if even partially exposed to sunlight.

If one wants to lay a vampire cat to rest for a longer period, they must use a sharpened bone of a dog or another canine, smeared with a paste made of catnip and garlic. The bone must then be enchanted, or blessed, or cursed, and driven through the cat's heart. Then its head must be cut off and its mouth be filled with catnip soaked in holy water. If treated this way, the cat will be laid to rest for nine years, and then rise as a Fledgling (without any salient abilities).

After being destroyed nine times, a vampire cat is destroyed forever. Killing them by water, sunlight, or turning does not count against their number of un-lives. Note that the cat does not have to reform at the place where its remains lie. As a matter of fact, they seldom do, so burning or interring the corpse is useless.

They prefer to rise in the vicinity of their destroyers to take their revenge.

Habitat/Society

Normally, vampire cats live on the blood of mice, rats, small rodents and small birds. They do, however, seem to find pleasure in attacking sleeping canines, including wolves, wargs, werewolves, and wolfweres. They never attack vampiric wolves or vampiric werewolves, nor any feline (except in special cases, see *Ecology*).

If they attack humans, they usually do so on nights of a dark moon and only if the human is alone and asleep. In most of these cases the ultha attack humans who have somehow angered them. The ultha have a longing to infect humans with bloodlust; especially when those humans have tried to destroy them. They have an excellent memory of such persons, which they keep even when killed or destroyed.

A vampire cat must drink at least 9 hp each night and must drain at least one level or Hit Dice per moon, else it suffers the effects described in Van Richten's Guide to Vampires. Vampire cats usually have underground lairs, but not necessarily in graveyards or within crypts. Here they sleep at day and hide the jewels they have stolen. These places are very well hidden and sometimes even guarded.

Ultha are loners and do not form packs, let alone families. As far as known they do not (or cannot) take grooms, nor do they have offspring. Vampire cats do not hibernate. Some sages believe vampire cats can travel the Mists just as the Vistani.

Age Categories

Age Category	Fledgling	Mature	Old	Very Old	Ancient	Eminent	Matriarch
Age (yrs)	0-9	10-18	19-27	28-36	37-45	46-98	99+
Hit Dice	3+6	4+1	4+1	4+2	4+2	4+3	4+5
Salient Abilities	0	1	2	3	5	7	9
Weapon to hit	Enchanted	Enchanted	±1	±1	±2	±2	±3
Regeneration/rnd	1	1	1	2	2	2	3
Magic Resistance	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%	30%	33%
Rnds sunlight	0	1	2	3	4	6	9

Salient Abilities is the total number of salient abilities the vampire cat possesses.

Regeneration/rnd means the hit points per round the cat regenerates. Note that regeneration is impossible while the cat is immersed in water or exposed to sunlight.

Rnds sunlight means the number of rounds a vampire cat can stand sunlight without being harmed. Regeneration is still impossible for a cat exposed to sunlight.

Note that due to the chaotic nature of vampire cats, all those values are at the discretion of the DM.

Salient Abilities

Note: It is strongly recommended that the DM chooses appropriate salient abilities instead of rolling dice, or add self-invented salient abilities. See also the guidelines for salient abilities in Van Richten's Guide to Vampires.

3d6 Salient Ability

3 **Innate Magic†**

4 **Passwall†**

5 **Invisibility:** The cat may become *invisible* 1×/night for 9 rounds; it is then also immune to any *detect* spells.

Reroll: The cat may turn *invisible* 3×/night, each time for 9 rounds.

6 **Transport†**

7 **Bloodlust†**

8 **Undead Control:** The vampire cat may control, 1×/night, for 9 turns, one small

3d6

Salient Ability

undead feline (e.g. a small cat zombie, a small cat skeleton, a skeletal cat, or a normal crypt cat).

Reroll: The vampire cat may either control a total of 9 HD of small undead cats or one greater undead cat, like a greater crypt cat (the cat must not decide this on getting this salient ability, but can choose in every case).

9

Superior Energy Drain: The chance of draining a level or a HD rises to 50% per attack, and to 21% per round of licking.

Reroll: The chance per attack rises to 67%, that per round of licking to 63%.

10

Aura of Silence: The ultha can, at will, project an *aura of silence* with a radius of 15'.

Reroll: The radius of the *aura of silence* is 33'.

11

Vampiric Rage: Once per night, for 9 combat rounds, the cat gains a bonus of +1 to both attack and damage rolls.

Reroll: The AC of the vampire cat is improved by one (AC 3 becomes AC 2); this is in addition to the attack/damage bonus.

12

Improved Saves†

13

Superior Regeneration: The vampire cat regenerates one more hp/rnd.

Reroll: The cat regenerates two more hp/rnd.

14

Extra Feeding†

15

Shapechange: The vampire cat can grow a pair of bat-like wings, gaining a Movement score of 12, Fly 18 (A), 1×/night for a maximum of 9 turns.

Reroll: The cat can use this ability 2×/night or change into mist-form (like a normal vampire) for 9 rounds.

16

Coloration: The fur of the vampire cat turns totally black (like that of a midnight cat), and its eyes take on a sickly green (or, in case of a mage, sickly blue) color.

3d6

Salient Ability

Reroll: The fur of the cat turns white, almost translucent, while its eyes become misty white (as if it were blind, which it isn't). Note that with this salient ability, it cannot longer be told if a vampire cat is a mage or not.

17

Summon Great Cat: The vampire cat may, once per night, summon one great cat (e.g., a tiger, a lion, or a mountain lion) within a radius of one mile. The creature will appear after 9 rounds, and be teleported back to the place from which it came after another 9 rounds, probably deeply confused and irritated. The vampire cat cannot control the great cat.

Reroll: The vampire cat may control the great cat for 3 rounds; after that, the great cat is free-willed (and may attack the vampire cat).

18

Golem Control: The cat may, once per night, summon and control one small feline golem, like a doll golem in form of a cat or a porcelain figurine. Range of summoning is 1 mile; the creature will appear within 9 rounds and will be under control of the vampire cat for further 9 rounds. Note that there must be an appropriate creature within the summoning radius.

Reroll: The cat may animate one small cat-like doll or cat-shaped porcelain piece, turning them into a doll golem or porcelain figurine. After 9 rounds, the golem becomes inanimate again, although some do have an evil glint in their eyes afterwards, especially at night.

†: see Van Richten's Guide to Vampires

Other Salient Abilities

Control Cats: The cat may control any small cat within 90', 1×/night, for 9 turns. It may only control as much HD as it has itself.

Improved: The cat may control one great cat within 30', 1×/night, regardless of HD, for 9 rounds.

Create Illusion: The vampire cat can use, 1×/night, an illusion spell (which one is at the discretion of the DM).

Improved: The creature may use one phasm spell, 1×/night, instead of an illusion spell, at the discretion of the DM.

Curse: The cat may, 1×/month, lay a curse on one creature. The curse may be embarrassing, frustrating, or troublesome. Vampire cats prefer

to cast their curses on nights of the dark moon.

Improved: The cat may cast dangerous or even lethal curses.

Dominate Victim: The vampire cat may dominate (as per spell) one human, demi-human, or humanoid 1×/night for 9 rounds if the victim fails a save vs. paralyzation.

Improved: The cat may dominate three victims for 9 rounds, or one victim for 27 rounds, or one victim for 9 and another for 18 rounds.

Familiar: The cat may choose one human, demi-human, or humanoid familiar. It prefers magic-users, especially witches. The other normal rules for familiars apply.

Improved: The cat may choose either three witches or one hag as a familiar.

Retain Salient Abilities: Even when destroyed in the proper manner, the vampire cat retains half of its Salient Abilities (rounded down). Since it starts again as a fledgling, a cat with this ability may gain much more Salient Abilities than a normal vampire cat could. For example, if a cat in the "Old" category with this ability is destroyed, it keeps one SA, and will gain another after reaching the "Mature" category again.

Improved: The cat keeps two-thirds of its Salient Abilities (rounded down).

Special Mode of Destruction: The cat must be destroyed in an unusual matter, e.g. with an enchanted wolf bone.

Improved: The cat must be destroyed in a special matter, e.g. with an enchanted werewolf bone.

Suffocate: 1×/night, the vampire cat may attempt to suffocate a victim (if the victim needs to breath, of course). Those failing a save against paralyzation and are not removed out of the area of effect (9' radius around the cat) will die according to the rules on suffocation.

Improved: The cat can use this ability 3×/night, and the effect has a radius of 27'.

Ecology

As undead creatures, vampire cats have no place within the natural order of living beings; they are things of the darkness that only exist to spread evil and chaos.

All vampire cats are female. It is not known how they proliferate, since they are also undead. Some sages believe that they can infect domestic cats, like human vampires, but do so only during a lunar

eclipse. It is, however, very unlikely that the newly-created fledglings become slaves to their “creator”. Fortunately, it seems like vampire cats cannot infect great cats.

Another theory states that some cats turn into vampire cats without any apparent reason. Powerful curses are also said to be able to turn a normal cat into an ultha. The first vampire cats are said to be created by the insane vampire-mage Radič the Fair.

The powdered claws, teeth, and preserved tongues of vampire cats can be used for spells and potions affecting blood, although this is not recommended.

Vampire Cat Mage

As noted above, vampire cat mages (sometimes known as *mena*) look like silver-grey Siamese cats with blue eyes, but without the distinctive markings. Unlike most other ultha (or cats in general), they have an innate ability to cast spells – and do not seem to be limited as to which spells (except for levels). Mena can cast wizard and priest spells from any school or sphere, without the need of spellbooks or spell materials. None of them has been observed to use healing spells.

Vampire cat mages have usually a higher intelligence score (genius, 17-18) than other vampire cats. All of them have the ability to Curse (see Salient Abilities above), but this does not count against their number of salient abilities. Note that the Salient Ability “Curse” and “Innate Magic” does not count against the number of spells a vampire cat mage can cast. Individual vampire cat mages may have more (or less) spells than given in the table below, at the discretion of the DM.

Age Category	Spell Level						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fledgling	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mature	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Old	2	1	1	-	-	-	-
Very Old	2	2	1	1	-	-	-
Ancient	2	2	2	1	1	-	-
Eminent	3	2	2	2	1	1	-
Matriarch	3	3	2	2	2	1	1

The Mistress & Other Vampire Cat Myths

There are rumors among sages (and some say, even among vampire cats themselves), that there exists a vampire cat queen, called Nith, or sometimes the Mistress, mightier still than the most powerful mage matriarch.

The tale of the only male vampire cat, named Krvich, seems even more unbelievable. It is told that it was a marine cat on board of a pirate ship that turned into a vampire cat and killed the whole crew. Later, it appeared in Zosopol, a small village in Barovia, where it terrorized the citizens. Krvich was destroyed and buried in the cemetery of a nearby monastery. The grave of Krvich is marked with a stone engraved with his name and protected by powerful spells against its return.

According to other sources, some ultha may take on the form of an elf, or even a full-fledged elven vampire; that their song may cause bleeding wounds; or that their bite transfers diseases, especially wererat lycanthropy. These rumors may refer to unique salient abilities. Some say that vampire cats have a special relation to a mythical beast called sphinx.

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Quoth the Raven 19

A Helping Hand

Two Good Creatures in the Mists

By Andrew "ashoon" Pavlides

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"There is something weird happening in the town. I overheard Diry, the thug, discussing with his no-good friends about a reward for killing large cats."

"You mean those Plain cats, for their ear tufts?"

"That's what I assumed too, but it seems those rubble have something else in mind. He specifically told them that the reward is not for plain cats, but for really big gray or white cats"

"Really? That makes sense in a way I guess"

"Makes sense? How?"

"Well, the cats have probably been stealing food. Remember the bad harvest Gunnar's field gave this year?"

"Yeah, they are near starvation this winter I hear. It's a matter of time before one of the kids or their mother die since they're all grown weak. I passed by last week to give them a few apples. They're all looking hollow; a strong wind would blow them away."

"Not anymore. Gunnar told us that his son, 5 years old heard noise from the other room and when he got there he

saw two large cats, one gray, one white, dropping off 2 sacks of flour and cheese!"

"You know, that means that Gunnar is stealing food, not "cats" out of a starving kid's imagination."

"That's what we thought too. But the kid told us the same story. Also, the only one missing flour and cheese is that fat loan shark that squeezes blood from many of us and Gunnar wouldn't dare to go anywhere near this guy or his estate. And now this! The thugs look for cats not Gunnar!"

"You know Tor, that reminds me of a story my grandfather told me, that happened to his family in Falkovnia. There was an illness in his village which was very hard on little kids. Two children had already died, 4 more were seriously ill, my grandfather among them.

Then one day they woke up fine! Weaker from the ordeal, but it seemed the illness was gone! My grandfather told me that in the middle of the previous night he dreamed that the two largest cats he's ever seen, one white, one gray,

were on his bed, licking his hands and face. His parents ignored that as fever-dreams.

Then, one day later the evil elite soldiers of that land, the Talons, rode in to the village looking for 'troublemakers'. They made quite a ruckus looking for anything out of the ordinary. My grandfather says they probably had no idea what they were looking for but still had orders to turn everything upside down"

"Your grandfather? Didn't he pass away 12 years ago? That story is probably 50 years old! And all the way up in Falkovnia? That's a biig distance from Nova Vaasa Artur!"

"Well, I tell you what I've been told, Tor. You were the one to put trust in Gunnar's cat stories."

The domains of dread can be harsh and unforgiving. The heroes striving to protect the innocents usually have to face overwhelming odds and after repeated brush with evil, they carry on their bodies and souls the trauma they inherited from these fights as their reward.

And yet, there is still goodness and hope in the world of Ravenloft. While creatures of the night abound, creatures made out of pure hope and goodness exist too. Angels are rare in the realm of the Mists and some of them, like the Isolde of the Carnival, had to make sacrifices to be able to blend in that world without damaging it permanently. And yet, they exist and try to help.

In the planes beyond, among the myriad angels serving good deities exist a usually overlooked type of celestial creatures that look like graceful feline humanoids who can change their form to that of a large cat of rare beauty.

From their celestial home of beauty and joy, these angelic creatures look upon the planes below and occasionally visit the material plane to help good men and women in their fight against evil.

There are few places in the multiverse where the heroes need as much encouragement and help to stay on the right path and defeat evil as the Demiplane of Dread.

Origins

Two of those celestial feline creatures ended up in these realms many decades ago. They look like two very large cats, over two feet in size. One is white like good paper and the other is darker, more gray, the color of an overcast morning. Both look healthy and beautiful, but not unnaturally so.

It's unclear if those angels were brought in the demiplane by the Mists of Ravenloft like many other outlanders, if they sought out permission to enter and managed to obtain it or even if they entered the demiplane in some other way.

What is clear is that those two angels gave up their humanoid form and some of their magical abilities. The area around them that is affected by their pure presence, their reality wrinkle, is also small compared to most other celestials and fiends although not less pure than other celestials' wrinkles. It also less damaging for the physical world but unfortunately, is taxing for the mind. Whether these are the result of the pact they made to enter the demiplane or if they made specific rituals upon arrival to limit the range of their reality wrinkle and the damage it causes to the demiplane, is also unknown.

Purpose

The two celestial cats don't seem to have a single, specific far reaching goal in mind except to help others and also oppose the various evil variants of cats or lycanthropes in the demiplane and vermin. Most of the few instances these celestials ever resorted to violence were against lycanthropes stalking their prey in some feline or rat form or the vengeful midnight cats that place curses upon those they fail to pamper them. Yet, the white and gray cats avoid setting foot in Valachan, the land of the werepanthers and a stronghold of feline horrors. Whether that's a result of their pact to enter the demiplane, a decision on their part or even the result of rituals they may have performed is unknown. The fact remains there are no reports of those two angels in that domain in the decades the cats are in the demiplane.

These two celestials are not angels of vengeance; they don't fight evil with divine fire or bolts of magic. They avoid violence and try to remain obscure offering a little help here and there. When it comes to criminals or other individuals that have a chance to redeem themselves, the cats flee instead of fight if possible. Generally, they wander the core without any discernible pattern. They usually stay away from large urban centers and help small communities or individuals in small ways. Many don't even know they had a helping hand to solve their problems and that seems the way the White and Gray cats prefer it.

While, as said earlier they don't seem to have a single goal, sometimes, the good acts they do seem to add on one another, build on goodness in a way, for a greater benefit down the road.

For example they are reported to have healed a couple of kids from

disease, stopping their desperate father from breaking in the uncaring priest's hold to steal magical concoctions he couldn't afford. Then a few days later a group of heroes arrived in the village, to recuperate after a fight with a disease spreading monster of the night. Two of their numbers were terminally ill but it seems the monster they faced had enough ill-begotten treasure since they could afford to buy those two potions from the greedy priest and saved their comrades. A few months later, those same heroes successfully fought off a werewolf and his inflicted spawn.

The two heroes were in so bad condition that they couldn't be moved further to seek help elsewhere; they would have died that night or the next day. The lands would have lost two of the champions of goodness that fight the horrors that plague the demiplane. By healing the kids, the celestial cats kept their father from committing a crime and gave a second chance to those heroes.

There was a different reported instance in Tepest where the two cats were making a kind of ruckus outside the house of a talented and charismatic young man, to the point he went out to chase them away. According to some neighbors, they sat there even after he threw things at them, nudging him to follow them, even pushing him with their bodies as he was trying to kick them away. In the end, the young man agreed to follow them.

The following morning he hasn't returned although there are reports from the neighbors that there were shadows around his house at night and "scary" people asking for him. The next day he still hadn't returned and nobody knew where he has been. Those fellows looking for him seem to become angry,

because his house was set on fire that night and left.

The lad returned to the village two days after that, a changed man according to the villagers. He had a determination they hadn't seen in him before. He didn't seem surprised that his house was burned or that there were outsiders looking for him. He gathered his things and left. Some say he became a priest preaching that good will prevail. Others say that he became a traveling singer. Some whisper that there is some fey blood in him and that turned him to a magic-user.

But everyone that dares to talk about this man agrees that when Shadow Fey stole a couple of infants from the village, it wasn't the Inquisition that brought them back unharmed, but this young man.

Powers

The white and gray cats don't have many impressive powers at first glance, nor an imposing physical form that would enable them to fight evil toe to toe. To assume though that these celestial beings are weak or they could easily fall prey to the monsters that plague the world is a mistake.

Although these two creatures are just over two feet in length their celestial body gives them incredible resilience for their size. Non magical weapons have lesser effect on them and while they have lost the celestial immunities of their original forms, they are still able to resist hostile magic. They also possess great speed that they can use to get away from danger quickly. Although they use it as last resort, they also possess a power to vanish from sight.

In the rare event that the cats will get in physical combat, usually against

undead or evil feline monsters, their enemies will find out that their claws and bite do considerably more damage than their small form would betray. Like the blessed paladins, they can enhance their attacks against evil creatures and undead.

Yet the power of these celestial creatures to battle evil lies outside of physical combat. They can cause undead to flee their presence like priests or in some cases completely destroy them outright. Mortal enemies that try to attack them find themselves plagued by sudden terror and fear based on intense awareness of their shortcomings, not unlike the mind affecting effects of their reality wrinkle.

These two angels seem to be able to undo, neutralize or lessen many of the supernatural powers of evil feline creatures. Wereleopards and werepanthers for example, find it difficult to spread lycanthropy in the presence of the cats and the cats can force any lycanthrope to assume his natural form. The plains cats of Nova Vaasa cannot startle enemies with their roar if they are near the white and gray cats and the celestials can remove the curses laid by the midnight cats.

Those that have advanced in the forbidden acts far enough to be able to use spells that affect the soul of a creature or control his or her mind and are depraved enough to use them, would find that the power of these celestials can break their spells and restore natural balance. The same is true for ghosts and other supernatural horrors that possess the body of an individual or dominate his or her body.

As mentioned before, these beings have the ability to heal within minutes any non-magical disease and they use that power extensively. Aside from this

ability, the cats can even restore health to the spirit or body of those suffering from the spirit draining attacks of wraiths or spectres or even the health damaging effects of a vampire's blood draining.

Yet, the most intriguing of their abilities is their sense of where they should be and when they should leave. While not infallible or easy to quantify, those two celestials seem to have an inkling as to where they're needed or when their enemies close in on them, that resembles the Bussengeist's sense of impeding tragedy. Using this power the White and Gray cats are on the way to their next troubled community before their enemies reach them. Even if they decide to stay to complete their mission or goal, they're never caught unaware.

Reality Wrinkle effects

Alas, like most celestials and fiends in the demiplane the cats pure nature superimposes itself upon the realm. This effect of affecting negatively the world around them, called "reality wrinkle" is the result of their pure nature seeping through the tainted world around them and changing it.

The reality wrinkle of those two celestial beings is small compared to the reality wrinkles of other celestials and fiends. Both the cats have reality wrinkles that extend just 400 to 500 feet from themselves. Whether the celestials are together or not, the effects of the overlapping reality wrinkles don't change.

The effects of the reality wrinkles of these creatures are different from most celestials. Whether that's the result of power rituals performed for this purpose, the pact they had to make to enter the world of Ravenloft or some other reason

is unknown. The fact remains that these angels are less damaging to the land than other celestials. That's not to say however that their purity won't cause problems for the land around them or that they can safely remain in a community for long periods of time.

The reality wrinkle of the white and gray cats has the generic property of acting as a floating pocket domain, where the darklord's powers don't work and that within the limits of the reality wrinkle the borders of any domain remains open. The reality wrinkles also carry the problem that they attract the attention of most darklords since they effectively steal away part of their domains.

Within their reality wrinkle, the natural healing and closing of wounds happens at a reduced rate; it takes twice the time for a wound to close. Food and materials spoil, rot or age at an increased rate.

The effects of their pure presence don't stop in the physical world. Persons that spend more than a few hours each day within the reality wrinkle of those angels start getting dreams highlighting their imperfections, shortcomings, mistakes, crimes and regrets, whether true or imaginary. A woman subconsciously (or consciously) concerned with her weight would see herself as a gluttonous fat monster being ridiculed by her family and loved ones. A usually honest merchant would see himself impoverished and begging on the streets, getting the ire of the employee he sent away or those he refused to give charity to. A man that secretly lusted for the wife of his brother would dream of his brother berating him and his own wife and children turning away from him ashamed.

Every sentient creature on the world has things to regret that weight on his conscience, hidden fears and taboos that he or she doesn't want to think about and would wish some things about himself or herself were different.

The purity of those two creatures seems to sip slowly into the mind of those spending time near them as surely as it sips in the fabric of the world around them. It is possible that this strain their presence puts on the mind could be worse if they weren't consciously trying to suppress it. If that's true, woe to everyone in the area if they somehow lose control of this power.

As said earlier, the reaction of the mind at first is usually bad dreams. If the celestials aren't present the following days, the bad dreams become milder each night till they stop entirely in four, five days. However, if the same person is exposed again in the pure presence of the celestial cats before the mind is put at ease, the bad dreams escalate to scathing nightmares that leave the person waking in the night full of self-loathing or insecurity. As such, the person is fatigued the following day. Nightmares turn to regular bad dreams in a few days if the celestials aren't present anymore.

The strain to the mind by the purity of the angels becomes more dangerous a couple of days after the nightmares start. Thoughts of the person's shortcomings, guilt and regret start to sip in his mind even during the day and at times, visions similar to the dreams visit him or her even when awake.

The severity of those situations has to do with the persons themselves and is different from person to person. In some cases when the person in question is mostly at peace with himself and the actions he has taken, the nightmares and visions from the subconscious are easier

to endure and it takes longer for madness to set on the mind, far longer than the angelic beings will be around. On other cases however when guilt, regret, fear or insecurity weight heavily upon one's mind, this mental torture can quickly lead to madness.

Most people under the effects of the nightmares or the visions start being withdrawn and distant trying to cope with themselves and their inner demons. At this point, while the effects will again lessen a few days after exposure to the angels' presence is eliminated, some people may acquire lingering effects, born from their own struggle with themselves or the realizations of their shortcomings. The aforementioned woman that had visions and nightmares about her weight may become anorexic for example, or the man that harbored some feelings for his brother's wife may become distant from his brother out of shame.

While the bad dreams and even nightmares wouldn't affect a creature that doesn't sleep, the mind of any kind of creature, even of an undead or animal, reacts to this kind of purity. It takes longer to manifest for creatures that don't dream but it affects them at some point. Animals are scared and become more hostile if forced to remain in the area for long for example as their main concerns in life are survival and fear.

In the case of undead and similar creatures however, it's just an annoyance as they are reminded of their shortcomings without that affecting them since most are already sociopaths. In essence, it works on such creatures like personal insults would; angering them without harming them.

The celestials realize the strain they put on the world and the minds of those around them so they avoid exposing

people to this mental torture. While they may decide to expose one's fears and shortcoming to himself for cathartic reasons, they wouldn't willingly drive a person to insanity, nor encompass a whole community in self-loathing induced depression.

In very few cases though, the white and gray cats have allowed their mind-warping side-effect to run rampant crushing the mind of those they withdraw their protection from within moments.

There were a couple werepanthers stalking the white and gray cats. They warned a community at which the cats were near that they will slay their children if the cats don't come alone to surrender to them. The terrified villagers didn't even know who "the cats" were. They locked their children in the houses and set a vigil through the night.

Whether those werepanthers were sent by the Baron of Valachan or were acting alone will forever be a mystery since when a group of adventurers followed distant screams the next day to a cave in the woods, they found the two werepanthers in human form, thrashing around and screaming madly in abject terror and crying hot tears of regret. Their minds have been permanently shattered and they have joined the ranks of the Lost Ones of this land. Of course since they were savage and evil creatures, the heroes didn't send them to an asylum but slayed them as they were thrashing helpless. Whether the white and gray cats agreed with that decision or not is debatable but the villagers didn't seem to mind.

Phylacteries

In the decades those two celestial creatures wander the land helping

communities and heroes to further goodness, especially with their non-violent attitude, their physical bodies must have been destroyed at least a few times. How come then and the White and Gray cats still roam the land?

Like most celestials and fiends that enter the lands of the Mists, these two angels have phylacteries that store their spirit in case their bodies are destroyed. Where those phylacteries are hidden, what they are like and how they can be destroyed it's unknown. However, since the Cats need the bodies of large cats to send their spirits in, the place their phylacteries are hidden is probably in a domain with a multitude of cats.

To return to the world in animal form, the spirits of these celestials must possess the body of a cat. The body must be near the place of the phylactery for the angel's spirit to inhabit it. The White and Gray cats take over only the bodies of freshly deceased large cats, never the body of a living cat, even if that means they have to wait. If one of the two angels is still alive, it is reasonable to assume it will bring the other a cat's body to speed up the return of the other angel.

At the time where the spirit of the angel enters the body of the cat, a transformation takes place and the cat's body changes within moments to match the appearance of the celestial in question; a beautiful cat over two feet long either white or gray.

Enemies

Throughout the lands, the angelic cats have managed to disrupt or help mortals to disrupt, many schemes of the creatures of the night. Although they keep a low profile, their presence is automatically sensed by the darklords

who have sent their minions time and again to terminate the white and gray cats or at least banish them from their lands.

Dominic D'Honaire and Baron Urik von Kharkov seem to hold a grudge against the White and Gray cats to the point of sending some of their lackeys against them even in other domains. Especially for the Lord of Valachan this is strange since the cats have never been seen in his domain. The wererats of Richemulot, also seem to be aware of these two celestials and they often take action when they are seen in this land, but so far they haven't chased them outside of this domain.

After finding out that the purity of these angelic creatures can drive his lackeys insane and even break his hold on them, Baron Urik von Kharkov prepared a trio of special necklaces that contain a drop of his blood. This necklace can partially shield his werepanther minions from the accelerated mind-disrupting power of the angels' reality wrinkle and help the werecreatures resist the cats' power to force the creatures take their humanoid form or break the Baron's hold on them. The method of creation the nosferatu used isn't known but it was certainly terrible with a cost counted in human lives.

Dominic D'Honaire has more access and far more faith in arcane and divine spellcasters. Being able to sense the presence of the celestial beings and their location easily when in Dementieu, he has acquired two magical rapiers, so immersed in evil that they will deal great wounds to the pure creatures if they strike them or any good creature in that regard. Those rapiers are in the hands of two of his most battle capable Obedients and he doesn't hesitate to send them

after the cats the moment they step in his domain. The Obedients are those hapless souls that are so used to being controlled by Dominic, that he has a far easier time controlling their every move. The mental barriers this manipulator has set on their minds make it far more difficult for the angels to break the darklord's hold on any obedient they encounter.

Dominic has lost the control of enough subjects of his vile mind control to hold a grudge against the two celestials and time and again, he has hired or magically coerced mercenary bands to hunt them down even outside of his realm.

As far as the Cats seem to react on those threats, they avoid confrontation with Dominic's Obedients perhaps because they realize the Obedients have little initiative of their own or perhaps because they're non-violent creatures. Most of the time, the cats simply aren't there where the Obedients arrive, having moved to a different community. By the time Dominic sends new orders to his minions, the cats have relocated again.

The only way that Dominic D'Honaire can possibly predict where the cats will be, is to predict where they will be needed next... or arrange that their intervention will be needed in a community. Removing priests and healers as a disease or a disease-bearing horror strikes a community for example, has a strong possibility to attract the celestials after all.

When it comes to the werepanthers the Baron sends against the white and Gray cats though, they don't always retreat. The celestials seem to have a vendetta of sorts against feline monsters and werepanthers are not exempt from that. The cats will often help local heroes locate and confront the werepanthers and will use their powers

to even the odds between heroes and monsters.

Closing words

The celestial creatures described above usually don't take a direct hand in destroying or driving away evil. They usually do good in small ways and that good adds up with other good deeds to create a better world. When the white and gray cats act against an evil creature they usually do so by indirectly helping mortals help themselves.

A group of heroes puzzled about the murder that took place in a village may find garlic and mirrors in their beds waking up, warning them of the presence of vampires. When trying to put to rest the ghost that haunts a mansion, the cats may simply draw the attention of the investigators to a painting of the woman along with her child to help them figure she has died out of grief over her lost child.

At other times, they would help heroes that faced horrors of the night to overcome the scars they earned in the fight, be it wounds, curse or disease, so that they can keep their fight against evil, or simply to have a better life.

The White and Gray Cats

Small Outsider (good)	
Hit Dice	6d8+6 (33 hp)
Initiative	+8 (Dex, imp. Init.)
Speed	40 ft., climb 20 ft.
AC	17 (+4 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)
Attacks	2 claws +10 melee, bite +8 melee
Damage	Claw 1d3-1, bite 1d4-1
Face / Reach	5 ft. by 5-ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks	Fear, Horror, Smite evil 3/day, turn undead
Special Quality	Darkvision 120', low-light vision, Reality Wrinkle, SR 17, Phylactery, Dam Reduction 5/evil, Premonition, 10 corruption points, Dispel domination and possession, force shapechange, counter feline powers, tongues, spell-like abilities
Saves	Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +9
Abilities	Str 8, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 13
Skills	Spot*+12, listen +9, move silently*+14, hide+14, climb*+7, jump*+7, swim+4, Knowledge (planes)+7, Knowledge (Religion)+7, Knowledge (Ravenloft)+7, Knowledge (Nature)+7, Knowledge (arcana)+5, heal+6, sense motive+7, survival+6
Feats	Weapon Finesse, iron will, improved initiative
Climate / Terrain	Any land in the Core except Valachan
Organization	Pair
Challenge	4
Rating	None
Treasure	Neutral Good
Alignment	*those skills gain a racial +4 bonus.

The White and Gray cats are very large for house cats, a bit over 2' in size so many consider them wild cats. They're beautiful as cats go, but not extraordinarily so.

Spell-like abilities (Sp): The cats never use vocal, material or somatic

components for their abilities. However, the casting time for those spell like abilities is usually 1 full round per spell level. For touch spells, the cats should be adjacent to the target and lick or shallow bite the wound they wish to heal or the hands and face. Caster level 8th.

3/day: remove disease, remove curse, protection from evil (duration 1 hour)

2/day: Aid, cure light wounds, align weapon (good only, also gives the benefits of the magic weapon spells. Duration 1 hour for both)

1/day: bless water, consecrate, invisibility (self only), lesser restoration.

1/week: restoration* (Both cats should be present to use that spell, and only one of them can use it in any given week)

The cats watch those they deem worthy, and if they feel they need an extra helping hand, they may approach them and use their spell-like abilities to help them before a fight with evil or to heal them after a fight.

Phylacteries: Like most outsiders in Ravenloft, the white and gray cats have phylacteries. In the case they die, their spirits return to the phylacteries and they have to send their spirit out to take the corpse of a cat that lies within 60' from the phylactery. The body of the cat inhabited changes within 3 rounds to match the appearance used by the celestial that now inhabits it. In case just one of the celestials dies and returns to the phylactery, the other one tries to get there as soon as possible to help the other one return to a body.

The phylacteries of those celestials are small cat-like figurines of alabaster. One is white, one is gray. The phylacteries sit buried in the grounds of a small monastery about 1000' from

each other. The handful of monks (commoners and experts mostly, not monk class) that tend the place, have planted large bushes over the phylacteries, which have grown exceptionally healthy and lush, although they tend to make people uncomfortable if they look at them for long.

The small monastery, home to a handful of monks most of which don't know what's buried in their grounds, can be in any domain of the DM's choosing that would house a monastery of good and hospitable monks.

Thanks to the abundance of cats the monks keep around and tend, each celestial killed would return to the world within 1d8+2 weeks after losing its body (or double that if both are killed).

Premonition (Ex): The white and gray cats seem to have a sense or inkling of where they will be needed next and how the good they make or the people they help would create further good down the road. Their sense is not infallible and they know it, so before they get involved in any situation they tend to watch from afar for a time. Their reality wrinkle makes it difficult for them to maintain frequent presence in a community so unless matters are urgent, they may approach to assess a situation for brief visits every three or four days, spending the rest of the time watching a different community or hiding from the Darklord's minions.

Their premonition can also inform them if they will be in danger so they can choose to flee the minions of evil. Because of this ability, the cats can never be caught flat-footed and they're never surprised in combat.

Corruption points: Both the cats have 10 corruption points, either from rituals made once they arrived in Ravenloft or

by the pact they had to do in order to enter the demiplane.

10 corruption points mean that any other power ritual they attempt has a 50% chance to fail. Also if they attempt to use a portal to escape Ravenloft, they would have 50% chance to just re-appear in the place the mists deposited them the first time.

Reality Wrinkle: The reality wrinkles of those two celestials are about 450' in radius. They have the usual property of reality wrinkles to superimpose themselves over the domain, cutting off a darklord's power and keeping the borders open within the radius.

The purity of the angels as with most celestials permeates and damages the world, but less than usual; natural healing in the reality wrinkle is slowed to $\frac{1}{2}$ normal instead of stopped. Food and materials spoil or rot at twice the usual rate.

The greatest problem though, is that the pure presence of the celestials slowly affects the minds of all creatures in their reality wrinkle, highlighting their imperfections, guilt and shortcomings. The effects aren't the same for everyone since their minds react differently.

The guideline below is for PCs without any gross problem or source of shame or guilt. The DM is advised to increase the DCs and the severity of the effects for outcast heroes, or one with a dark past. Or in the case of a hero with good self-esteem and clear conscience the DCs may be lower.

All these effects are mind affecting, so effects that give bonuses to will saves vs mind affecting powers apply.

The first day that the PCs spend more than an hour in the reality wrinkle of the celestials they will have bad dreams about faults or mistakes when

they go to sleep, born from their subconscious. When sleeping the PCs should attempt a Will save with a DC of 14. Success means they will remember having some bad dreams but they won't be further affected. Failure means the PCs had trouble sleeping and they are fatigued for the rest of the day. Those bad dreams and the fatigue would remain for the next night too. Spending more days under the surveillance of the cats increases the DC by 2 every night.

For someone already suffering the effects of the first failed saving throw and spend again more than an hour in the same day within the reality wrinkle, the second night the dreams become nearly unbearable, personal, intense and horrid. The character has to make a will save with DC of 14 or suffer the effects similar to the "nightmares" horror effect. Again, spending more days in the reality wrinkle increases the DC by 2 every night. Unlike a horror save though, the nightmares quickly lessen to bad dreams (and fatigue) once the character succeeds at a will save with the same DC. Usually, someone waking up screaming in the night is a sign for the Cats that they should leave for a few days.

Someone suffering from the nightmares of the 2nd failed save, it could be dangerous to stay more in the presence of the celestials. Such a character should make a will save with DC of 14 (+2 for each extra day as usual) or suffer under the effects similar to the "hallucinations" madness effect but without any ability loss. After this point, some lingering minor effect will remain. For example a dwarf that had nightmares and visions about his comrades that died while he was passed out drunk, may develop a mild aversion for drink. Again, these visions tone down to nightmares once the character

succeeds at a will save with the same DC.

After the hallucinations start, the exhausted and strain mind of someone that spends even more days within the reality wrinkle starts to break down. Such a character should make a madness save with DC of 14 (+2 for each extra day). Unlike previous effects, this mental damage doesn't go away; it's a normal madness save following the usual rules for recovering from madness. More exposure to the angels after that leads to further madness checks till the poor character is a Lost One.

Force Shapechange (Sp): Upon successfully identifying a shapechanger through any means, the Cats can force the creature to assume his or her natural form. The shapechanger must be within the reality wrinkle and the line of sight of the angel for this ability to work. The shapechanger must succeed on a will save with a DC of 16 or be forced to assume natural form (human for most werecreatures, wolf for wolfweres) for as long as he or she remains within the reality wrinkle of any of the two celestials. The same shapechanger can be affected only once per 24h by this ability from the same celestial.

If the shapechanger is suffering from an involuntary change, the sudden reversal may prompt a horror check, especially if the werecreature is unaware of his or her curse.

Tongues (Ex): The white and gray cats can understand (but not speak) any language.

Counter Feline powers (Su): The most versatile power of these celestials is actually their ability to counter virtually any power a feline creature uses against other creatures with the exception of darklord powers. Within 30' of the celestials creatures that are targets of

powers or effects from feline enemies, gain a +4 to their saving throws, or the feline powers have a -4 to the roll to activate them. Abilities that don't allow a saving throw now can be resisted with an applicable saving throw (no penalty).

For example the ability of the midnight cats to place curses receives a -4 penalty if the target or the midnight cat is within 30' of the celestial. A Paka's ability to see through eyes of felines and command them would require a feline target to roll a will save to resist the Paka's power if the target or the paka was within 30' of the celestial. A creature making a saving throw vs a Crypt cat's infection or a werepanther's lycanthropy would gain a +4 bonus to the saving throw if he or she is within 30' of one of the white and gray cats.

Abilities used by darklords on creatures within that radius are unaffected.

Dispel domination and possession (Su): The Cats can break the hold of a creature over another creature's mind, soul or body. To do that, the celestial has to succeed on a melee touch attack with its bite against an unwilling target. If successful then the celestial makes a dispel check against such effects (like dominate, magic jar, the malevolence power of ghosts etc). The DC of this check is 11+the effect's caster level (or HD in case of malevolence or similar powers). The angel's caster level for this power is considered 12 against mind controlling spells and powers and 8 against possession or body-control effects. The Celestials may use this ability 1/hour.

Ghosts, ancient dead, vampires etc. get a bonus to the DC of the dispel for their inherent abilities equal to their rank; for example to break the dominating effect of a mature 8HD

vampire's gaze, the DC is 11+8 (HD) +1(Age).

This power can be even be used to reverse transposition up to stage two. The DC is 11+the fiend's HD and if successfully banished, the target creature receives a +2 to the fortitude save to survive the reversal of the transposition.

Special: Dominic's obedient increase the DC of the dispel check equal to the bonus they get to resist mental manipulation from other sources. The necklaces Urik von Kharkov made for this reason, also increase the DC of the dispel by 4 (as well as give a +4 morale bonus to the will save of the carrier against the powers of these two celestials). Similar defenses could be made by other Darklords.

Fear (Su): The cats can make a standard action imbue a living enemy within 60' with fear, using a gaze attack. This is their most common form of self-defense. The target must pass a will save with DC 16 or becomes frightened for 1d4+6 rounds. A target that saves against this effect cannot be affected by the same celestial's fear power for 24 hours.

Horror (Su): The most terrible power the celestial possess, it's not actually a power in itself. It's their ability to withdraw their protection from a creature from the true mind-shattering power of their reality wrinkle, letting it affect the creature unchecked.

It takes just a swift action from the white and gray cats to remove their protection for a specific creature in their reality wrinkle. However the effects on the mind don't start immediately.

The first round after the protection is withdrawn the creature feels a foreboding sense of doom as his or her or its mind starts reacting and absorbing

fast the seer purity and perfection of the two celestials. Aside of that there are no ill effects. The second and third round the creature starts having strong feelings of self-doubt, fear or guilt that intensify. At the start of his or her or its turn 4 rounds after the protection was withdrawn and every round thereafter the feelings and visions become overwhelming and the target has to make a horror check with a DC of 14+1 (max DC 24) for each extra round that the target remains inside one of the celestials' reality wrinkle or until the target becomes a Lost One due to lost madness saves.

Once withdrawn and the horror checks start, the celestials need 2 full minutes to re-instate their protection on the target's mind at which point the victim will probably be suffering from long term lingering effects. Because of the severity of this mind crushing ability, the Cats almost never use it. In case they use it as punishment, in most of the cases they run away in order to remove the target from their reality wrinkle before he or she or it dies from system shock.

Whether the target remains in the reality wrinkle of one or both the celestials, the effects of this ability are the same. "Pure" creatures like other celestials or fiends are immune to this ability, and the Dark Powers shield darklords from the mind shattering power of the cats' purity. Innocents receive a +4 bonus against this power in case it is involuntarily used on them.

Smite evil(Su): 3/day the angel can make a melee attack against an evil creature with a +2 to hit roll and deal +6 damage. The cats use this power mainly against inherently evil creatures like fiends or against undead.

Turn Undead (Su): The Cats can turn undead like 6th lvl clerics (turn check +3). 1/day the celestial can choose to destroy the undead turned as if using the sun domain power. Use of this power destroys undead even if they could flee. Darklords are immune to this effect.

Blaustein

A Preview of the Sea of Sorrows Report

By Joël Paquin

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"Blue is the most insubstantial color and seldom occurs in the natural world except as a translucency. It is considered empty, or austere, pure, and frosty. It is also the coldest color. Indifferent and unafraid, centered solely upon itself, blue is not of this world: it evokes the idea of eternity, calm, lofty, superhuman, inhuman even."

-- Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant,
Dictionary of Symbols

Blaustein

By Viktor Hazan, xxx date, 761

After the tiny but extremely mentally disturbing Dominia, it was with some anxiety that Howe took the *Black Pelican* to sea again, this time toward the infamous island of Blaustein. I too looked forward to it with anxiety, since my preliminary notes regarding our probable greeting upon arrival at this island included such *hilariously funny* things as being lynched by an angry and unwelcoming mob brandishing clubs and

torches, or seeing the ship seized and all on board killed and dismembered, and not necessarily in this order. That is, unless the lucky ship captain was able to leave Blaustein in a hurry. These people probably have a sense of humor I can't appreciate.

Indeed, from the mainland and the Sea of Sorrows' civilized islands, Blaustein's reputation is grim, to say the least: the island is seen as a haven of

The following text is a preview of the future Sea of Sorrows FoS report. As you probably noticed, this report takes much longer to write than expected, and we blame the hot weather of Souragne, making us sleepy in the afternoon.

But to make amend, here's a large chunk of it: Blaustein!

Arr! Please riot after reading this report!
Your suggestions and comments will be integrated in the final version.

Main writer: Joël Paquin, with the FoS for additional ideas.

thugs and pirates who are always on the lookout for some evil deed involving capturing a ship, smuggling dark cargoes and even, some whispers, slave trading. Also, according to the few non-pirates who have survived their visits to tell about it, newcomers to Blaustein are either attacked in the port or summoned before the ruler.

The known despot of these ruffians is called Lord Raoul Morrell, a bloody and violent tyrant. But reports have it that his people are extremely loyal to him, taking his words as wishes to be granted right away, including dying for him if he asks for it. Lovely.

However Captain Howe told me not to be afraid of our arrival in Raïs, Blaustein's port city, and had a large green, red and blue flag lifted at the main mast. It depicted a glowing gem,

deep blue. Howe assured me that having this flag and disbursing the docking fees upon arrival would ensure a safe docking, and also some minimal security for the boat.

On land afterward was another story, Howe warned me. A scholarly looking person like me surely wasn't going to walk the streets of Blaustein without attracting serious and violent problems. "What a lovely field trip, I miss Todstein already," I thought grimly.

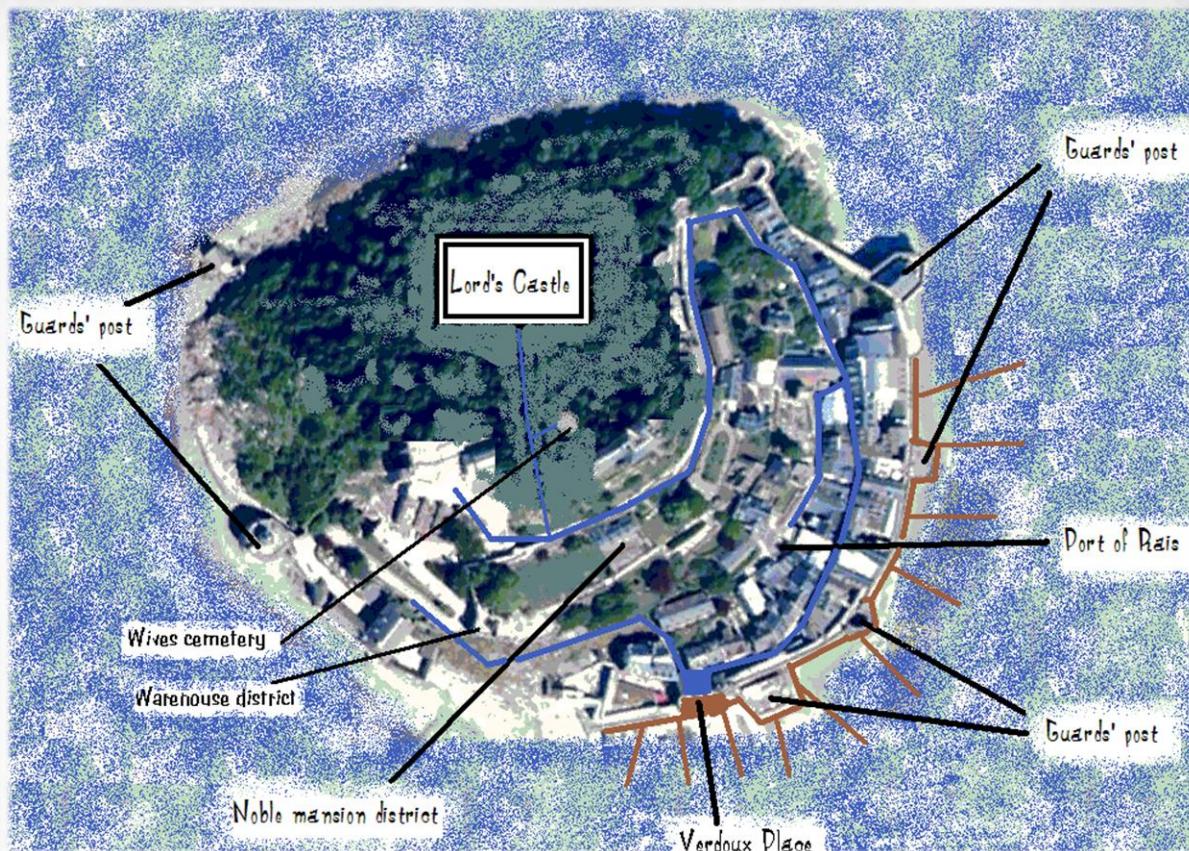
I also interviewed at length some of the men in Howe's crew, who had visited Blaustein often. From their uncomfortable smiles, slightly ashamed, I understood they *liked* these visits very much, as the island was a paradise for sailors on permission looking for female charms and alcoholic oblivion. Nonetheless, I acquired a lot of information by talking to them, as well some Blaustein lingo to help me pass like a regular, yo ho ho!

Blaustein in Short

Location:	Sea of Sorrows, about 35 miles off Port-A-Lucine (Dementieu)
Ecology:	Minimal ecology (mostly urban)
Environment:	temperate-warm hill on an island
Darklord:	Lord Raoul Morrell (Bluebeard)
Year of formation:	643 BC (as an island in the Sea of Sorrows)
Cultural level:	Early Medieval (6)
Population:	300 (90% human, 8% Caliban, 2% other), plus anywhere from 20-80 foreign sailors docked there, usually for a few days, up to a week
Main settlements:	Raïs (port) (pop. 300)
Religion:	Bone organized
Language:	Mordentish, Lamordian, Darkonese
Government:	Tyranny
Money:	Any copper, silver or gold is used in Raïs

Blaustein's Topological Survey

After traveling the murky and foggy Sea of Sorrows for a while, the rocky island of Blaustein is almost a welcome sight of solid land. But quickly this impression fades as its dark triangular shape stands out of the sea like a threatening shark tooth coming out of the water. Also, the imposing blackish castle on top of the small island seems menacing as soon as buildings can be seen by onlookers from an incoming ship. The castle rests on the hill above the port, but I'll get to this place later in the report.



The circular island itself is very small, about a thousand feet wide. Its maximum height, where the castle is located, is about 400 feet above sea level. Three of the island's sides are rocky cliffs at least a hundred feet high, making the island inaccessible on these sides. Captain Howe told me of the numerous legends about hidden caverns in these cliffs, where the usual forgotten pirate hoards are waiting to be rediscovered, watched by ghosts. One of these famous apparitions is La Llorona, a woman crying for her husband lost at sea. Other legends make her a victim of the pirates. But I heard this Llorona legend elsewhere on other islands. She might be a recurrent island legendary theme, like that "Bloody Mary" is on land. Others say that there is a secret passage from one cavern climbing to the castle itself. I've watched closely these

cliffs with Howe's spyglass, and saw nothing. If there really are caverns around Blaustein, they are submerged or very well hidden.

The only settlement in Blaustein is the small port town of Raïs. It is walled and protected by many sturdy guard posts. On the other side of the island, there are two more guard posts that are supplied by boat, since no trail leads to these on land. On these defensive towers, light catapults are displayed to menace any ship coming forward. I estimate that a ship not bearing the Blaustein flag would suffer at least a dozen attacks before reaching the docks, most possibly sinking it.

In Raïs, outside the defensive walls, there are floating wooden docks large enough for two horse carriages to meet side by side. I saw about fifteen ships docked, and these were from extremely

different origins. Their flags were mainly Darkonese, Valachani, Dementlieuse, as well as some from other exotic places. There was even one from Souragne. A dark junk was positioned there, bearing a flag I could not identify at first. Howe told me it came from a wild place in the mists called Sri Raji. Never been there yet. Along with their homeland flag, all of these ships also had the infamous Blaustein flag.

This Blaustein flag was a good idea to quickly select whose boats were welcomed and whose boats to be quickly boarded and rampaged. I guess this little naval secret isn't totally fool proof, but if most sailors in the know keep their mouth shut, and if these flags are rare enough, it could work well as a first line of security for Blaustein. Those captains having one of these flag surely keep it locked the rest of the time, as it could reach a good value on the black markets.

Behind the protective walls, the small city of Raïs tilts between the slope and the sea. A few hundred feet over the town, a few larger mansions stand on a narrow plateau. And over the mansions, on the topmost point of the island, is where the Lord's castle rises.

When arriving at the dock, there were eight armed guards waiting for us. One member of this thuggish welcome committee held a whistle, ready to alert other guards, if we were not on the *guest list*. Waiving to them, Howe told them that all aboard are loyal to Blaustein's Lord, and when near enough, he threw them a pouch containing the 10 gold piece docking fee. While one of the guards was counting the gold pieces, another asked, "Ahoy, Captain! Have any beauty on board?" at which Howe answered negatively "No, matey, no wench on board," and then added a

salacious joke on the right use of women on board, spicy enough to make me raise an eyebrow. But the Blausteiners guards laughed loudly, said "Aye! Have a good stay! Long live Raoul!" and then went away from our boat. With a little boyish smile, Howe excused himself and said "Here, you have to play their way, and try hard to get in their club, or you'll quickly attract attention and get serious trouble. Remember this while on land."

I went down inside the ship to my room to finish preparing myself for the visit. I had my hair done in braids on the trip to Blaustein, and had a few tears in a black cotton shirt. A few skull tattoos on my arm (temporary ink, mind you!), a dagger in my belt and ready to go into trouble I was. Howe offered to accompany me on land, and I was really glad he did make this offer, as I was uneasy to mix alone with this rough crowd, to say the least.

Some of Howe's crew were kept on board as a watch, while others eagerly jumped on the docks to get to the nearest tavern.

Blaustein's Only Settlement: Raïs

While the *Black Pelican* crew went looking for supplies or spent their money looking after expensive pleasures, Howe and I disembarked on the docks. The first thing I noticed is that these large and sturdy docks were in fact floating docks, able to stand out of the water on pillars standing on numerous large and empty tin cans. Then I also noticed that the boat the other side of the dock from ours had recently been hastily given a coat of black paint, and given a new name as well, the *Pride of the Devil*. From its design, I guessed that this boat once bore Lamordian colors. Now it was

going to be used for piracy. I shivered thinking of the original crew's fate when noticing dark stains around the main mast ...

We walked toward the only entrance to the city from the docks, a place watched by a nearby towering guard outpost. As we approached, I could not help but notice how mean looking the other people we met on the docks were: many had a missing finger or two, teeth missing or near black from neglect, body piercings made of silver, and many had tattoos and scars. Also, a few had a missing limb, crudely replaced by a crude metallic or wooden part. Dementieu's tea salons seemed very far away, as well as nearby Ghastria's subtle refinement.

I noted that five of the docked ships bore names of an extremely joyous type (full of hope for a peaceful and better world): *The Bloody Hangman*, *Damnation of the Black Manta*, *The Poison Greed*, *Ocean's Dishonor*, and *Hells' Bleeding Dagger*. These five ships bore only the Blaustein flag. The other ships, those with another nation's flag in addition to Blaustein's, bore "normal" names and I guess these were probably the few merchant ships trading with this den of filth, or these were the ships used by Blausteiners to reach the mainland. I can't see the *Ocean's Dishonor* docking safely in any port of the coast, without alarming the local authorities!

The crowd on the dock was abundant, and it was a rough one. I had to react quickly to avoid a vicious elbow in my ribs here, or a shoulder punch there that nearly pushed me into the sea. I understood it was some kind of "sport", as nobody else really took offense when they were hit. A puerile rite of acceptance, if you ask me.

Raiis (village): Tyranical; AL NE; CL 7; 200gp limit; Assets 8,000gp; Population 300 (plus at any time 20 to 80 sailors docked for a short time); Isolated (90% human, 8% Caliban, 2% other)

Authority Figures: Conomor (the Man Servant of Raoul Morrell), male human Exp 7 (servant to the Lord, the only living person to remain at night in the castle with Morrell – see below).

Important Characters: Drownin' Fritz Smithe, male human Exp5 (innkeeper of the *Vile Plunderer's Den*); Lady Juliana de Seashell, female human Ari3 (largest brothel owner, informant to the Lord), Sir Old Rawbone, male human Ftr8/Exp5 (the wisest of the Worthy, in charge of the militia when Bluebeard is absent), Lady Fredeline (Souragnian shop owner, Voodan11^{DTDL} (Loa: Ovun Borundir, the Warrior)).

The protective port walls open to reveal a large public plaza, called Verdoux's Place. It is really a busy place. Howe showed me something I first overlooked. Above us, six bodies were suspended on scaffolds, in various state of decay (or doneness, if you are one of the many crows flying around). The freshest if I can say, the body of a young man, was hanged there very recently. In the middle of the plaza was also a large wooden gibbet, with many dark dripping stains; I didn't have to look too closely to know what these were.

Oblivious to this macabre display, carriages clattered from the docked boats to the warehouses surrounding Verdoux's Place, or beyond through a narrow street leading to town. And through this, a rough crowd went to its business, whether it was talking with

friends, smoking, gambling with dice, or sleeping in a haze of alcohol on a bench or on the ground. Thankfully, the sea wind helps to carry away the odors of rotten fish, urine and vomit. There were many dogs around, wandering from smells to smells.

The warehouse district is mainly located around Verdoux's Place, and also on a trail going first north from the busy square, then west (opposite from town). On the other side, going east from Verdoux's place, a nameless narrow alley is the main street of Raïs. Wooden constructions of three or four floors rise from all pieces of land that are not cliffs. This alley smelled of refuse, rotten fish and cooking oil. The lower floors of these buildings are occupied by inns, taverns, gambling houses, brothels (in some cases many (or all) of these uses are combined into the same *fine* establishment), or by seedy stores, many selling boat parts or exotic wares.

Howe told me that anything illegal in other places of the continent could be found here, as well as alcohol, potent poisons, a large variety of drugs, and surprisingly high quality sailing supplies. I juggled for a moment with the idea of looking for one of those famous Blaustein gems, but decided it wasn't worth the risk of having my throat cut in

Blaustein guard outposts: At any given time of day, there are always 3-12 guards on duty in each of the guard towers, watching for trouble on the docks and for ships passing near Blaustein. These guards are Ftr1, armed with clubs or cutlass (use Borcan Enforcers stats, Gazetteer IV p 31). These guards are extremely loyal to the Lord, and are often drunk and abusive to strangers.

A militia can also be summoned within minutes, with waves of 20-30 of these arriving for each minute until the whole Blaustein population is present.

some back room of a squalid shop. Through the large windows, I saw exotic goods from many of the islands of the mists, including a place selling those famous dragon rockets from Rokushima Táiyoo.

I also saw voodan wares from our hometown of Port d'Elhour. The woman owning this store, a mean looking large Souragnian woman, looked at me for a long time, and I was suddenly afraid she'd recognized me through my disguise, and that she was some kind of spy for Blaustein, but she eventually looked away from me to gaze at other people on the street instead.

The town of Raïs has dozens of taverns and inns, and I can't list their names here as most are nameless. Who needs a name when most of the population is illiterate? Instead, the taverns were identified by a painting or a sculpture, most often with a marine theme, or of statuesque women. From my interview of Howe's sailors, I found that all these inns have poor quality rooms and meals while being quite expensive for what you get. The only thing cheap is Blaustein is alcohol and freedom.

Howe led me toward town, to a well known tavern, this one with a name: the *Vile Plunderer's Den*. Needless to say, I hated the idea of going in there, but knew we had to do it if we wanted answers on specific topics for the report. It sweetly reeked of an exquisite mixture of old sweat, bad breath, spilled beer, oil smoke, and rotten fish. My eyes watered from the stink when I entered and I had to trust Howe to navigate us through the tavern crowd. This was something to see (or may be not, in afterthought): the harsh looking drunken patrons drinking beer, talking loudly or singing brawling songs, or plainly drunk derelicts asleep

on the tables. There even was a brawl ending in one corner, between three men, while nobody seemed to care as long as they were not in the way of a fist, a kick or a chair.

I heard many of the tables entertained by tales of sea travels, treasure, legends and adventures. Bards here are much appreciated. But other patrons were instead speaking in hushed tones, as if scheming their next affair outside Blaustein.

The patrons were mostly men, but there were women among them as well, as inebriated and loud as the rest of the crowd. And I was surprised to see these women as mean looking as the men, and *in the same social role*. I understand that to be worth her weight in sea salt here, a woman will do what a man can, and many make fearless sea hunters. The

tavern workers were a mix of highly tipped, scantily dressed women and tough looking guys, serving food, beers and other watered alcohols.

Howe invited a couple of patrons to our table, offering them the first round of drinks and stories. I have to admit that if one forgets their bad breath, I'll say in retrospect that these folks were interesting to meet, as they had many funny stories about the sea and this strange island of Blaustein. Howe started with embellished stories of the Nocturnal Sea's hazards, and I followed on with a bit about that sea's pirates. I was relieved Howe didn't mention the unpleasantness of Todstein, or the horrors of the Deep.

I wonder as I write this... where is Dirac now?

Adventure Hook: The Blaustein Gems

Any bard from the western coast can easily tell the following story:

"The jewelers and aristocrats of the Core circulate the legend of a source of unusual and flawless blue gems found on the island of Blaustein. The gems are called, unsurprisingly, Blaustein gems, and few are those who truthfully can claim to have seen one. The Blaustein gems are said to be worth a king's ransom. They are also said, in hushed tones, to be cursed, as the few wealthy nobles known to own one have become recluses, their manors decaying around them, the servants dismissed, and visitors turned away at the gates." This bad reputation doesn't scare would-be wealthy buyers, who would like to show their prosperity by owning one of these very rare gems. There are a little more than a dozen of these gems in circulation outside of Blaustein, in the whole world of the mists.

These clear pale blue gems, about the size of an olive, appear once in a while on the Raïs market, and usually fetch extremely high prices, sometimes as high as a few thousand gold pieces. These are prized by rich collectors of the core for their unusual ability to reflect on their wearer the light of day in warm colors as if they had a miniature sun in them.

Nobody knows that these gems are sold by Bluebeard himself, nor that these are the solidified eyes of his previous wives. A supernatural event Bluebeard can't influence and doesn't understand, the eyes of his wives, when they dry out from the hanging bodies after being murdered, eventually fall off as these unique Blaustein gems.

Bluebeard makes sure these are sent to the rich houses of the core because he can see through them when he concentrates on them for a minute using the large mirror in his sitting room (as with the spell scrying (Will DC 16 negates if the gem is worn)). The Lord of Blaustein also uses these to cast a variant of his dream powers to lure vain women to his island.

(after an idea by Chris Nichols, "Myths of the Core", Book of Sacrifices)

After a while, we had them talking. The first drinks we offered were not their first of the day so these guys quickly became talkative. Their names were Dancing Jean and Mary Read (simply because she was one of the few here in Blaustein who wasn't illiterate). Howe introduced me as some kind of bard from Darkon, so I was able to ask most of the questions I wanted to ask under that alleged reason. I learned many things from them on Blausteiners and their overview of life.

But at one point, it turned sour when I asked a personal question to Dancing Jean about his past. He then looked at me like if I had bitten his mother, and was about to leave our table (or hit me on the head with his mug, I'm not sure), when Howe quickly told him it was my first visit here and so I didn't know it was *gauche* to ask personal questions here. Strange, I thought, since you can ask anything about anybody, but not about the person you are talking to. I apologized and offered the next round of hard liquors ... and Jean was like a long time friend again.

Later, we were all a little inebriated, and Jean left when some of his friends arrived at another table. Then Mary offered me a "coochie coochie" in a room upstairs, and quite surprised (and

Adventure hook: Empty Soil

Since Bluebeard keeps the body of his former wives hanged in a locked room of his castle, these graves are of course empty. But for the public image, the Lord of Blaustein makes sure this private cemetery is well kept, and that fresh flowers are replaced regularly. He also visits the cemetery once in a while to make his subjects believe that he really mourns his former wives.

A sign that something is wrong here; there is a grave for Beatrice, the third wife, who is said to have disappeared.

mildly disgusted, though I hope it didn't show), I stuttered a refusal. Mumbling something about me being a "poxed lubber," she went elsewhere in the tavern. Howe smiled wildly at me but thankfully he said nothing to add to this situation.

With this information, and our Fraternity notes on Blaustein (from Jacques de Casteel's previous visit to Blaustein), I was able to write this report on the secrets of this tiny island and its mysterious ruler.

Blaustein's Central Plateau

Just a few hundred feet over the town of Raïs, a narrow plateau spreads large enough for a few stone mansions and their private courtyards. There are ten noble houses in Blaustein, and one of them is the Lord's castle itself. The other nine noble families reside in moderately large manor houses made of stone, and their roofs are made of red tiles. Compared to the bustling atmosphere of Raïs below, this plateau is very bucolic and quiet.

These are the houses of the "Worthy", and this title is given to Blausteiners in their old age by the Lord himself. All Blausteiners work hard in their *profession* to attract the attention of the Lord in order to get this privilege in their old age. These "nobles" get a comfortable monthly rent enabling them to hire a few servants. They use their experience to plan raids and other pirate schemes for the younger to enact.

On the narrow road leading to the top of the island and the Lord's castle, a small cemetery is located in a quiet grove a hundred feet off this road. This cemetery has about twenty graves, all of them being the Lord's former wives.

We stayed two days wandering Blaustein's taverns, talking to the patrons to get more information on this place. The last day, there was a public execution and I heard the executioner was to be Blaustein's Lord himself! I was eager to see this, and not for the execution of course. We went there to watch with the loud crowd.

Looking at this barrel shaped man dressed somewhat tightly in a purple and blue velvet suit, I first thought that Lord Morrell was some kind of near human caliban: strangely bulbous in every aspect and not handsome at all. His black beard had oily blue reflections to it. Given his swollen appearance, by contrast his clothes and manners are unmistakably those of an aristocrat. Moreover, Morrell wears many large and bulky silver rings and he carries a silvery dagger at his belt. His attitude was very self-confidant and his smile to the cheering crowd, cruel. The woman to be hanged was a drunken woman I saw in a tavern the day before. She was singing spicy songs, but I do not remember her as a trouble maker to the Lord, though I wasn't in her presence all the time.

What was really amazing was the crowd's reaction to their Lord's presence. I have never heard a crowd cheer a leader this much, even in the military rallies of Falkovnia. This was somehow frightening and I hoped never to be unmasked and caught by this mob. I felt the Lord had total control: a wave of his large hand could silence the crowd instantly, and his people eagerly drank in his speech on the woman's "crime." Morrell said she was to be hanged because she spread lies about him and was denounced by a man who received a reward. The crowd cheered loud as Morrell put the hangman's noose around her neck and even more loudly when

Morrell opened the hatch under her feet, sending her to her death.

But what followed sent me shivering: her death didn't come soon enough for the Lord, and he reached for her throat and strangled the last wisp of her life from her himself, dropping her body only after her bones cracked under his strong hands and her head nearly snapped off.

Then the fanatic crowd cheered the loudest. Frightening.

Thankfully, I'm told this execution was very quick compared to the "usual," and other methods of creative public executions includes rack punishment (dislocation of all four limbs by stretching on the rack or by horses, or with heavy mace blows), boiling water dunking, various bone crushing, and torture by thumbscrews, branding, burning (sulphur burning, red hot pincers, hot lead or burning oil), quartering (fingers, toes, hand, foot, breasts, ears, nose, name a body part, they do it...), or a combination of these horrible tortures, before final death by strangulation, hanging or beheading.

But one fact about this hanging is extremely eerie. I spoke to three native people afterward on that day, at separate occasions, to ask who was that hanged woman, and all three told me this stranger *arrived on boat this very morning to spread lies about Morrell*. But this is obviously false as I saw her in a tavern two days ago! Was she a scapegoat for the anger of the Blausteiners, who needed an execution like others need a meal?

After he let her crushed neck fall, Morrell then waved triumphantly to the crowd, to never-ending shouts of approval and applause. Again, a simple hand wave silenced the crowd and he

ordered the inn owners to “give every worthy man of Blaustein a beer.” The crowd cheered as they rushed to the inns and taverns.

Then Morrell walked the street to the company of cheering crowds. I saw him walk the narrow street, toward the plateau. I told Howe I was going to follow him discretely to learn more about this powerful man.

Castle Blaustein

Morrell walked Raïs’s main street slowly, through the dense crowd of cheering ruffians, often stopping to speak with people in the crowd. He reminded me of a proud father talking to his children, and the “children” were in awe when he spoke to them. All the girls gave him a kiss. He waved off all invitations to get a drink with his people, and continued his walk east. I knew from

Lord Blaustein’s castle guards: during the day, there are always 6 guards on duty at the castle. These guards are Ftr4, also armed with clubs or cutlass (use Borcan Veteran Enforcers stats, Gazetteer IV p 31). The guards can summon a mob of people^{DMG2} from Raïs within minutes, by blowing a horn from the top of a tower. Every Blaustiner hearing this call stops whatever he or she is doing, get a weapon and runs to the castle.

Other castle staff includes a cook (Robert Cofresi, Exp3), and an old maid overwhelmed with the task of maintenance of the old castle (Anne Bonney, Exp1). They all know where the traps are, and how to avoid these. The guards and the staff leave the castle at sunset, as they believe the castle is haunted by the ghost of Morrell’s first wife. Only Conomor stays inside at night.

my interviews that he usually often accepts these invitations to drink with his people, and then goes to sleep in a room on top of the tavern (always alone, I’m told). But not this time.

After half an hour, he emerged from the crowd at the eastern outskirt of Raïs and continued walking alone toward the plateau of the noble houses. I then sneaked between a brothel and an inn to make myself *invisible*.

After reaching the noble plateau, I noticed that he suddenly walked more slowly, and I thought he might have discovered my presence following him. But then I saw his face and understood he was facing grim thoughts when looking at his castle, as if he was going back there reluctantly after all? Compared to his previous arrogant look, he now looked very lonely, shoulders down, and that was a drastic change from the confident man I’d seen in the city of Raïs.

Leaving the noble plateau, Morrell walked on a dirt road with a gentle slope, leading to his castle. At one point, he crossed a trail leading to a nearby cemetery, where his former wives repose, but he didn’t look in that direction, not even a glance. I thought he either had other current problems or else, didn’t seem to care.

When he came near the castle, he let go his fatigued attitude and went back to his usual arrogant self. The guards waved to him as he came in view from them. The castle is an ugly, massive stone construction. It has four towers at each corner, and a new wing in the back. Crenellated battlement walls topped the structure, with the usual snarling stone gargoyles. In fact, the whole lack of grace of this castle reminded me of Morrell himself. I saw about a half

dozen men guarding the castle, standing at the towers as well as at the front door.

These guards opened the massive ebon wood double doors for their lord before him, as he was moving up on the flight of stone stairs leading to it. These doors have the height of two men, and they creaked on badly oiled hinges. Hearing this noise, I realized I could not open these doors invisibly without getting the guards' attention, and I was too far back to sneak and follow inside behind Morrell. I would have to wait for another opportunity to get in.

During my tavern conversations, one of the most intriguing facts I found about the castle life is that no guards nor the cook nor the maid would stay in the castle during the night. As much as they love their Lord, *nobody* stays in the castle after sunset. The reason for this

evacuation is well known in town: they say the castle is haunted at night by Morrell's first wife.

I then noticed the front door didn't have any lock. I wonder if the castle is locked at night? Maybe it is secured from inside after everybody has left. I understand Morrell's manservant, Conomor, stays in the castle, the sole exception to the rule, since he is almost never seen in town at night. During the day, he often goes in Raïs to order food and supplies for his Lord, and meet the Worthy and the guard's Captain.

I walked around the castle. The structure has five main floors: one level below ground (and possibly other underground rooms or tunnels as well), the entry level, a first and second floor, as well as a wall walk level, where guards stand watch in the towers.

Conomor, the Manservant

(cohort) male humanoid (human) Exp7

HD: 7d6-7 (16 hp); AC 10 (touch 10, flatfooted 10); Base Atk +5; Grp +5; AL: LE; SV: Fort +1, Ref +2, Wil +6; Str 10 Dex 10 Con 8 Int 11 Wis 12 Cha 13

Skills & Feats: Diplomacy+12, Gather Info +12, Hide +10, Intimidate +8, Knowledge(local) +5, Listen +4, Move Silently +9, Profession (butler) +8, Sense Motive +6, Spot +4; Cold One, Jaded, Stealthy.

Spell-like abilities: 1/day *cause fear*

Language: Perraulesque* (home language), Mordentish, Dementlieuse, Falkovnian

Possessions: Black suit, dagger, sleep poison

The manservant once provoked one of Bluebeard's spectral wives and was nearly killed by one that has the *energy drain* ability. Since then he is cold and clammy to the touch and the spectres completely ignore him. He has also failed one powers check and can *cause fear* by gaze. When using this power his eyes turn yellow with hatred.

Conomor is an old man, and with a permanent sneer of disdain on his face. Though he serves Bluebeard faithfully he hates all those who are better than himself, including his Lord. He is Bluebeard's personal servant and secretary, and he commands the cook, the maids and the guards.

Very little information is known about this faithful servant. Conomor was cursed by fate: he agreed to a life of servitude to Bluebeard if the lord *wouldn't* marry his pretty sister. But when he came through the mists, Bluebeard being immortal, Conomor got a lot more than he agreed for... Now an ageless bitter man, he is a loyal servant because he is well paid to cover his master's excesses. A cold-hearted and greedy man, he doesn't really care about the girls' deadly fates at his master's hands, as long as he gets bags of gold. He hopes to get back to his homeworld someday.



(by Gustave Doré)

There is no other visible entrance to the castle than the front one. I was considering entering through the arrow slits on the first floor or one of the windows on the second floor when I saw a man coming from town to the castle. I cast *fly* to make sure I didn't make any noise and followed him inside. The gaunt manservant was an older man, and looked disdainful of everything. I was lucky, this was Conomor going back to the castle.

The front door led to a small corridor that opened to a larger room. I flew silently after him, still invisible. The manservant suddenly stopped in front of the larger room and said out loud "Hail to the Lord of Blaustein!" and then walked inside. I realized he had just disabled a magical trap! I knew from our Fraternity intelligence this trap to be the infamous tilt room, where people were thrown to their death into a pit under the castle. At least, with the *fly* spell I couldn't have fallen down, but the trap activation would surely have triggered an alarm. I had to be cautious, even

though I knew most of the other traps of this place were probably mechanical ones. While I passed this area, I also wondered who could have made this mighty magical trap?

Since I had just a few hours before sunset, I had to move; I didn't really want to find the cause of these castle haunting rumors face to face. I decided to start my inquiry with the lower level. This cool level was deserted, half of it being storage room and the other half an empty prison. An odor of decay came from the pit. It was much deeper than what my lighting source could reveal. I let a small rock fall into it, and from the time before the noise I estimate the bottom to be near sea level, or about 400 feet down. There was no other noise coming from the pit after the noise from the little rock I'd thrown. I conclude that the tilt room is a trap designed to kill intruders invading the castle without allowing them very far inside the structure.

I moved up again to the entry level, but it had no feature of interest other than the tilt room. I went one level up, to the first floor. At this level, the walk around the castle has numerous arrow slits and a few mechanical traps which I avoided by following guards during their patrol and watching them getting around the traps. In the center of the arrow slit walk is the main hall, a large banquet hall that was warm, but had an odor of decay and rancid candles. The blue and green carpet was thick but old.

On the walls, there were dusty tapestries depicting bucolic scenes. But on one of the tapestries, there was a bearded man giving a set of keys to a woman. The man's eyes on the tapestry were wild and he looked like a hawk watching a mouse...

The banquet table was large and sturdy but didn't seem well maintained or cleaned. Also on this floor are an empty (and dusty) guest room, and the kitchen and the nearby cook's quarters. The pantry is well supplied, however with few vegetables and lots of red meat, rice and wine barrels.

On this floor I noticed Morrell seems to appreciate silver ornamentations as well as black ebon wood doors. These doors were oddly cool to the touch, even though the rest of this level is warm and humid. Many pieces of antique rosewood furniture were placed in the corridors, but they seemed in dire need of restoration and oiling. I noticed there were many silver mirrors too on the walls, placed here and there.

In the library, I saw Morrell sleeping in front of a fireplace, on a comfortable but old couch. There was a half-empty bottle of brandy near him on a table. The room had a strong scent of book decay and the papered walls were showing a few mold stains. A large parquetry desk was standing near the fireplace. In front of the desk, I noticed many dark stains on the intricately colored carpet... The library held a large number of books, but at first glance they were all dusty. I thought about entering the room and investigating Morrell more closely but I changed my mind. Now I know it wasn't a good idea for my own health.

Instead, knowing the sleeping lion's location in his den, I thought it would be easier to explore the rest of the castle. The second floor level was very quiet. I found most of the rooms were more or less ancient and dusty, and definitively were furnished for a woman's taste. The fireplace of each of these rooms had an engraved mantelpiece with these words: "For you my love" and a woman's name.

But the woman's name in each of the room is different! Lenor, Matilda, Carmilla, Antonia, Lorel, etc.! I knew I had found the famous dead wives rooms. But there were about twenty of these rooms! How odd it seems to have Morrell moving the new wife in a separate room each time? The symbolic part of this thinking eludes me.

"Eventually," I thought grimly, "the castle will run out of rooms..." and it made me think of a part of the castle that seemed more recent, a new castle wing. How grim for him to plan this in advance!

After a minute in each of these "wives" rooms, I felt some kind of presence, so I didn't stay very long in each room... There was also a "master's room," slightly decaying and dusty as the rest. A quick search of the room showed no written journal, but in a chest were many exquisite pieces of feminine jewelry, jewels, silver mirrors, poetry books and other things Morell probably gives his wives-to-be to seduce them.

Otherwise, this floor also has a sitting room with a gallery of portraits of women (without any names on the frames), and many mirrors. On the largest of these expensively framed mirrors, where one can admire himself from head to toe, there is an inscription: "Show me your true heart. Worthy or nay?" As I suspected, this mirror has magical enchantment to it, an aura of moderate evocation, but I didn't have the time to learn more. I guess it is used for scrying?

On this floor also, there is a room with a pool in the center of it. The pool's decaying water hasn't been refreshed or treated in a long time and the green colored water's level was very low.

On this level, I found a room in one tower corner of the castle that was locked. The door was solid and enforced with metal studs, and this lock seemed extremely difficult to open without the key. Probably another treasure vault, I thought at first. I had only one wall passing spell, and wanted to save it in case I needed a swift emergency, so I decided to cast *see ethereal resonance* near this door instead to learn more from the spell's eerie impressions. I was nearly stunned with what the vision granted by this spell showed me: a ring of hideously rusted and bloody hooks, dripping fresh blood on the floor where a lot of blood was already spilt and was caking. This is probably what bloody end is happening to the women that are never seen again, I thought. Or could it be the dead wives? When the spell finished, I also had the strange impression that I had some kind of blood stain on my clothes, but when I checked there was nothing there. But still this impression lasted.

I went back down a level to the library to investigate this room more carefully and get more direct observations on the Lord of Blaustein, but it was a badly inspired idea. When I arrived at the library, Morell was in the position I left him earlier, sleeping on a couch and snoring loudly. I was still invisible and flying, so I was moving silently. I just wanted to get nearer to this enigmatic person to get a closer look, and perhaps look at the library also. Before entering, I went away in the nearby corridor and cast *detect magic*, to see if there were magical wards in the room, as well as to scan Morell and his library for valuable items.

While on the doorstep, I concentrated on my detection spell and the result was positive. There were no

magical wards in the room, but there was magic on Morell's person as well as in a section of the library. Two objects were magical on the Lord, and there were two books in the library radiating magic. Both sources were of moderate strength. Interesting, I thought.

So I moved in. Mistake! As soon as I crossed the threshold, the air was suddenly filled with noisy wailing female voices. The presence I felt in the wives' rooms was now felt again. The wives! The pitiful wives' voices warned "their lord and master" to awaken quickly, since an intruder was in the library! Morell awoke from this sudden noise, and took his silver dagger in his hand, peeling his eyes as he scanned the room. He looked mildly angered by the intrusion but not really threatened. I found that self-confidence odd and prepared to cast an exit spell.

But then the noise of the female voices turned to a cacophony of litanies. I thought of banshees wailing. If my memories are right, their pitiful voices said things like "My lord, see how good I have become; please love me," "Did we deserve this? See how we are useful!" and "I'm the one saving you from this intruder, my love, now will you think I'm good enough?" Others were sobbing pitifully to attract Morell's attention. But Morell seemed insensible to them. I wasn't.

When the pathetic litanies started, a terrible fright took me, as if I was a child in front of something horrible, a terrible injustice, and I screamed. I felt the sensation of being one of these pitiful wives, pinned on a hook, and I watched in horror my blood dripping on the floor, as I was butchered alive. It was horrible. I was frozen there, unable to do a thing, invisible and magically floating only about 20 feet from Blaustein's Lord!

The Hanging Room

Located on the second floor of Bluebeard's castle (see the map in Darklords Ravenloft accessory), the door leading to the Hanging Room can't be opened magically (it even resists knock spells) and without Bluebeard's golden key, the Open Lock DC to open it is 40 (amazing lock quality).

Inside, no source of light is available except the light coming from the opened door. The air has a scent of decay, with dust and a heavy coppery scent. The floor is clotted with dried blood. The room has many rusty iron hooks on the walls and the dried bodies of women hang limply from it, ranged against the wall. They are in various state of decay; the oldest one is now a dried husk on a hook. All of them have had their throats cut. Some also have had their necks broken. Each of their faces shows a frozen mask of fear.

These are the twenty wives of Bluebeard, most of whom disobeyed him and looked inside this forbidden room, using the golden key. After their visit to the room, the golden key has a blood stain that can't be washed away (magical effect). The key also alerts Bluebeard that the Hanging Room's door has been opened, wherever he might be.

There is a comfortable chair in one corner. On a wooden plaque on the side of the door inside the Hanging Room, the following crudely carved words can be read: "The Fatal Effect of Female Curiosity! My anger over your untrustworthiness will exceed anything you have ever experienced."

During the day, this room is the lair of the spectres of the dead wives.

Morrell then looked at me directly and I was under the impression that *invisibility* didn't fool him at all! He asked "Who are you?" but I didn't answer as I was frozen from the terrible fear.

After a moment of wait, he went into a rage and bull rushed toward me and tried to grab my invisible body, but he failed, as if he expected me to be farther than my actual position. I then realized he knew more or less where I was, but he couldn't see invisible things. I understood he was detecting my thoughts and tried to shield my shocked thoughts as much as I could, then flew up to the ceiling to get out of reach and away from this room.

Not making any noise, hoping not to be followed by Morrell, I flew, still invisible, to the top floor in order to fly

away from this place. But Morrell was able to follow me for a little while. I felt my thoughts scanned, and then he yelled, "Well, kind stranger, what is it you want from me? Stay and we'll talk, like gentlemen. I'm not angry at you, just curious. And I have an offer for you. If you accept, I'll tell you all you want to know about me. Isn't it what you came here for, stranger?" This calm demeanor and the offer were tempting, but then I saw one of the ghosts make itself visible behind Morrell: the ghost lady wore a long blue dress that seemed a long time out of fashion. But her appearance then changed quickly to an undead horror: her face turned to the like of a skull, her hair flew under an unfelt wind, a gaping mark appeared on her throat and dark stains appeared on her slashed dress! It was with *her* that I didn't want to talk, I thought.

The Spectres of the dead wives

So far, Bluebeard has killed 12 wives since the formation of the domain Blaustein in 643. Also, before the mists captured him and created Blaustein, Bluebeard killed his first eight wives in a similar fashion, for a total of 20.

There is also a longer list of women brought to Bluebeard that didn't meet his fancy, and were killed soon after they were brought to him, their bodies usually thrown in the pit or over the cliffs into the sea.

The eight dead wives before 643 (from his home world) are, in order of death, with their "official cause of death":

- 1) Marguerite (unknown year - before 643. The story says she ran away with a bard and died shortly after, murdered by the bard)
- 2) Lenor (unknown year - before 643, she died in her sleep)
- 3) Beatrice (unknown year - before 643, she simply disappeared)
- 4) Marcella (unknown year - before 643, aged 15, died from pregnancy complications)
- 5) Camilla (unknown year - before 643, died from an illness)
- 6) Matilda (unknown year - before 643, drowned)
- 7) Jacinda (unknown year - before 643, went crazy and jumped off a cliff)
- 8) Jacqueline (unknown year - before 643, horse accident)

The twelve dead wives *post* 643 are in order of death, with their "official cause of death":

- 9) Ursula (year 645, of Ghastrian origin, murdered by a thief)
- 10) Antonia (year 649, of unknown origin, died in her sleep)
- 11) Karina (year 657, of Valachani origin, died from a fall)
- 12) Alana (year 670, of Invidian origin, died when giving birth. Child supposedly died too. The midwife was hanged.)
- 13) Sofia (year 684, of Lamordian origin, died from a hunting accident, the hunter was hanged in reprisal)
- 14) Claire (year 697, of Borcan origin, drowned)
- 15) Marcia (year 705, of vistani origin, died from castle wall collapse)
- 16) Lilia (year 713, of Dementlieuse origin, died from bad medication and the doctor was decapitated, then burned)
- 17) Lorel (year 729, of Paridoner origin, fell from a window when she refused to be brought back to Paridon by her brother Lord Henredon. Truth: the story behind this is told in *Tales of Ravenloft*. The closest a wife ever came to being Worthy to Bluebeard's eyes, Lorel had her eyes cut out by Bluebeard when in rage he discovered her eyes were drifting to other men. She then later opened the forbidden room and was killed. Lord Henredon's body has been thrown in the pit.).
- 18) Annabelle (year 743, of Dementlieuse origin, fatal snake bite. Truth: she was forced to marry Bluebeard when he captured her brother and kept him in his prison. He was soon killed afterward too.)
- 19) Coletta (year 751, of Dementlieuse origin, pneumonia)
- 20) Marielle (year 760, from Darkon, died from yellow fever)

The wives are now ghosts loyal to him. They appear more or less the same as they did in life, but in translucent ghost form. The wives are rank three ghosts (based on Commoner 1st level, Cha 18, can freely manifest, CR 5). They all have *Home*, *Home Again*; *Rejuvenation* and *Whispered Thoughts* abilities:

Home, Home Again (new ability) (Su): the third night Bluebeard spends out of the castle, any ghost wives can summon him back to his castle, wherever he was when summoned. Bluebeard awakes in a chair in the Hanging Room. The ghosts are all around him, caressing him lovingly and whispering him to tell them how well they became worthy after their death. Bluebeard experiences this phenomenon with disgust.

Whispered Thoughts (Sp): see VRGttWD p 36 (all wives have this ability, and it is often used in cacophony – Madness DC 34 (10+1hd+4cha+19ghosts) in this case when all twenty ghosts are present).

In addition, the wives have one (for wives # 9-20) or two (for wives # 1-8) more abilities from this list:

Dispelling Gaze (Su): new ability, similar to the Restless Dead ability *Dispelling Glare*, see VRGttWD p 67

Dream Walk (Su): see RL CS under “ghosts”.

Energy Drain (Su): new ability, similar to the Restless Dead ability of the same name, see VRGttWD p 70

Haunting Lament (Su): new ability, similar to the Restless Dead ability of the same name, see VRGttWD p 71

Paralyzing Touch (Su): see RL CS under “ghosts”.

Phantom Shift (Su): see RL CS under “ghosts”.

The ghosts are not normally aggressive to visitors, unless Bluebeard is himself threatened. The gentle ghosts then change their look to that of a hateful banshee, bloody, with their throat cut. They attack until their Lord tells them not to, or the attacker is destroyed.

They spend the day in the Hanging Room, staying there unless someone enters their former private room, which is a cause of curious investigation by the invisible ghost. If they know a visitor or an intruder is in the castle, they will also check on Bluebeard’s safety while remaining invisible. Also, a scream or shout by Bluebeard would bring them out of the Hanging Room during the day (the castle is dark enough for the spectres to move freely within).

They wander the castle at night, pitifully singing or claiming they are now worthy of their Lord’s love and attention. At night, when Bluebeard is there, they surround him and try to attract his attention by their devotion. He can’t command them to go away.

They sing or complain bitterly about their only crime being a single act of disobedience to their husband, over a forbidden room they were told not to enter. And they moan about the injustice that their husband could have a secret to his spouse, but not the reverse. The ghosts agonize at length on what else they could have done, should have done, to the point of apologizing to Bluebeard every night for the curiosity that got the better of them. Some of them also bicker between themselves to be considered the “worthiest wife.”

However, when there are other guests sleeping in the castle, the specters are quiet, and these guests just hear feminine laughter, or sobbing, or sometimes singing in a distance, or knocks at their door. When the awakened sleepers investigate these noises, they find nothing. Few people other than the Lord or Conomor sleep at the castle more than one night.

A few moments later, I reached the top castle walls and flew away, still sweaty and shaking from fear. I looked behind me but the woman's ghost wasn't following. Then, I noticed the sun was near the horizon and it made me feel even more anxious, as if a large weight had suddenly been put over my chest and prevented me from breathing. Thinking I had been lucky enough already, I flew directly to my room on the *Black Pelican*. I slept very badly this night, because of nightmares of dripping blood...

Indigenous Plants and Animals

Most of the island is urbanized, but there are a few patches of trees (mainly

coconut trees, a surprise given the coldness of the Sea of Sorrows) here and there on the noble plateau and around the castle. The villagers of Raïs know it would displease the Lord if they were to fell even one tree.

The wildlife is also scarce, limited to a few colorful birds locally called "fitchers." These beautiful parrot-like birds are usually in the hues of red, orange, green and yellow. There are numerous crabs living in the rocks surrounding Blaustein. Sometimes, the island suffers from a swarm of tiny red crabs, but while being slightly disgusting, it isn't dangerous.

Encounter list in Blaustein

Wildlife : CR 1/10 Bat ^{MM1} CR 1/8: Rat ^{MM1} CR 1/6: Fitcher (these are simple parrots, use Raven ^{MM1} stats, but some have higher intelligence and can talk); Crow and Raven ^{MM1} CR 1/4 Albatross ^{STO}; Cat ^{MM1}; Scorpion, monstrous, tiny ^{MM1} CR 1/3; Dire rat ^{MM1}; Dog ^{MM1} CR 1/2 Barracuda ^{STO}; Crab, monstrous, small ^{STO}; Eagle ^{MM1}; Snake, Tiny viper ^{MM1}

It should be noted that many Blausteiners like to bring back from their trips caged live animals as trophies, like bears (CR 2, ^{MM1}), lions (CR 3, ^{MM1}), etc., but sometimes even demi-humans. These caged creatures are eventually put in the same cage, while people wager on which one will stay alive.

Monsters : none native.

But the ships sometimes bring to Blaustein humanoid monsters such as Doppelgangers (from the nearby Paridon mistway, CR 3, ^{DOD}), Lycanthropes, Paka (CR 5, ^{DOD}), Red Widow (Cr 6, ^{DOD}), Sea-Claimed ^{FoSNS}, Vampires (notably cerebral vampires ^{DOD} from Dominia), Vehrteig ^{DTDL}, etc. as well as the possible monstrous vermin carried by the ships.

An uncommon event also, marine undead also sometimes haunt the island's surroundings – Bowlyn (CR 3, ^{DOD}), Drowned (CR 8, ^{MM3}), Jolly Rogers (CR 6, ^{DOD}, often with the *Hellish Laughter* ability ^{VRGWD p 71}), and Remnant (CR 3, ^{DOD}).

Also, even more uncommon, because of Bluebeard's frequent use of *dream* powers, there are Dreamspawns ^{DOD} sometimes encountered on a mission.

Since the death of Marcia (wife #15, in year 705), vistani women avoid visiting this land.

Blaustein's People and their Worldview

Blausteiners believe the sea and the civilized world is there to be plundered by them. They feel their Lord will protect them from any harm and retaliation at home. The natives born on this island are raised to be fighters (or rogues) and sailors from a young age, even girls.

The largest proportion of Blausteiners is basically sea hunters and thieves. They are dangerous people, be they man or woman. In other lands they are known as bloodthirsty pirates, shady traders, brutish buccaneers, boat snatchers, hired assassins, disloyal thieves, "no questions asked" smugglers, schemers, savage thugs, cruel poisoners, or even cannibals, and recently they are known as slave traders as well.

Magic is considered an awesome and useful gift, but few Blausteiners receive the ability to cast spells the day they are born. A boat with a mage is considered as having good luck, but few boats do have one on board. I heard many times of one of these mage, Cajuste the Cruel, whose prowess with the art is said to be impressive.

I provided a physical description of Blausteiners in the previous sections and there isn't much to be added, except one thing: these riff-raffs come from all known places of the land of the mists. So you have all variations of height, weight and skin colors represented, even from as far as Souragne, Saragoss or Rokushima Taiyoo. They are mostly humans, but a fair number of these natives are ill-bred calibans.

But wherever they come from, they are accepted by the Lord as one of his

own people ... if they obey his law. And when they choose to consider Blaustein as their home, they fall completely under the sway of his charisma and they become obedient. So while the number of children born in Blaustein is too low when considering the high pirate mortality rate, Blaustein has managed to keep a steady population from immigration of those people unwanted in other lands.

Many claim their head has a price in The Core's coastal towns. I'm not sure what part of these claims is simple bragging, and what part is truth. But since their main occupation while in Blaustein is drinking rum, smoking opium, and drinking concoctions keeping them awake, these people are at best unpredictable, and at worst, violent. Many are sadistic when they hunt the sea, and I saw with my own eyes some of the fiercest ones bearing collections of dried bloody ears at their belt. When they are at sea, they are savages without pity. They would throw their own mothers to the sharks, after having her flogged by a cat o' nine tails for information.

But they never seriously maim other Blausteiners, as it would displease their Lord. Treason to other Blausteiners (and to their Lord) is one of the worst crime here, and the death penalty slow and painful. Their first value after obeying their Lord's commands is total and unconditional friendship. But that doesn't hold back a good fist fight between friends just for *good clean fun*.

Furthermore, their individual freedom is extremely important, and they think the same of other people's freedom, but of course only if they are considered of their ilk. The rest of the world is to be plundered and its people sold as cattle, or killed when they feel

like it. High over this grand freedom, the only thing they can't do is pry into another Blaustein's secrets. As I found out during my tavern interviews, the most self-destructive thing one can do here is snoop where you shouldn't. Howe did warn me not to get too curious about the person you are talking too, but I wanted to test the fine line over this matter. Strangely, I found you can have them discuss any topic, even juicy rumors about their Lord, but they will kick you in the eye if you ask them just one personal question about themselves, even a trivial one.

People from this tiny island are not religious people, mind you, but they believe in luck. They carry many "luck" talismans or other *gris-gris*, often of voodan-like origin like those from Souragne. I even saw some luck talismans with the loa Madris Orundi, and something they said was the "Maiden of the Sea," which was surprising to say the least!

While in Port-a-Lucine, I remember seeing the teeth of a martyr priest in a glass case at the University of Dementieu (I still smile inwardly as to the reason this glass case was once broken). According to Lord Balfour de Casteelle, those yellowish little pieces of ivory were the teeth of a bloke named Uri Grislev, a Hazlanite priest of the Lawgiver that tried to convert Blausteiners to the faith of the Iron Tyrant. It is said that two weeks after his arrival, he was mobbed, attached to a wooden pole and had all his bones cracked one by one with an iron rod by Morrell. And then his body was burned too, and thrown in the sea, in a typical Blaustiner's overkill. I guess these teeth were the only thing left of the priest after his execution, and those were gathered

from the execution field by surviving companions.

I now wonder why the Lawgiver's faith was this badly received in Blaustein, as this faith rewards blind obedience and support of a king's rulership. Those things should have passed well in Blaustein, since this is exactly what Morrell wants from his flock. May it be because this Church forbids unions between different ethnicities? I can't say.

Another darker side of Blaustein's trade surfaced recently. Conventional piracy isn't as lucrative as it was, since Darkon's warships now protect the north coast. In fact, rumor has there was a secret "peace" treaty between Blaustein and Darkon. So it is said Morrell now personally controls a slave trade business. He realized there were many clients for slaves, for the usual reason (hard labor, military cannon fodder) as well as other more shocking ones, and Morrell quickly got many peculiar clients with specific needs. He often delivers bodies to an isolated Shloss in Lamordia, or slaves to Dominia's asylum or on a beach in Markovia. We know he even sometimes cooperates with Kargat forces in discretely moving captives when they work outside of Darkon. There are also degenerate nobles looking for peculiar entertainment, cult leaders looking for sacrifice and even, Morrell suspects, monstrous clients looking for feeding.

So the previous instruction not to leave anyone alive after a raid has recently changed to: bring to Blaustein all the captives that are not too maimed in the raids. Some of the people gathering raids are now conducted to isolated farms and other small settlements on the coast.

Morrell personally supervises all new arrivals in an isolated prison, made to look like a warehouse on the trail west of Verdoux's Place. I think he wants to get first choice should a beautiful woman be captured in a raid or during a kidnapping operation. These women are brought to the castle and most often never seen again. For their Lord, these sea thugs often kidnap women from surrounding lands (and beyond) for the promised reward by Morrell, or follow his instructions and escort the ones who have fallen under his spell and freely wish to come to Blaustein.

Otherwise, many of the ships coming from the Sea of Sorrows mistways are subject to the usual piracy attacks and harassment, mainly those from Paridon (as the Royal Channel mistway arrives very near to the island of Blaustein).

There are very few goods produced locally, mostly alcohol from imported sugar cane. Large scale agriculture is nearly nonexistent, except for those people growing vegetables in private gardens. The small size of the island doesn't allow large farms for animal raising. So most of the supplies are bought from the outside, and paid for by gold pieces from raids. Surprisingly (or not after all) there are many merchant ships willing to trade with Blaustein as they are paid well, and are protected from the raids that other merchants suffer. All Blausteiners can also use a fishing rod with success if meat supplies are low, which happens fairly often I'm told.

About a fourth of the population has a quieter life style. These are people with a "useful" profession on land, whether tending the inns and bars or the shops, or they are accountants, involved in ship and sail repair, managing the smuggling warehouse, raising the few native kids –

who most often do not know their parents – or those ladies working in the brothels. Many of these are former sea raiders who got injured permanently during a battle, or are older raiders that didn't become Worthy.

The Worthy is something unique in Blaustein. While the younger Blausteiners revel in their tough and brutish pirate or smuggling activities, when they get older (more than 40 years old) it's often time to retire from the throat cutting business. Some become captain of a ship, and a few selected by the Lord become the Worthy.

These older Blausteiners proved their worthiness to Morrell and they literally get promoted to a higher class, moving up from Raïs to one of the nine small noble mansions closer to the castle. This usually happens when a noble dies: he is replaced by a new one selected by Morrell. In addition to the house, and a few domestics, they are given a monthly pension of 50 gold pieces to maintain it and their new "noble" lifestyle. The change is drastic as these former fish-smelling thugs now dress as gentlemen and gentlewomen, and try really hard to act like them. Sometimes, it's quite funny as the veneer is thin, and these "nobles" could pass at first glance as regulars in a Dementelieuse salon, if a little outdated in their fashion or powdered hairdo. But many also show the usual scar marks, missing teeth or tattoos! And any conversation with them shows their lack of education (they try hard to hide their dirty street talk, or marine slang, but do not always succeed). They are usually called "Sir" in Blaustein.

Also, when a lot of strong alcohol is flowing in their veins, this thin dress-up veneer melts quickly and the pirate talk and manners are back, with the violence

of their younger age. They can quickly degenerate to debauchery and violence. So since these are experienced and dangerous former pirates, able to pluck your eyes from your skull in a gesture, it's a bad idea to laugh in their face for their ridicule. And they are far from being stupid; remember these are the ones that lived this rough life and survived.

One of them, Sir Old Rawbone, is the wisest of the Worthy, and he replaces Morrell during his absence on commanding the militia and watching Blaustein and Morrell's interests.

Some of them spend their time in the savory establishments below the mansion plateau. But the Worthy also spend their time between themselves, using their experience to plan the raids, smuggling operations and other deeds that will be carried by the younger Blausteiners. They get a proportion of the profits, but they can choose not to accompany the "missions" they planned, and no Blaustiner will question this, as they are the Worthy – they proved their worth to Blaustein and its Lord. Now it's time for the younger ones to prove themselves.

The Blaustiner Hero

Races: The clear majority of the Blausteiners are humans of any conceivable size, build and coloration – from all domains of the land of the mists. There is also a fairly large number of calibans who fled the oppression of their homeland. All claim Blaustein as their new home land.

Classes: Those classes always ready for violence include barbarians, rogues and fighter, as well as Scourge. Magic is rare but tolerated on Blaustein when used to the success of raiding activities: so wizards and sorcerers are seldom persecuted, to the contrary. However, few appreciate the low level of education and violence of other Blausteiners when they get higher in levels. Bards can find a home in Blaustein since their stories and songs are welcomed.

Recommended Skills: Appraise, Balance, Bluff, Climb, Craft (shipyard), Disguise, Escape Artist, Forgery, Gather Information, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (geography), Listen, Move Silently, Open Lock, Profession (sailor), Search, Sense Motive, Sleight of Hand, Spot, Survival, Swim, Tumble, Use Rope.

Recommended Feats: Acrobatic, Agile, Alertness, Athletic, Back to the Wall, Brawler, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dead Man Walking, Deceitful, Dodge, Endurance, Improved Disarm, Improved Feint, Improved Trip, Jaded, Negotiator, Nimble Fingers, Persuasive, Power Attack, Self-Sufficient, Stealthy, Toughness, Unseen, Weapon Focus (club, scimitar, short sword), Two-Weapon Fighting

Blaustein Male Names: Bartolomeo, Benito, Bellamy, Calico, Clegg, Enrique, François, George, Hayes, Hector, Henry, Hook, Horatio, Jack, Jackman, Kelley, Jan de Bouff, John, Kennit, Manuel, Nate, Nathaniel, Oliver, Peter, Pugwash, Richard, Simon; or by some appropriate nickname like Red Legs, Scrag, Dirty Jean, The Ghoul, Count Willy, etc.

Blaustein Female Names: Alvida, Anne, Bretta, Charlotte, Ching Shih, Grace, Jane, Lillies, Mary, Rachel; or by a nickname also like the Baroness, Black Gina, etc.

Blaustein's Language

Blausteiners usually speak low Mordentish, but they add to it many colorful local expressions in order to be understood only between themselves. Following this is a few examples. Add as much furious swearing as you can, and you already feel part of the group.

Thanks to the expertise of Stevie for his help on this part of the report. I owe you a rum, Bucko.

Blaustein's Local History

Unsurprisingly, considering the high level of illiteracy and the dark activities going on there, there are no written records about the history of this island. From Mordent's historical records in Heather House, the island of Blaustein was discovered during the winter of 643, about a dozen years after the appearance of the Sea of Sorrows itself. From letters to Mordentish officials and other trade documents, this island was ruled by a man by the name of Blaubarts Schatten from its appearance to 677, by Wolfgang Blauer from 677 to 697, then by a man named Florian de Puysange from this year to 735, and by the current Lord, Raoul Morrell, from 735 to now.

However, over the years, with these changes of Lords, there were very few changes in style (or aggressiveness) from this wild place's government. It was always a haven for piracy and other smuggling, according to the written Mordentish nautical records.

This is extremely different from what Blausteiners say. For them, there was only one Lord *from the beginning*, and that is Lord Raoul Morrell... Near the end of our stay in Blaustein, confused by the origin of this strange revisionism, I

Addled	Mad, insane, or just stupid.
Ahoy	Hello
Avast!	"Hey!" but could also be used as "Stop that!" or "Who goes there?"
Aye	Yes
Bilge	Nonsense
Dead men tell no tales	Usual pirate excuse for leaving no survivors
Landlubber	Anyone out of Blaustein, or a non-sailor
Misty Deep	The Sea of Sorrows
Old salt	Experienced captain
Shark bait	An enemy, or a worthless person
Van Riese' locker	The bottom of the sea

scanned the mind of two Blausteiners and I can testify they are truly convinced Morrell has been around since the beginning, even an old man from Blaustein. The name Florian de Puysange meant nothing to him.

Interestingly, I also noticed that many Blausteiners can tell you the list of the twenty wives; with the dates and the cause of death (see this list in the attached notes). That is, without any tiny difference from one another. As a teacher myself, I have to admit this is a great lesson on local history for these illiterate people!

I draw two evident conclusions from all of this: all obvious and indirect clues lead to pinpoint this Morrell as the Watcher's toy in Blaustein. However, there are reports that he was seen a few times in Port-a-Lucine, in Ghastralia, as well as in Mordent? Confusing. Second,

and I did get a hint of this previously regarding the identity of the executed woman, there seems to be something similar to Darkonese land powers over memory alteration affecting these wild Blausteiners. Something (*or someone*) clearly tells them what to remember...

There may be more in Morrell's own library, but that should be left for another person's inquiry. I shiver to think of going there again to meet the ghosts.

Blausteiners can also tell you the following about Morrell: their Lord is a talented womanizer, a man who charms women with his pleasant conversation, poetry and fine gifts. But he is very very unlucky. They even pity him over the death of all his previous wives and the frequent visits he makes to their cemetery. The thoughts that this history may not be as it seems is brushed away quickly as rubbish. Similarly, they do not question the odd fact that the third wife, Beatrice, has a grave in the wives' cemetery, even if common history says she "simply disappeared"!

The unlucky Morrell never took as wife a lady from Blaustein, but always selected women from outside the island. They do not seem curious over this, and some of them explained to me that rough women from Blaustein are probably not sophisticated enough to interest their stylish master. This strange thing is worth investigating as Howe told me that on another visit he saw a foreign girl brought to Morrell that wasn't exactly of the sophisticated type. She was never seen again, and quickly forgotten by Blausteiners.

His superior battle prowess is legendary, and he is said to have lead successful raids even in Martira Bay!

Blaustein's Government

Morrell's people enforce these few laws:

A ship docking at Raïs that's not bearing the Blaustein flag is to be boarded and seized immediately. Warships are attacked when they are close to Raïs. All female captive are to be brought to Morrell in the castle.

To be on the safe side, a ship arriving in Raïs has to bear the Blaustein flag, proclaim its submission to the Lord, and pay the expensive 10 gold pieces docking fee. But merchant ships make extremely lucrative business here so this fee is paid without hesitation.

All Blaustein natives are free to go wherever they want and do whatever they please, as long as they pay respect to the Lord and obey his every whim: that includes fight for him, fetch stuff (or captives) from him, and be part of raids, etc. Displeasing the Lord is often a capital offense.

Morrell gets a sizable portion of the piracy and smuggling take, that I estimate to be about one quarter of all revenues (those evading this "tax" are punished by horrible death; but has it never happened in recent years, according to Blausteiners – if that means anything). Morrell mainly uses this source of income to finance his militia, to pay the rent of the Worthy, but also to buy some luxuries for himself and gifts for his next wife to be.

All Blausteiners love the public executions on Verdoux's Place. The victims for these weekly executions often come from boats not bearing the Blaustein flag, or when none is available, originate from the villagers' ranks themselves, as I found during my stay. The Lord is often present, if not the executor himself. He starts by claiming

why he decided this person was to be executed: usually for the crime of displeasing him, or by “planning against Blaustein’s interests.” Sometimes, the victim is killed by hanging, but flogging followed with sea water rinsing, or hanging & burning simultaneously is not unheard of, nor are any number of the creative methods I detailed earlier. Strangely, the Blausteiners often do not remember the person hanging by a rope on Verdoux’s Place was sometimes their neighbor just yesterday...

The relations between Morrell and the other coastal governments is often very harsh, because Morrell is well known to encourage piracy on the Sea of Sorrows, if not support it himself. Mordentish, Dementlieuse and Lamordian ships fire on sight at any ship bearing the Blaustein flag and they are thus forbidden to land there. The same happens with ships from Paridon.

Relations with Darkon are now friendlier, since Morrell has recently agreed not to attack Darkonese ships. Pressure from Darkonese warships is surely a good reason for this peace “agreement”. Valachani relations are neutral, as there are few valachani ships to be attacked, and the coastal towns are too far inland to be raided.

Morrell has cordial relations with the sophisticated Ghastrian and the elusive people in Dominia (as a reminder, they are now clients to Morrell’s slave trade).

Conclusions

I felt I had enough information on this island, and could make a report on the forces at hand. This island being somewhat tiny, I scanned it for an object belonging to van Rijn and linking him to his homeland. He always wore a small silver pocket watch, and he probably thinks I’ve forgotten. But since it’s from his “Hamsturdaam” homeland, a place he longs to see again, I know in my heart he surely still carries it with him all the time. And I have not forgotten this trinket, and now I suspect it could even be a part of his phylactery. I just wish I’d remembered this object before as it could have helped tracking him.

The scanning showed no trace of the Traitor, and I don’t see this wild island has having interesting resources that he could manipulate in his war against us. Also, the usual questions on this matter to Blausteiners were inconclusive again, so we’ll leave this place for the last stop in this trip, Ghastria.

DM's Appendix

Lord Raoul Morrell (Bluebeard),

Darklord of Blaustein

Male Caliban Ari4/Thug4; CR 9; Medium Humanoid (Caliban); HD 4d8+4d10+8 (51 hp); Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (touch 13, flat-footed 10); Base Atk +7; Grp +12; Atk +12 melee (touch attack to initiate grapple) (no damage or 1d3+5 nonlethal) or +15 melee (1d4+8, +3 silver dagger); Full Atk +12 melee (touch attack to initiate grapple) (no damage or 1d3+5 nonlethal) or +15 melee (1d4+8, +3 silver dagger); Face/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 21, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 9 (middle-aged); SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5

Language: Perraulesque* (home language), Mordentish, Dementlieuse, Falkovnian

Skills and Feats: Bluff +11, Diplomacy +15, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (geography) +5, Knowledge (history) +5, Knowledge (local) +5, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +5, Listen +6, Sense Motive +12; Spot +6; Power Attack, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Death Blow^{Cad, SwF} (can perform a coup de grace attack against a helpless defender as a standard action).

Spell-like abilities (as 9th level caster): At will *discern lies*, *detect thoughts*, *modify memories* (on the inhabitants of Blaustein - people born on the island, and all those expatriates now considering Blaustein as their home). He can also send a *dream* 1/week with an implanted suggestion to a vain, greedy or foolish



woman, anywhere in the world. Bluebeard has to be aware of the existence of that woman. Usually the suggestion is to seek him out and become his wife.

Special Qualities:

Immune from all attacks from his former wives (Su): The former ghostly wives cannot harm him in any way.

Mutilating attack (Ex): when Bluebeard has pinned his foe, he is able to spend a full round action similar to a coup de grace on them to mutilate his opponent by tearing off a bodily extremity (all the fingers in one hand at once, toes) or a facial part (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, teeth), or pressing on the stomach to make them *sickened*. The damage caused by this attack is 1-6 hp and also causes appropriate hindrance (you can't write without fingers, you can't talk without a tongue, etc.). The wound quickly stops bleeding, and cicatrizes with an ugly scar.

Rejuvenating Body (Su): On his home world, Bluebeard was born with a deformed caliban body. However, since being in the land of the mists, his body

transforms slowly over decades, to smoothen the caliban deformities. But it will take centuries before Bluebeard could be considered handsome.

Know inner desire (Su): After ten minutes of being in the presence of a person, and using *discern lies* and *detect thoughts*, Bluebeard knows something about the inner motivation of person, a shameful secret, or unavowable desires.

Fleeting key to freedom (Su): Because of his modus operandi with his wives, Bluebeard needs to get away from the island to test his newlywed wife (in order to have them tempted to open the forbidden room). So the dark powers enable Bluebeard to escape from Blaustein's limits once per year.

When he leaves the island of Blaustein a newlywed wife, his anger builds and he usually sails a boat never far from the island. The other times, he prefers the liberty of sailing with his ruffians, watching attacks from the poop deck (rarely attacking himself, but using his *modify memory* to implant great battle stories about him in his people). Bluebeard sometimes visits port cities, especially if he is aware of a beauty he could seduce as a future wife.

This escape lasts a maximum of three days: the specters of his former wives supernaturally bring him back to the castle after that time, in the hanging room. He hates when this happens, so he tries to be back before three days on his own. Also, if the key has blood stains on it, the specters immediately bring him back.

Since Bluebeard can visit other domains for a short time, this can be used as misleading information: "He can't be the darklord, he was seen in Mordent last month!"

Possessions: magical key to the Hanging Room (gets bloodied if anyone but him opens the door as per the story, until that person is dead), +3 silver dagger, several different exotic noble outfits (including at least one Pharazian outfit complete with turban and pantaloons), jewelry. Aside from his ever present silver dagger he often carries a rapier, cutlass, or scimitar.

Description

The Lord of Blaustein is definitively not a graceful man. While of average height, his barrel-shaped body is large and bulbous. His arms and legs are a little short for his size. Every part of his body appears inflated from too much extra flesh under his skin. His lips are fleshy and full, his fingers like round sausages, his arms meaty and round. At first glance, Bluebeard appears like an ill bred human. To make things worse, Bluebeard often dresses his plump body in dark colored suits that are slightly too small for him, as if a creaking suit would emphasize his full body size.

Bluebeard wears a large but neatly trimmed black beard, with oily blue shades under the light, and light streaks of gray, as well as a thick mustache of the same color. To people realizing his beard color is in fact blue, Bluebeard has an Outcast Rating of 1. His full lips are deep red, and the skin of his sanguine fleshy cheeks is reddish too. His nose is pock-marked and his blue-gray eyed gaze is cunning and evaluating, and most often mocking too.

Bluebeard wears large silver rings on three fingers of the right hand.

Given his ungraceful swollen appearance, by contrast his manners and speech are unmistakably those of a sophisticated aristocrat. Bluebeard wears

outlandish finery including sometimes noble outfits from such different places as Mordent, Dementieu, or even Sri Raji or Pharazia. Always the outfits seem to look a bit weird when he wears them but woe to those who would ridicule him for it. He often sports exotic perfumes, usually of sandalwood and bay leaves. His voice is silken, smooth, and pleasant and his intonations charming. His usual attitude is self confidant.

Background

The Lord of Blaustein was born under the name of Raoul de Sille, a disgraceful caliban with an ugly face and hunched back. But being the son of a wealthy lord protected him from the usual caliban fate and Bluebeard still was able to get a noble's education. Being shunned by other people of his age, he spent a lot of his time reading books, and became a scholarly expert in interpretation of children's tales. Near the age of twenty, de Sille grew a full beard to hide some of his ugly face, but it had strong unique bluish shades. It is then that he was secretly nicknamed Bluebeard, but when he found out, he liked the name and asked to be called Lord Bluebeard, or La Barbe-Bleue. A few years later, Raoul's kind father died and Raoul became the lord of this wealthy estate.

As much as he longed for it, he could not find female companionship because of his ugly appearance. It is then that he started writing to daughters of wealthy nobles far away, trying to charm them with his wit and his poems. He tried hard to be worthy of their attention. But when the romance was too hot to stay solely on paper, Bluebeard finally did visit them or the ladies visited him. But each time, the romance stopped abruptly as the women were dismayed by his ungraceful looks. They rejected him for

his hideous appearance. But after four times of refusal, Raoul thought he found the "right one." She didn't think of Raoul as a mongrel, but as the graceful and charming man he was. This woman, Marguerite Cys, was married to Raoul de Sille the next month.

Quickly however, things went sour for de Sille when he sadly found out she had married him only for his enticing wealth, and was eying other men. When he found she was unfaithful, he killed her with a knife slash on the throat and let her body rot in a closed room to which only he had the key. He calmed his anger and announced to his people that his unfaithful wife ran off with a bard.

A similar thing happened six other times to de Sille. There was one who tried to poison him after they married, in order to become the sole owner of the estate. Another tried to steal from his coffers and run away with her real lover. All were faithless, and every time, he killed this unfaithful wife.



(by Edmund Dulac)

But de Sille didn't stop looking for a woman really worthy of his attention, a woman that would be able to see the grace in him under this sad disguise of flesh and would not marry him just to get her hands on his wealth. A few years after, he again thought he found this rare woman. Jacqueline Madore fell in love with de Sille and they got married quickly. She was the perfect wife, loving him as the sophisticated and kind gentleman he wanted to be. Everything was perfect for de Sille, but he decided to test her to know if he could trust her completely.

Bluebeard announced to her that he had to leave the estate for a while to visit a far away aunt that was on her deathbed. He gave her all the keys of the castle, including the key to the room where the bodies of Marguerite Cys and the other unfaithful wives were now dried husks. He told Jacqueline she was free to go anywhere in the castle while he was away, but she was forbidden to enter this black doored room. He then went away with his escort of soldiers for his trip. Unfortunately, almost immediately Jacqueline was struck with the desire to look inside the forbidden room. She opened the black door and discovered her husband's sinister secret: she saw the bodies she understood to be those of his past wives.

But Bluebeard returned to his castle a few hours after his departure as he "forgot a gift for his nephew" and saw what his wife had done. In a rage, because less than an hour is all it took for her to fail his test, he brought her screaming to the forbidden room and killed her by planting his knife in her throat, leaving her there to die alone, after locking the door. "Disloyalty cannot be tolerated", he told her before

slicing her throat, "so you will join these other disappointments for eternity."

When he looked outside, trembling with rage, he saw that odd strips of mists began to form on his land ... And thus was Bluebeard snatched from his home to become darklord of a tiny island in the sea of an unknown and strange world. The year was 643 on the Barovian calendar.

He found himself master of a heavily defended castle. This new world's incarnation of his home had ingenious defense mechanisms and deadly traps he had only heard of, as part of castles from his land. But now they were all collected into one place, his. Bluebeard liked this castle's feel: inviting yet deadly defensive if something was proven dangerous.

Bluebeard also noticed that his features were now improved greatly. No longer very ugly, he found himself much more charming than he was. That he couldn't go very far from the island wasn't a problem for him at first, as he never traveled much anyway before. But he found he could escape the island about once per year, though he wasn't really fond of this at first. Also, later he found his name to be infamous and he came to travel anonymously when he traveled to other lands. So he also changed his name after a few decades in an attempt at a fresh start.

He found he had great control of the riff-raff that inhabited his island. He loathed this thuggish population as they were unsophisticated, vile and wild, but they obeyed his every whim. He could even change their memory to put in their head whatever self gratifying lie he could think of. He could detect lies and detect other people's thoughts. Nobody could ever lie to him.

And that was satisfying.

But all this came with a ghastly price. Soon after his arrival in the plane of the mists, he tried to get close to a woman from Blaustein to satisfy a manly urge, but he quickly stopped as the woman now appeared to him like a decaying corpse that reminded him of one of his former wives, complete with gashed throat. When he got away, he saw it was just an illusion. But he couldn't get close to that woman, or any other from Blaustein, for the same disgusting change in appearance happened.

Bluebeard understood in mild despair that he needed to find female companionship from outside his land, again. And another cycle of disappointment followed: the first wife, Ursula, soon proved herself having thoughts of unfaithfulness. Bluebeard killed her and hanged her body on a hook in the room of his castle he dubbed the Hanging Room. All the other ten wives that followed, however pure in heart, could not resist the curiosity of looking inside this Hanging Room, and eventually joined the others forever in death.

The golden key to the Hanging Room was now magical and became stained with blood whenever an unfaithful wife opened the forbidden door. Only the death of the unworthy wife could erase the stain. The key also alerted him that the Hanging Room door was opened, wherever he was at the time of the trespassing. The wives were all killed and their bodies hung to dry in the infamous forbidden room.

Able to mold his population's memory, Bluebeard propagated lies about this string of death, casting him into the role of a poor and unlucky husband. He changed his name a few

times over the years, as he understood his extraordinary longevity (much more than 100 years) could attract problems with monster hunters from outside, and also to get a new identity in order to court the lovely young ladies of The Core under a new guise.

Current Sketch

Bluebeard could enjoy this power of judge and jury very much if it wasn't that he was very lonely, able to get married to a non-Blaustiner only once every ten years on average, and only for a few months. Blaustiner woman are repulsive to him as they eerily take the appearance of any of his dead wives.

Also, the dead wives' ghosts haunt him at night with their boring lament and demands for attention. They even bring him home when he tries to stay away from the castle at night and Bluebeard hates this weakness and this prison feel.

Bluebeard, or Raoul Morrell as per his current name, is usually self confident, arrogant and self-satisfied, while keeping the aristocratic guise.

When met, Bluebeard doesn't like if anyone confronts him on the death of his wives. If accused, he will laugh it off while setting a plan to get rid of this accuser. Reading the thoughts of the accuser, he will set a trap based on temptation in which the accuser will be completely under the paw of Bluebeard. The Lord of Blaustein is a master at playing cat and mouse with any person that he would not let leave the island in order that his reputation outside of Blaustein would remain clean. Anyone in a position to menace the reputation of Bluebeard will soon fall into a trap and get killed to silence him. He will tempt his target toward a set-up deed that will seal his fate: getting killed by Bluebeard

himself, executed by the mob on Verdoux's Place, or thrown into the castle's pit.

Meanwhile, Bluebeard passes the time by ruling his realm with an iron fist while making sure his population loves him. His tiny realm in the sea is now looking very small and he tries to get as much information on the rest of the land of the mists to make his life less boring.

His physical body ages very slowly, about a year every ten years. While some wrinkles appear in his face, they are graceful and correct something that was ugly or odd in his face, so Bluebeard is getting more handsome as he ages, but it's a slow process.

Combat

Bluebeard relies on his devoted staff and the loyal villagers in his domain for protection. In the castle, by night the spectres of his wives wander freely, and they try to shield him from harm. If forced to fight, Bluebeard will shout for help if he thinks he needs it.

Bluebeard isn't much of a fighter himself, and doesn't like to handle a weapon like a longsword, but he loves to maim his victims with his own hands. Bluebeard tries to grapple and then either pin and strangle his victim until unconscious or use his mutilating attack, or use his dagger while maintaining the grapple (using a dagger while grappling incurs a -4 penalty).

Adventure hook: The Pit

In the middle of the castle stands a very deep pit, where intruders are quickly hurled until they are able to get hold on something when the tilt room mechanism turns the room upside down over the pit (Ref DC 20). Rumors on the Core have it that there is an extensive catacomb under the castle, with hundred feet long tunnels filled with bones and skulls (false).

The bottom of the pit is at sea level (400 feet below) and cannot be seen since the place is dark and normally without any source of light. From the top, the walls of the pit are bricked for the first quarter of it, and then turn to natural grotto walls. At sea level, the floor is mainly rocks, which means a swift death to anyone falling there, but a deep pool of natural water stands in the northern corner of the grotto.

The floor is littered with human bones, of victims Bluebeard threw in the pit. These are the remains of most unlucky foreign travelers brought to the Lord – travelers without the Blaustein flag, would-be adventurers, annoying peddlers, bothersome relatives of a former wife, and the women that bored him and whom he didn't marry. They are most often thrown there with their belongings so it could be possible to scavenge for useful items, or written material such as a journal, if it isn't too close to the natural pool.

Many little crabs dwell in the natural pool and quickly clean any corpse thrown in the pit. The pool has a submerged tunnel leading into the sea. But this tunnel is often the lair of marine undead, who also fight the crabs over corpses' morsels.

A vicious hand-to-hand fighter, Bluebeard loves to hit on the head in order to daze his victim. Then he strangles him slowly, continuing after the death until the neck bones are crushed. Once he has his opponent pinned, Bluebeard is fond of brutal "poetic" torture (see also Lord Henredon's story in Tales of Ravenloft).

If facing more powerful foes, Bluebeard can also count on a mob of Blausteiners when in town, or Conomor his manservant, or when in his castle, on his guards and the twenty ghosts of his wife. Often his manservant will come to his help and assist in grappling or pinning a victim. If things go really badly in the castle, Bluebeard could also summon the whole Blaustein population to his aid in a few minutes.

In combat or when he meets someone he wants to shaken, Bluebeard likes to make use of the demoralize opponent option of the Intimidate skill.

Lair

The main text describes Bluebeard's castle, and the original castle map and description can be found in the *Darklords* accessory (TSR RR1 #9331).

Closing the Borders

Bluebeard cannot close the borders of his domain.

Option: when confronted by powerful heroes

When facing able foes, Bluebeard could tell them the following (false) story:

According to him, the castle is really haunted by the ghost of his first wife, Marguerite. If the heroes suspect a string of murder, he could tell them she is controlling him or she is killing all the

would-be wives herself. Marguerite is getting an ever-growing army of wives' ghosts under her command, so she needs to be destroyed before everything gets out of hand. The Blausteiners love their lord, and would do anything to help, but the evil Marguerite weaves terrible spells to confuse them. That's why the lord needs unaffected foreigners to eliminate her.

Adventure hooks

- A wealthy woman wants a Blaustein gem and she wishes the heroes to travel to Blaustein and acquire one for her.
- The family of a kidnapped woman, or a woman seduced by Bluebeard's dream power into seeking "a magnificent manor located on a lush island," asks the heroes to go to Blaustein to bring her back.
- A woman has received letters from this charming lord, and she asks the players to investigate his claims.
- The new slave trade activities can also be the source of numerous adventure hooks.
- A monstrous creature (a hag, a red widow, a doppelganger) has answered Bluebeard's letter, and the Lord of Blaustein (posing in this as a gullible nobleman) needs help to get rid of this monstrosity he married.
- Lord Henredon is back to unlife as a Dread Revenant VRGWD, and Bluebeard hires heroes from outside to get rid of him. Or Bluebeard could hire them to get rid of the ghosts haunting his castle.

Sources:

Darklords, and Tales of Ravenloft,
“Sight and Sounds”, written by D.J.
Heinrich
Internet sites on interpreting the
Bluebeard story, and its possible origins
(by the way, many names used in the
text were plucked from these as a nod)

<http://www.io.com/~sj/PirateTalk.html>
Uri Grislev (mention in VRA, p 52)

*Thanks to: Deepshadow (and his epic
campaign), Frank (Giamarga) for help
on stats*

Timeline

- 643 (Blaustein)** Year of appearance of the island of Blaustein in the Sea of Sorrows. The Lord of this tiny island is known as Blaubarts Schatten, a reclusive tyrant.
- 645 (Blaustein, partially false)** Year of the Lord of Blaustein's first marriage in the Land of the Mists, with Ursula from Ghastralia. But sadly she was murdered by a thief that came to steal in the castle. See the Blaustein boxed text "The Hanging Room" for the complete list of unhappy marriages that will follow.
- 648 (Blaustein)** Piracy on the Sea of Sorrows becomes a major concern to the Coast and the City of Paridon.
- 677 (Blaustein)** The Lordship changes to Wolfgang Blauer when Blaubarts Schatten retires. He is soon announced to be dead, in local general indifference.
- 697 (Blaustein)** Florian de Puysange becomes Lord of Blaustein when Wolfgang Blauer dies.
- 705 (Blaustein)** The Lord of Blaustein marries his fifteenth wife (or the seventh since the creation of Blaustein), the foolish vistani called Marcia. From then on, vistani will avoid this land.
- 708 (Blaustein)** Uri Grislev, a Lawgiver priest, travels to Blaustein to convert the natives to his faith. He was killed by a mob only two weeks after his arrival. From then on, most religious orders avoid any religious activity in the open on this land.
- 722 (Blaustein)** A Blaustiner gem is showed for the first time on the Core, at a Borcan ball, and some rare new gems of this kind will appear from time to time hereafter.
- 729 (Blaustein, partially false)** The Lord of Blaustein latest unhappy wife, the seventieth, dies when she falls through a window. Just before, Lorel's brother Lord Henredon (from Paridon) came to visit her but is never seen again.
- 735 (Blaustein)** The Lordship of the island changes to Raoul Morrell when Florian de Puysange dies.
- 759 (Blaustein)** Blaustein agrees not to attack Darkonese ships, and a few months later, the Lord of Blaustein is rumored to own a slave trade ring.
- 760 (Blaustein)** Blaustein celebrates the twentieth wedding of their lord, to the beautiful Marielle from Darkon, and pray for his happiness. But she dies after two months, in her bed, of yellow fever brought by a foreign ship to Blaustein. This ship's captain has been hanged after both his arms were torn off.

Point Portage

Crossroads of the Wild and the Weird

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Between the city of Bleakstone and the Starbury Valley rolls a dense, impenetrable wilderness. The forest is an endless ocean of green, rolling from the Great Lakes across the rugged landscape of the northwest. Roads are hard to cut through the dense foliage and all too quickly do the woods wash away such paths with new growth. The earth itself hinders all attempts to travel, for beneath the canopy of trees is an undulating land of rocky hills and swampy marshes. There are but two paths that might take a traveler through the howling wilderness; canoe and rail. Both paths cross at the same place, Point Portage.

Geography

Point Portage is a mile-long causeway of earth separating Lake Wanapitei from the swampy banks of the Ramsey River. The Point is only a hundred yards at its center, flaring out on either side like an

hourglass. Portage is the narrowest point of land between the waterways, making it the natural crossroads for water traffic in the area. The Point is several miles west of Bleakstone, roughly equidistant between the crumbling lakeside city and the mining boomtown Starbury.

The land is bed of semi-solid mud held together by grasses and scrub-brush on a foundation of rock. On either side of the Point is a sea of lily pads, shaded by a forest of waving cattails. During the day, the marshes hum with the dull drone of thousands of black flies, while every night the croaking of frogs and haunting song of loons echo from water. The forests press close to the northern and southern sides of the Point, pushing as far as the broken remnants of wooden stockades. Most of the logs in the palisade have been cut free and chopped up to make a walkway of wooden planks in the mud.



The forests surrounding the Point are thick, damp, and dark. The tall canopy of green blocks out the sunlight, leaving the forest floor shrouded in darkness. In the shadows, fungoid corruption rules: Indian pipes erupt from the black carpet of dead leaves to bask in the shadows of rotting logs. Deadfall does not rot as fast as it ought to, but rather lingers and ferments. Hidden amidst the woods are narrow glens and dales where the locals have cut their farmsteads. The locals allow the woods to encroach close to their properties, as if the forest were a blanket to be wrapped around their homes.

To the west of the Point is the gurgling Ramsey River. Fed steadily by the runoff from the highlands, the river rolls restlessly past the Point. Though too shallow for steamboats, the river is of perfect depth for the canoes that paddle endlessly up and down the waters. From the vantage of the Point, one might also look east across the massive Lake Wanapitei and the leagues of forest beyond. The lake is rimmed with great cliffs of white rock towering above a belt of thick marshlands. At most times the lake is calm and serene, its mirror surface broken only by a few stony islands, flocks of water-fowl, or the ripples from schools of fish. Yet when storm winds gather, Wanapitei shifts into a raging sea of black waves fanged with white foam. Not without good reasons do the locals claim that a spirit lurks beneath the waters. Indeed, many a luckless traveler has been drowned by the caprices of the lake.

History

Point Portage has always been a crossroads for travel between the Great Lakes and the interior of Minnesota. Before the intrusion of Europeans, the natives conducted brisk trade through the Point, using it as a meeting place to exchange furs and hides from the North for the bounty of Lake Superior. Competition in the fur trade spurred various tribes and confederations to war for control of the Point. Many towns were raised over the spit of land, only to be burned and raised again in an endless cycle. The violence ended only after 1814, when the United States drove most of the native tribes further west.

For many years the Point was forgotten by the outside world. As American civilization grew, it displaced the little communities that had grown on its outskirts. Hardy frontiersmen, native tribes, outlaw gangs, and religious nonconformists were all forced further away by the endless march of progress. All the while, Point Portage remained a place set apart from time, protected as much by the deep woods as by the lack of any desirable resource. Such isolation was attractive to many of the people seeking a shadowy refuge from the blinding lights of an alien civilization. Thus the lands around the Point became a sanctuary for the hermits and the hunted, the wild and the weird.

The isolation of the Point ended abruptly with the Iron Boom in 1860. A railway was required to carry the iron ore from the Starbury Valley to the port of Bleakstone, and the Point proved to be the ideal bridge to carry the rails through the rugged land of water, wood,

and rock. The swing station was built and ore began to flow down the tracks.

Up those rails came the invasion from civilization. Wealthy men, such as John Bell, led a vanguard of land speculators and ruffians. These robber barons sent their thugs to evict the locals from the best farmlands, acquired the titles to the properties from the state, and enticed immigrants to settle on the cleared lands. The land owners skirmished with the local squatters for years, to no avail. Of the wave of immigrants that settled around the Point, few stayed. Most were disturbed by the eerie woods and the strange, hostile locals. With the mines booming and the high rent on land, there was little reason to stay. Point Portage was once again forgotten by the outside world.

Eventually, the national railway reached the Starbury Valley and the new connection siphoned off the flow of ore through Point Portage, reducing the importance of the rail link. Once again, Point Portage settled into the shadows of obscurity.

Present

Point Portage has settled into equilibrium; the place neither blossoms nor decays further. Attempts to tame the lawless region have met with failure, at least for the time being. The rails are still in use, though trains are infrequent. The Point is still used by locals to cross between the Lake and the River.

The residents of Point Portage are divided into two groups: the local squatters and the outlanders. The squatters are a strange blend of intermarrying peoples who have lived in the deep woods for generations. Most are American, though there are French, Dutch, and natives from various tribes

including Mohawks, Algonquians, and Blackfoot Cree. Though from different cultures, the locals share a common love for the wilderness and isolation. Bonded by their distrust of the outside world, the squatters have formed a bulwark against further intrusions.

Outlanders work for the railway and rarely venture far from the Point. Many immigrants have come down the rails and tried to make a living in the deep forest, only to abandon their homes for easier living elsewhere. There are a few die-hard settlers, mostly eastern Europeans, who have set down their roots and will not be driven away. Stubborn, reticent, and completely uninterested in the world beyond, these hardy farmers are well on their way to becoming true locals themselves.

Places of Note

Railway and Swing Station

The Bleakstone railway erupts from woods on the Southern end, and runs along the length of the Point before disappearing into the forest on the Northern side. The rails sit upon wooden ties built upon a rocky roadbed, reinforced with revetments of wood and stone.

At the southern end of the Point is the Swing Station, the stopping-over point for trains. The station is a single story building with a train platform, water tower and coal chute. Close by are the storehouse and the workers' bunks. Several extra sets of sidetracks allow for locomotives to detach from trains and turn around, should that be required, such as when coal is delivered. At the end of one of the sidetracks is a workshop, where a small tank engine is housed.

The Swing Station is home to most of the Outlanders in Point Portage. Many are workmen charged with the Sisyphean task of pulling the rails out of the sinking earth and cutting back the encroaching forest. Managers at the station come and go frequently, being either hired elsewhere or fired for incompetence. The current manager is Beauregard Frescura, a short, stocky man who is slow at thinking and fast at shifting blame. Constable Al MacDonald is the head of rail security and the closest thing to a lawman in Point Portage. MacDonald is easily identified by his black Stetson hat, waxed handlebar moustache, and the sawed-off shotgun cradled in the crook of his crippled left arm.

Farmsteads

Along the lake and river are a number of dilapidated farmsteads. Some are the abandoned settlements of the immigrants who have fled to better lands, but most are the homes of the local squatters. These tiny acreages are nestled closely in the forest, with barely enough space for a field. The humble squatters gather a great deal of food by hunting, fishing, and trapping, so they need little in the way of cleared land. With so many abandoned farmsteads nearby, the squatters have more land than they can possibly farm.

Many of the farmsteads are built around ancient ramshackle houses of immemorial age. These antique edifices tilt crazily under the weight of patchwork additions, propped up by crude buttresses or secured to living trees. Sod huts and native wigwams are scattered across the properties, as are dens cut directly into hillsides. The squatters employ hasty, haphazard construction as they migrate from

homestead to homestead as the seasons change. A given farm might be jam-packed with several generations of a family one month and completely deserted the next.

Pitt's House of Treasure

The heart and soul of Point Portage is Pitt's House of Treasure, a massive barn-like structure built of rough cut logs, mortared together with dried mosses. The roof is made from hundreds of tree branches tapering to a great stone chimney. The cold and the dampness have turned the wood a dark black, yet the timbers are still as strong as the day they were mortared in place. The trading post on the shores of Lake Wanapitei is incredibly ancient; the oldest of the native elders still possess beads and tools their grandparents bought from Pitt's House.

Pitt's is a great storehouse, jammed from floor to ceiling with the necessities for wilderness living, and more than a few modern luxuries. Furs and pelts are draped over parts for steam engines; tobacco and jugs of liquor are stored on the same shelf as the latest medicines and salves; and racks of rifles are built into the reverse side of bookshelves. From the roof beams hang a few canoes, stuffed with goods that could not be fit on the floor. The trading post usually takes payment in furs, hides, horns, and shells collected by hunters, trappers, and fishers from miles and miles around.

Pitt's is run by Arnold Michel, a French miner from Starbury who won the House in a game of blackjack, or so the story goes. Michel and his family live in the attic garret above the trading post along with a half dozen locals who work in the House. Adjoining their apartment is a storage space which is

rented out to the occasional lodger. Once a season, Michel clears a space on the floor and holds a great card tournament. The squatters come from miles around to sip whiskey and watch others risk their meager fortunes.

Bell's Folly

Keen eyes might penetrate the thick forests and detect a strange watcher perched upon a rocky outcropping above Lake Wanapitei. The lone sentinel is the belfry of Bell Manor, a great stone mansion consumed by the forest. The lonely structure is a great gothic revival mansion built of grey slate quarried from the stone around Point Portage. Set upon a high granite cliff above the lake, the house can only be reached by a narrow path from Point Portage.

The mansion was built by prospector John Bell, who is credited with discovering most of the ore bodies in Starbury. Though celebrated, rumor circulated that Bell was less skilled as a prospector than he was as a claim jumper. Bell invested much of his earnings in land speculation around Point Portage and tried to lure sharecroppers to farm the untamed wilderness. The landowner hired a team of thugs to drive away the locals and seize his choice of the lands. The locals fought back and, in a series of brutal skirmishes, Bell was made a virtual prisoner in his mansion. First Bell lost his tenants, then his fortune, and finally his mind. In 1879, Bell died raving and was buried in his gardens. None of the Bell family has tried to reclaim the house, owing to the remoteness of the location and bad memories.

In the long years of abandonment, the acreage has gone wild with weeds and brush. Bent and twisted trees erupt

from the broken stone terraces and paw their branches at the panes of high-arched windows. What once were rose bushes wrap their way along the low stone hedgerow around the property, walling the estate off with a barrier of stinging nestles. Reeds and marsh-grasses bloom out of stone fountains and curtains of creeping ivy claw their way higher up the walls with each year. On nights when the wind is just right, the copper bell tolls in the tower. When the locals hear the deep peal echo over the water, they cross themselves and mutter prayers to their ancestor saints.

A rumor is spreading regarding the "Bell Diamonds". Though Bell's will listed no jewelry in his estate, it was common for the wealthy to hide their earnings in jewels to avoid taxation. Recently, clerks at the DeWitt's Auction house in Bleakstone discovered an appraisal notice written in 1879, regarding a horde of precious gems owned by John Bell. If accurate, the notes suggest that the mad robber baron hid a fortune in gems in his house. Supposedly, Bell intended to sell the jewels to fund a final campaign against the squatters but died before he could arrange the sale. Bell's family disavows the rumor as typical gossip, though their lawyers have begun searching for investigators to mount an expedition.

Lily Creek

Just a mile from the Point is an inlet to Lake Wanapitei where the forest slopes down into the water, creating a tangled swamp. A carpet of green lily-pads bobs on the surface, shading the black waters and a swaying jungle of slimy water weeds. Tall but sickly birch trees crowd close to the water edge, casting dancing shadows as they wave in the breeze. The

squatters avoid the stagnant creek, for it is a poor fishing spot, and an even poorer hunting ground. The air is hot and thick with the smell of vegetal rot. Mosquitoes and horseflies swarm above the stagnant waters, with only a scant few frogs or birds to prey upon them. The locals call this font of pestilence Lily Creek.

A strange legend surrounds Lily Creek, owed to a squatter called Tom Beaumadael, about whom the most fantastic tales are associated. It is said that Beaumadael once swam beneath Lily Creek and discovered a cavern through which flowed breathable air. The squatter explored the cave and discovered that it was not a cavern but rather the orifice of a colossal turtle and the current of air was its fetid breath. The titan creature lay buried in the creek, with only its tail left out of the mud.

After exploring the inside of the creature, Tom Beaumadael claimed that the beast had a shell as vast as a mountain, a neck as long as a freight train, and a mouth so wide that it could swallow the whole Point in a single bite. The creature, claimed Beaumadael, is hibernating, but when it dreams, the thrashings of its tail cause the lake to erupt into a deadly sea of rapids. Beaumadael warned his fellows, bringing as proof two stones he took from the gizzard of the turtle.

Outlanders deride this myth, not least because so many of its adherents are of European descent and “ought to know better.” The squatters know that all of the stories surrounding Tom Beaumadael are half-lies, and so also half-truths. Years ago, a thief stole one of the Turtle Stones Beaumadael brought, and ever since the locals have become secretive with the remaining rock. One outsider who saw the Turtle Stone claims that it is an opal the size of a man’s head.

The Mission

To the north side of the Point is the teetering ruin of the Mission, Ste. Marie of the River. Of the buildings that made up the Mission, only the chapel survives and over the years the building has partially sunk into the mud of the Point. The mission was founded in the eighteenth century by Jesuits to convert the natives who traded at the Point. The Society closed Ste. Marie in 1804, and the remaining missionaries were stripped of their rank and confined to various monasteries in Lower Canada.

Little was known about the final days of the Ste. Marie Mission, until historian Raymond Lafitte found a diary at the Thompson Museum in Bleakstone. The journal is purported to be written by Father Montcalm, a Jesuit who traveled to Point Portage in 1803 and ultimately closed the mission. The sober diary hints at the most sinister allegations, suggesting that the mission in Portage had become infected with the insidious practices of witchcraft. Lafitte intends to write a dissertation regarding the diary, which he believes will earn him a doctorate. However, the diary lacks concrete proof of its claims, so Lafitte is currently looking for assistants to help him excavate the site and find proof for his theories.

The Train Wreck of 1870

Along the southwestern shore of the lake rests the shame of Point Portage, the Train Wreck of 1870. On a stormy night in May of that year, Train #3 approached Point Portage. The water-bloated bank collapsed into the Lake, dumping the whole train into the sucking mire. Many were killed by the derailment and many more were trapped as the cars sank into the muck. The survivors spent the night

weathering freezing rains and listening to the cries of the people drowning in the wreckage below them.

The railway sent a salvage team to pull the wreck from the swamp but the train had sunk too deeply into the mud. The swampy banks would support no equipment heavy enough to pull the train free, so the train was left to rust and rot. The tracks were rebuilt further inland and the railroad washed its hands of the tragedy. Corroded iron still bleeds crimson into the swamp, turning the mud the color of clotted blood. The warped debris still pokes high out of the mire, the bones of a half-buried serpent. On rainy spring nights, the swing station rings its brass bell three times in memory of the disaster.

Other Notes

The Jackson Gang

Ernst Jackson used to make a good living out west as a bandit, rustler, and horse thief. However, with the government's success against the Sioux, the U.S. Cavalry has turned its attention to smaller prey, including highwaymen like Ernst. While most of his ilk fled further west, Jackson headed east where he figured he'd find plentiful loot, eager

recruits, and less than capable police. He was partially correct.

Jackson found that the eastern law officers were complacent, inexperienced, and slow. Sadly, the same was true of his own criminal recruits. Rather than being hardened frontiersmen like him, most are soft and spoiled drunks fleeing the drudgery of the mines.

Jackson is planning a final big score that could allow him to retire. He recently recruited August Bendlewood, a spindly little bail-jumper who used to work at the roast yards for Creighton Mine. Bendlewood has explained that the refining process occasionally yields moderate traces of gold, which the company collects secretly to avoid taxes. The company ships the secret hoard of gold on a special train to Bleakstone, where revenue officials are too corrupt or incompetent to notice.

Jackson means to rob the gold train at Point Portage. He has scouted the area and expects only weak resistance. His bandits will have ample opportunity to seize the station, get the gold, and escape into the wilderness. Though his men are greatly excited at the prospect of gold, Jackson doesn't think that the take will be great enough to share betwixt them all. Once he has his plunder, Jackson plans to issue his gang a severance pay, not in gold, but in lead.

Cold Island

Lonely Island of Dark Secrets

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Cold Island sits in Lake Superior, just a few miles south of the Ramsey River. The island was settled by strange recluses seeking a sanctuary from the world. Even today, the little settlement is a backward outpost amidst the wilderness. On that forgotten island, strange mysteries wander beneath the pines and ancient evils stir in buried barrows. Of the furtive islanders, none dare speak of what awaits those who delve the secrets of Cold Island.

Geography

Cold Island is a wedge-shaped island, eight miles across and three miles at its widest. The land tapers at the northwestern edge, pointing at the mainland like an accusing finger. The island is densely forested with pines, birches and titanic oaks that tower over the other flora. Beneath the canopy of green is a rolling landscape of rounded hills, winding steams, and narrow glens. The forests swarm with deer, rabbits, foxes

and wild fowl. Along the northern edge of the island yawns the Northern Fen, a sea of waving cattails concealing jagged rocks and the wreckage of sunken boats.

Lake Superior moderates the weather, allowing autumn and spring to linger for many months. Summers are mild, with frequent showers and omnipresent clouds tempering the heat. Cold Island lives up to its namesake in winter, as the land is buffeted by freezing winds and blanketed in heavy snowfall.

The main settlement of the island is Dal Burgeon, a cluster of houses and wharfs built around the island's only port. A few dirt trails wander from the village and meander over hill and dale like spidery cracks in a broken mirror. These trails lead off to the small farmsteads sheltered in the forest. Many of these farms are abandoned and overgrown. Deer and rabbits browse the meadows that once were fields and birds nest inside silent houses of stone.



History

Cold Island was first settled in the mid-eighteenth century by members of the Collingwood clan of Scotland. The Collingwoods had been Jacobites during the uprising of 1745 and lost most of their ancestral lands in the confiscations that followed. Most of the clan migrated to the New World, though they found themselves stifled by the growing English presence. Seeking solitude, the Collingwoods founded their own colony on Cold Island. The island remained a British possession after the American Revolution, and the Collingwoods were joined by a few loyalists who built Dal Burgeon. Like most Scottish, the Collingwoods had many ties with the old country and stayed true to the English Crown. Traders rarely visited, for the islanders were a strange and secretive folk with queer ways. It was said that they practiced a corrupted form of the Church of Scotland mingled with ancient Gaelic pagan rites.

During the war of 1812, a mob of American "privateers" descended upon the nominally British settlement and engaged in all manner of mayhem. The American army eventually brought order to the chaos, though only after the privateers had murdered the Cold Island Collingwoods and a few of their closest friends, leaving the remainder of Dal Burgeon terrorized. The incident was overshadowed by the Bleakstone massacre and was thereafter forgotten.

After the war, the United States assumed ownership and partitioned the land. Members of the Collingwood Clan of Scotland filed a claim for the return of the island. Wary of giving conquered land back to a foreigner, the United States negotiated a settlement whereby it

would return a portion of the island to the Collingwoods on the condition that at least one member of the Clan reside upon the land for a period of 99 years. The Scottish Collingwoods took up the offer and built an estate on the western edge of the island, Cold Island Castle.

Present

The iron boom of the 1860's brought increased lake traffic past Cold Island; ships and barges passed directly by Cold Island en route to pick up iron ore from Starbury, at the ports in Elderslot and Spivey point. The residents of Dal Burgeon prospered by performing repairs and supplying coal to the ships and the town grew. The years of prosperity died abruptly when the rail line reached the north and curbed the lake traffic.

Now, boats rarely pass by Cold Island and those that do are usually too well stocked to require a stopover. The repair docks and coaler warehouse are vacant now, little more than worm-eaten monuments to better times. Once more, the island has become an isolated and lonely place. In their solitude, the islanders have turned back to the singular ways of their ancestors.

In stark contrast to the impoverished islanders are two wealthy residents: Lord Collingwood and Aldus Beasley. The two own the vast majority of the island, though, due to decades of partitioning, their lands intertwine and even overlap. This confusion has caused a number of bitter disputes between the two. Beasley and Collingwood despise one another and thwart each other's attempts to develop the island. As the two quarrel, the woods reclaim the island.

Places of Note

Dal Burgeon

Dal Burgeon is the island's largest settlement. The village cups the disused docks and empty warehouses on the lake side. High Street runs the length of the village and branches off into a few side streets, which in turn lead to a band of farmed fields, which tapers into the woods. The whole village smells of fish, owing to the packing plant that salts fish for sale on the mainland. During the day, most of the villagers can be found working in the barn-like packing plants or in the teetering white tower that is the salt silo.

Houses in Dal Burgeon are mostly old stone buildings, many of which are over one hundred years old. The villagers are a friendly folk, but they are also quiet and furtive around outsiders. The fisher-folk speak with a Scottish brogue filled with Irish slang. The people are used to being shunned for their strange ways and are not inclined to offer outsiders more reasons to look down upon them.

Bill Gibson runs the Dry Goods Store and carries everything from ammunition to water skins. Gibson also functions as the town barber, dentist, and undertaker –using the same chair for seating customers of any of these services. What cannot be bought at the dry goods might be found at Connolly Reclamation, a teetering warehouse packed from floor to rafters with miscellaneous junk pulled from the lake.

Those few who visit Dal Burgeon stay at “The Hound of the Hill,” an ancient stone barn that serves as the island's only tavern with a room upstairs for rent. The Hound is managed by

Lorry Dalton, a tall, stout blonde woman with an easy laugh. Lorry's brother, Jimmy, runs a brewery in an adjacent building. The Hound Brewery specializes in a thick malty beer known as Cold Stout, which is one of the island's few exports with salt fish.

The stars and stripes fly proudly from the flagstaff of Civic Hall, a squat wooden building bleached white by the sun. The building is shared between the village's only civic officials: Cole Bigelow, the mayor, and Sheriff Kent Jackson. Neither man has any staff, so each tries to foist their menial duties onto the other. Just across from Civic Hall is the office of Norman Depotsi, the representative from the Lake Superior Commission. Semi-retired, Depotsi splits his time between filing complaints from fishermen and adding to his impressive collection of model ships.

The Masonic Hall is the most recent building in Dal Burgeon and stands just opposite of the Presbyterian Church. The Hall was constructed from grants by both Sir James and Aldus Beasley, though neither man visits often. A handful of villagers are Masons, including Doctor Abbot, who is the lodge master, and the town pastor, Dhomine Slot.

Confederate Point

On a muddy spit of marshland, just at the edge of the harbor, leans a sun-bleached, worm-eaten structure. Careful inspection reveals that the tilting pile was once a set of gallows. The swamp is known as Confederate Point. In 1863, a group of Confederate spies were apprehended while trying to interdict the flow of iron past Cold Island. Being amateur hangmen, the villagers botched the executions: two of the condemned died

of slow strangulation and one was accidentally decapitated. The last conspirator, Marvin Calloway, suffered greatly as the frayed noose broke repeatedly. Witnesses relate how Calloway cursed the villagers with each failed attempt to end his life. After the sixth attempt, the rope finally held and Calloway perished.

The bodies were buried in unmarked graves at Confederate Point and the tranquility of Cold Island was preserved, for a time. At the end of the war, the government sent an official to inspect the remains. To the horror of the villagers, Calloway's coffin was empty.

The Beasley Estate

On the eastern edge of Cold Island is the home of Aldus Beasley, the owner of the Creighton Mining Company. Beasley is a wealthy man living under disgrace: He was implicated in a bribery scandal and is in unofficial exile from the city of Bleakstone. Now he bides his time, loitering on his estate, and entertaining high society guests while trying to engineer his return to the good graces of power. Unlike his neighbors, he is a loud and opinionated man with modern tastes. He often says to those around him "If there were no Collingwoods, that island would be mine... and American!"

The boundaries of the Beasley Estate are marked by a tall stone wall wrapped in vines and ivy. At the border, the winding dirt trail from Dal Burgeon meets an ornate iron gate, manned by a guard. Beyond the gate house is a straight cobblestone road flanked on both sides by cherry trees. The road leads past manicured lawns, exotic gardens, sprawling orchards, and stately pavilions.

At the end of the road is "San Celanus," a Georgian mansion of brown stone and white columns. The interior of the building is sumptuously decorated with the oldest antiques and the most modern amenities. This grandiose edifice includes dining halls, stables, a greenhouse, and a cavernous ballroom built atop the cliffs overlooking Lake Superior. A disused dock and boat house sits at the bottom of the cliffs.

Aldus Beasley and his wife Dianne live on the estate with a small army of servants. The estate is also home to half a dozen armed game wardens. More than a few villagers have found themselves picking bird-shot out of their backsides after hunting game on Beasley's lands.

The Ulcer

On the northwest corner of the sprawling Beasley Estate is a dense ring of pine trees and bush. This impenetrable wall of foliage hides Aldus Beasley's secret shame – a single tendril of land owned by the Collingwoods. Sir James refused to sell the land and Beasley refuses anyone access.

Amongst the tall weeds and brambles are the ruins of an old farmhouse and barn. The tiny plot was once the home of some of the Cold Island Collingwoods before they were murdered in the War of 1812. The land was returned to the Sir Edward Collingwood in the 20's, even though the surrounding lands had been partitioned and sold off.

Burned Chapel

Just past the limits of Dal Burgeon is an overgrown ruin, known as the Burned Chapel. The chapel must once have been impressive, with its great arched doorway and the massive stone altar at its end. The sturdy stone walls still stand,

though they tilt at odd angles. The roof is long since gone but a few charred timbers still extend from the stonework, like the ribs of a corpse. The forest has begun to swallow the ruin; the trees crowd close to the old building and weeds sprouts where pews once stood.

The chapel was built by the Cold Island Collingwoods in the eighteenth century and used as a place of worship until 1812, when an American militia burned the chapel and buried all of the Cold Island Collingwoods on the site.

Cold Island Castle

Cold Island tapers off towards the west into a chain of bluffs overlooking Lake Superior. Over these cliffs stands Cold Island Castle, a squat blocky citadel of great grey stone. The castle was constructed in the 1830's by Sir Edward Collingwood, who modeled the edifice after his clan's ancestral estate in the Highlands. An avid huntsman, Sir Edward stocked the island all manner of wild game. Before the completion of the castle, a mountain lion, which Edward had imported for the hunt, escaped captivity and fatally mauled him. Edward's heirs commemorated the event by adding a black cat to the family coat of arms.

The Collingwoods accumulated a vast fortune across the United States, though by treaty with the government, their claim to their properties in America is dependent upon one of their family residing upon the island. While Edward's direct heir languished in the estate, the other Collingwoods traveled across the country and intermarried with many prominent families, only rarely visiting to pay tribute to their patriarch in his prison.

The long lonely years have worn upon the castle, weathering the stone such that it appears to be centuries old. Today, the vast feasting hall and countless guest rooms are blanketed in dust and cobwebs. When Sir Edward constructed the castle, he filled its cavernous rooms and corridors with antique artifacts from Scotland and old Europe. Now these forgotten relics rust in the dark.

The current owner of the castle is Sir James Collingwood, the great-grandson of Sir Edward. A man in his eighties, Sir James has recently taken ill. As Sir James has no close relatives, a lawyer has been commissioned to seek out the scattered scions of the Collingwood clan. There will be many lands and properties to be divided up amongst these inheritors, with one stipulation: One of these long lost relatives will be required to live in Cold Island Castle, permanently.

The Bleeding Hall

The dining hall of Cold Island Castle is on the main floor, locked behind a massive pair of iron bound oak doors. The hall is dominated by a massive rectangular oak table surrounded by antique chairs. At one end of the room hangs the Collingwood pennant and at the other, a portrait of Sir Edward. In the rare times that the hall is used, illumination is provided by torches ensconced on the stone wall and from two iron-wrought chandeliers that hang from the cavernous ceiling. Those with a careful eye will notice that the wooden floor is stained with large brown-red blotches.

The strange history of the Collingwoods turned horribly sinister in 1854. In order to retain their vast land

holdings in the United States, the Collingwood clan chose Duncan Collingwood, Sir Edward's grandson, to remain on Cold Island. Since he was unwilling, his family decided to drive him to madness and institutionalize him in the Castle.

The gas lighting succeeded only too well, for Duncan had become a raving lunatic. The madman seized a battle axe from the collection of artifacts and slaughtered most of the conspirators in the dining hall. Duncan was taken away to Ether House, the insane asylum in Bleakstone, and one of the few survivors, Moira Collingwood, was forced to remain on the island in Duncan's place.

Lady Moira ordered the dining room sealed, though her son, Sir James, reopened it after her death. Despite the best efforts of the staff, the grizzly stains could not be removed. Even worse, the stain seeps into any carpet lain across it. The axe that Duncan used hangs on the wall of the dining hall.

Lodge of the Silver Gate

Close to the Beasley Estate is an acre of cleared fields and a few cottages surrounded by a low stone wall. Once a farmstead, the property has been transformed into a retreat for a sect of mystics known as the Lodge of the Silver Gate. Aldus Beasley granted the Lodge the use of the property as a means of ingratiating himself to the practitioners. Since then, his wife has become a member of the Lodge and now sponsors their spiritual research.

The Lodge is less of a cult and more of a mystical study group. Practitioners of magic and spiritualism gather within the Lodge to compare notes and collaborate. Cynics suggest that the

Lodge is an organization of charlatans, where phony mediums compare notes on their victims and fix prices for bogus fortune readings.

Lodge members come and go from the place, though there are usually a dozen members at any time. That number swells just before May Eve and All Hallows Night. Most of the Lodge members are friendly and take great pleasure in discussing their mystical studies. The locals avoid the Lodge members, not out of fear but out of distaste.

Lost Lamb Glen

Northeast of Dal Burgeon runs Lost Lamb Glen, a deep and narrow depression cut into the forest by a winding brook. The glen meanders through the forest before finally opening into the Northern Fen. Along either side of the ravine are steep cliffs of crumbling earth, topped by oaks and pine trees that lean over the narrow dale, casting it in cold shadows.

The Glen is an eerie place; strange sounds echo from the cliffs and chill winds blow along the vale. In places the glen opens into squat grassy hillocks crowded up against the cliffs. These rounded knolls sprout like mushrooms all along the route of the stream. Many have noticed that the squat hummocks are too rounded and symmetrical to be wholly natural.

Several years ago, archeologist Dr. Richard Dwight stumbled across the Glen while hunting deer with Sir James Collingwood. The professor remarked that the hillocks resembled Celtic barrows and made plans to excavate one. The doctor was thwarted by Aldus Beasley, who owns most of Lost Lamb

Glen and refuses all requests to dig on the site, for reasons he keeps to himself.

The Northern Fen

The cliffs of the northern side of the island yawn open into the mouth of the Fen, a broad sea of waving cattails rolling down into the lake. Tall willows and birch trees sprout from mounds of mud, casting shadows across the weed-choked waters. This swamp buzzes with all manner of amphibians and water-fowl, even when game is scarce elsewhere on the island. The tranquil appearance of the swamp belies a terrible danger: Sharp rocks lie hidden beneath the black waters of the Fen, waiting to rip open the bottoms of whatever boats might enter. The waving reeds hide the wrecks of countless craft heedlessly piloted into danger. The thick water-weeds ensnare swimmers and the muddy quagmire threatens to suck down waders. Only a few of the islanders hunt or trap in the fen, so anyone so trapped must rely upon themselves for rescue.

It is said that once the Northern Fen was a fine meadow and pasture land before sinking into the lake. Old records at the civic hall back up this claim, and include a bill of sale to a buyer whose name has been expunged from the record. Some duck hunters have said that they spied the remains of a farmhouse, mostly sunk into the swamp.

The Wreckers

A jagged line of rocks reaches out of the lake bottom two miles south east of the Dal Burgeon's port. Known as The Wreckers, these lethal shoals lie hidden just beneath the waterline and pose a terrible threat to whatever luckless ship might blunder into them. Many of boats

have been lost to the treacherous wreckers over the years.

The Lake Superior Commission in Bleakstone has tried to warn ships away from the Wreckers, though since that office is rife with erroneous charts, their warnings have caused more annoyance than awareness. The Connolly family of Dal Burgeon salvages the numerous wrecks that litter the submerged rock face. Some folk have claimed to have seen lights shining out near the wreckers, perhaps acting as a lure for luckless ships. Such talk is always kept quiet, since the whole town profits from the scavenging of the wrecks.

Other Notes

The Prowler

Hunting enthusiasts have imported many exotic animals to Cold Island, most notably Sir Edward and his mountain lion. Usually these interlopers are quickly stalked and destroyed but one such animal has managed to elude the efforts of its pursuers.

The Prowler is a large cat with a jet-black coat and eyes that glow with green fire in the moonlight. It has been known to call out in the night with a hair-raising cry like that of a screaming woman. The exact species of cat is unknown; it might be a jaguar or puma with black fur, or even an African panther. No one knows who imported the beast to the island and some have made the preposterous claim that the Prowler is the same creature that slew Sir Edward in 1838.

Over the last twenty years the Prowler has been spotted by numerous people and been blamed for the disappearance of pets, livestock, and even a few hunters. Many villagers tell

tales of finding themselves watched from the shadows by a menacing pair of burning green eyes or hearing the bone-chilling peal of a catamount yell. Outsiders scoff at such claims since the Prowler's reign of terror has long outlasted the lifespan of any normal cat.

Mummers' Festival

On the third day of February the inhabitants of Dal Burgeon celebrate the Mummers' Festival, a curious rite of ancient lineage. The celebrants known as "mummers" don black cloaks and masks and venture out into the dark snowy night. The masked wanderers coalesce into groups and descend upon whatever homes have left lights in their windows. The celebrants play the fiddle, the flute or sing hymns or ancient Gaelic songs in exchange for food and strong drink.

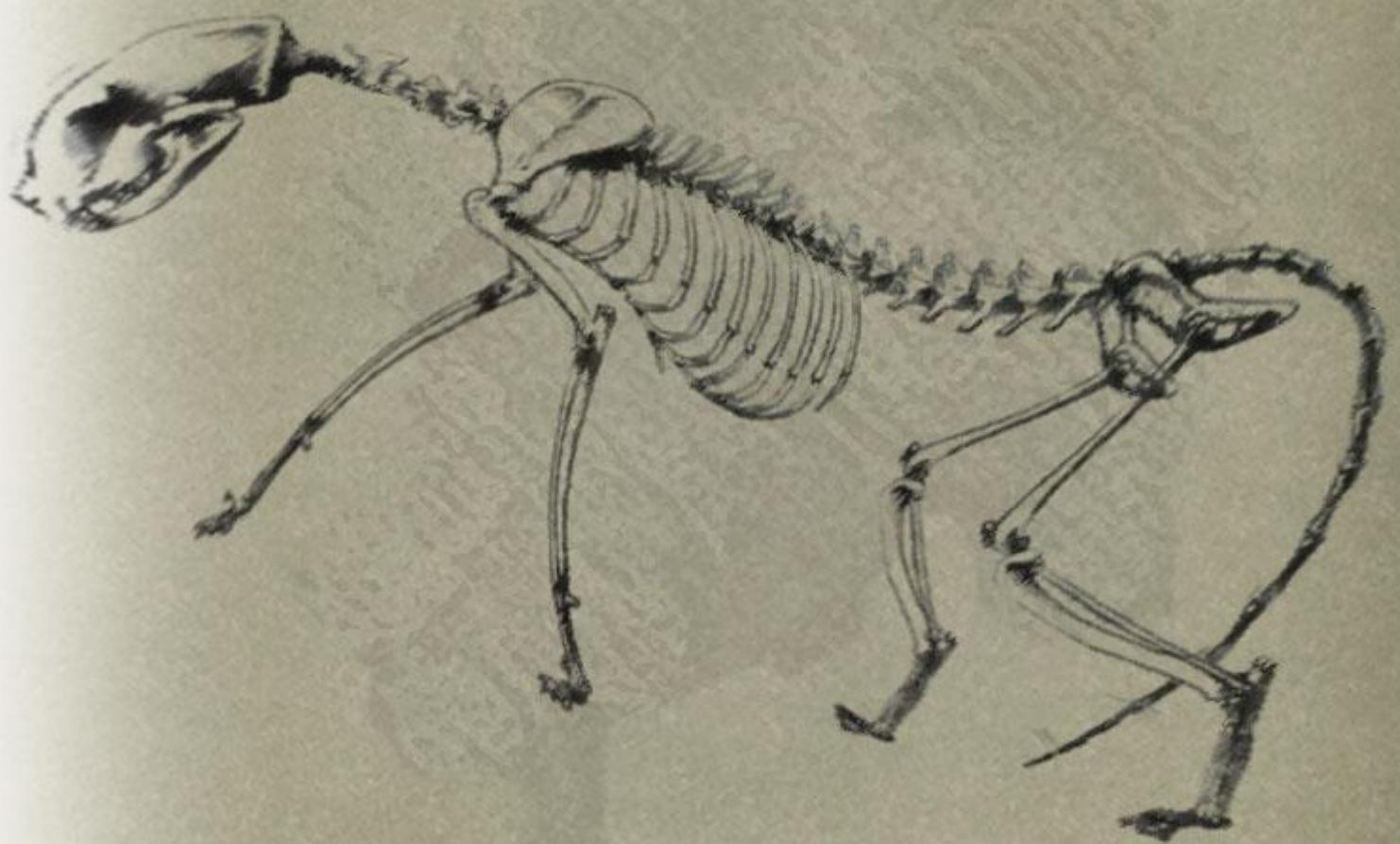
Over the long turn of years many strange tales have grown around the festival. When he has had too much to drink, John Macintyre might tell the story of the night when he last went mummering. Macintyre says that on the night of the festival he had become separated from his group when he

lingered too long at the house of the Donnelly family. After fortifying himself against the cold with a few drams of rum he stepped out into the night and quickly joined a group of like-dressed revelers.

Due to the rum, it was a long time before he realized that the procession was not heading towards town, but away from it. The silent column plunged into the woods and emerged at the burned chapel. Where there ought to have been an overgrown ruin, instead stood the chapel as it must have appeared before it was razed. Through the wide open door, lights and shadow danced, as if a great fire burned within. One by one, the cloaked figures entered the chapel whilst a flute sang from within. John fled then, rushing into the black woods. He was not followed, but to his horror, he saw only one set of foot prints in the snow, his own.

The villagers of Dal Burgeon have all heard Macintyre's story, but they do not let him disturb them, for he was a drinker then, as he is a drinker now, and it is not uncommon for strange illusions to play about in the darkness of a Festival night.

Cyoth the Riven 19



Curiosity Kills

A silent hunter haunts the night, prowling by the pale light of the moon. On silent paws it stalks the dark, flitting from shadow to shadow. It is the cat, a creature once worshiped as a god. In ignorance, we call the cat a pet, yet none deny that the cat has no master. Indeed, the cat is cryptic, and sees and hears that which man has never known. Who knows what dread secrets have been witnessed by those yellow eyes? No man can say.

Until now....

You now hold Quoth the Raven Volume Nineteen, a tome collected by the Fraternity of Shadows. This dark book holds the secrets of our feline friends and the twilight realm they rule. Dare mere humans learn this forbidden knowledge?

Just remember: Curiosity killed more than the cat.

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 3rd
edition™, Ravenloft Player's
Handbook™ and Ravenloft
Dungeon Master's
Guide™

