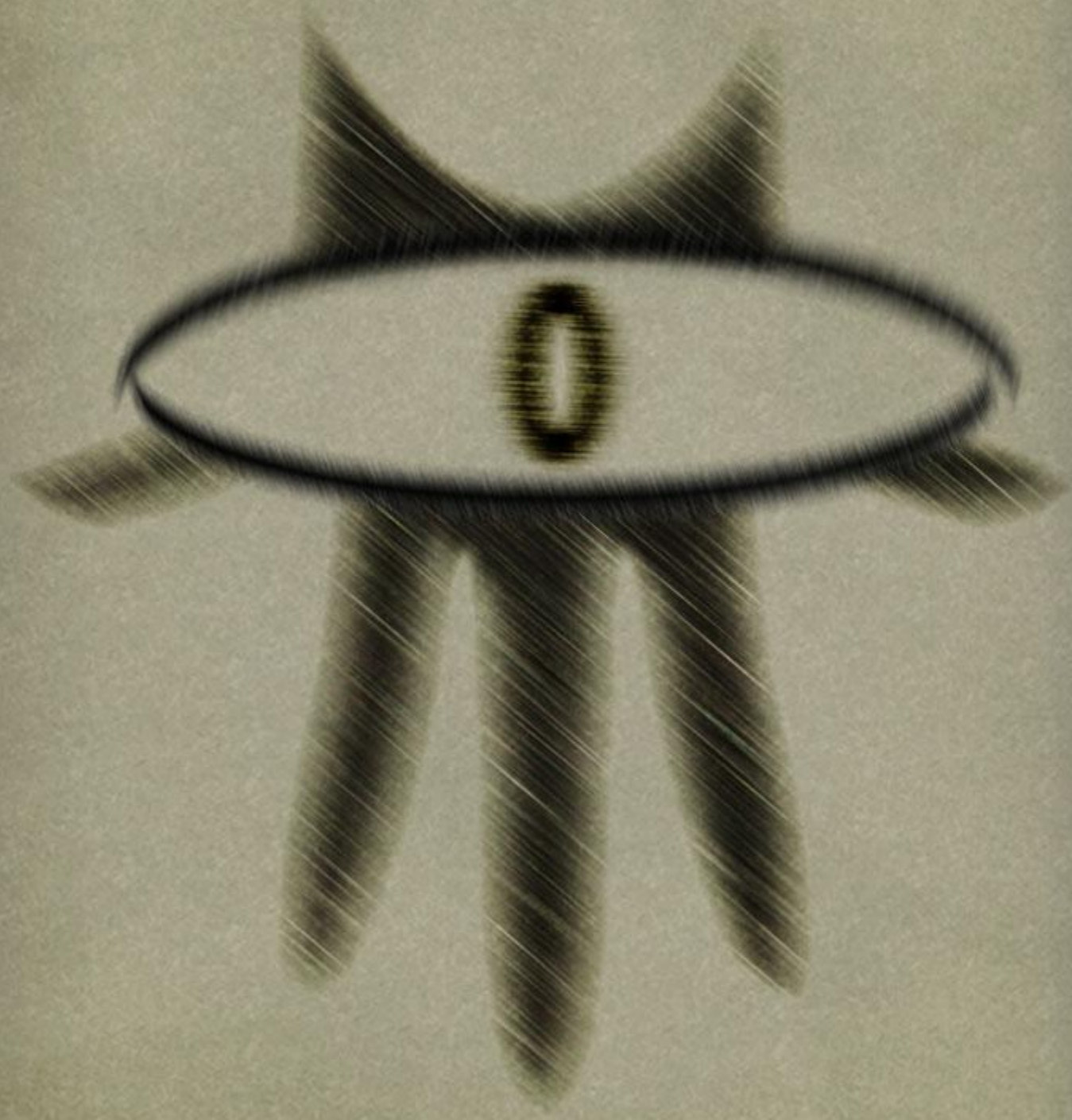


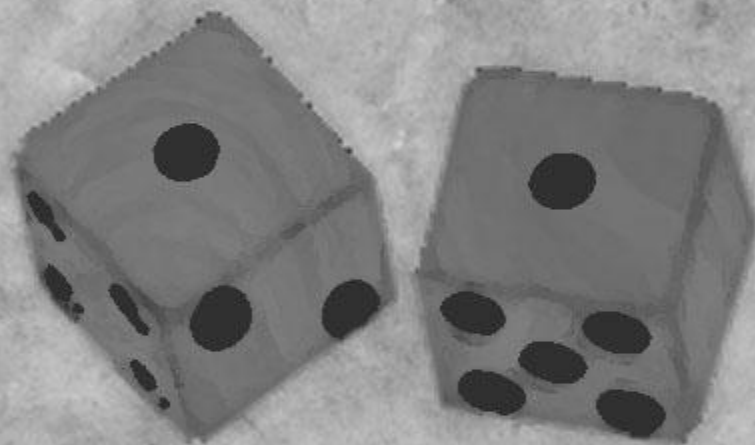
Quoth the Raven



XXX



Quoth the Raven *XX*



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Quoth the Raven Vol. 20

October 31st, 2013

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The bindings of this document are entirely from rabbit feet and leprechaun beards.

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Ghastria

A Preview of the Sea of Sorrows Report

By David "Lester" Gibson

david@fraternityofshadows.com

Greetings my Esteemed Brothers. I continue my report on the Western Sea.

It was early morning when the *Black Pelican* departed from the port of Blaustein, far too early for this scholar. The sun was just rising when the Captain quietly yet firmly woke the crew and gave them their orders. Captain Howe muttered something about the tides, but I suspect he was tired of the pirates moored around him in the pier eyeing his hold and evaluating his cargo. Regardless, it was late in the day before I could focus on my studies and later still before I had the clarity of mind to refresh my arcane memorizations.

We set sail southward, with the Captain taking advantage of southerly flowing currents to accelerate our trip. Captain Howe set the course by his compass and the *Pelican* swiftly found its path.

After much sailing our southbound current began to intersect currents of cold water flowing northward and the water grew choppy. The *Pelican* clumsily lurched across the sea despite her seasoned crew, the conflicting flows sending large waves across her bow.

Captain Howe had been warned of the confluence, but was nevertheless surprised by its intensity. Thankfully, it did not take long for the swift vessel to reach its destination; the rocky green-capped isle visibly stood-out against the waves: Ghastria.

I was happy to see land. After a year of travelling the seas, I am growing tired of being on the waves and weary of fish

Ghastria in Short

Location: Sea of Sorrows

Ecology: Full Ecology (Temperate Forests, Hills, and Plains)

Darklord: Marquis Stezen d'Polarno

Year of Formation: 584, 742 joins the Sea of Sorrows

Cultural Level: Chivalric (8)

Population: 2,900 (97% human, 3% other)

Main settlements: East Riding (pop. 1,200), The Docks (pop. 125), Norshore (pop. 75).

Religion: Church of Ezra

Language: Mordentish

Government: Monarchy

Money: Assorted coins

meals, something I find rather surprising. It saddened me that I found less and less solace in the simple art of angling. As I will relate, my stay in Ghastria did nothing to alleviate this growing disinterest.

Despite Ghastria's proximity to the Misty border that runs along the western edge of the sea, the sky grew clearer as we neared the island and the sun soon broke through the perpetual overcast of the sea. We could see the ever-present bank of fog and Mist bordering the land, but the phantasmal tendrils evaporated whenever they neared the shore, as if held back by an invisible force. From the sea, with no static point of reference, it seemed like the land was subtly shifting in the sea to maintain its pleasant weather.

The *Black Pelican* circled around the island, to approach from the southern shore. It was there the Captain assured me we would find the safest harbour.

From my place on the deck I could see green grassy meadows dotted with bright wildflowers and copses of fruit trees. While not yet harvest time, the branches of the trees were already dangling low from the heavy fruit. The bright sun reflected off a number of brooks that cut across the emerald meadows, undoubtedly babbling pleasantly as they rolled to the shore.

Thankfully, I was not some naïve Outlander readily lulled into a complacent state by the pretty scenery; at that moment I resolved to keep my wits alert, despite the inviting appearance. I have travelled and read enough to know that all the lands of our world are dangerous, but that not all are openly hostile. And it is easier to remain on guard in a gloomy and oppressive land, where the dangers are less insidious.

Geographic Survey

Ghastria is a mid-sized island. While dramatically smaller than Liffe or Graben it is significantly larger than the likes of Todstein, L'île de la Tempete, or Blaustein.

The shoreline of the island is either rocky beaches or low cliffs, which are surprisingly easy to scale. It is a simple matter for smaller vessels to come ashore. Being more accustomed to sharp cliffs or deceptive beaches with hidden shoals, I kept expecting to run aground on submerged rocks or obfuscated reefs. However, there were none and the entire island proved readily accessible. Captain Howe was himself hesitant, and had men stationed at the railings, keeping watch for submerged dangers. These preparations were for naught as we easily found safe harbour at the small town appropriately named "The Docks".

Through interviewing the inhabitants and touring the island, I found the entire shoreline to be free of hazards: the island is approachable and inviting. I was warned that there were shallow patches and eddies along the northeastern shore, which could be treacherous, but mostly for swimmers and very small craft. There was nothing that would even slow down a vessel the size of the *Black Pelican*.

These potentially dangerous currents are the result of the warm current flowing out of the Misty border northwest of Markovia and strengthened by the Leviathan's Waters near Dominia. These twin currents bring sizable schools of smaller fish and larger warm-water fish. As mentioned earlier, this warm water meets cold currents from the south with rough results. One stretch of these intersecting currents take the large

schools right over a shallow stretch of water creating rich fishing grounds that attracts anglers from across the Sea. I'd heard of the "Ghastrian Shallows" before and long dreamt about casting my lures into its fertile waters, but upon reaching the island I found myself longing for fresh vegetables and redder meat.

Climate

Ghastria is blessed with favourable weather patterns and the island is surprisingly pleasant year-round. Winds bring regular moisture inland and the warmer water blesses the island with mild springs and autumns. The natives brag of their cooler breezes during the summer, which keep the heat bearable, while the winters are snowy yet relatively comfortable. The damp snow acts as an insulator for the homes, keeping the inhabitants warm indoors, and the winds are not so brisk as to summon dangerous storms.

The cooler summer breezes belie the power of the sun. It is deceptively easy to be sunburned. Even in the wintertime this is a danger, with the bright white snow reflecting the sun and readily blinding the unprepared. Forewarned, I kept my cap at the ready.

Precipitation is common year-round with heavy showers in the mornings and evenings and heavy and wet winter snows. Ghastria is home to none of the stinging powder I have seen in colder realms. The mixing sea currents often create thick fogbanks in the mornings, but these quickly burn up as the sun rises. Likewise, the heavy overcast skies of the rest of the sea vanish during midday but return as the night cools.

The countryside is a verdant green. The regular sun and rain help give Ghastria a long and productive growing

cycle, as demonstrated by its bountiful crops. Some farmers even split their fields and plant twice, once in the early spring and once late, allowing them to stagger their harvests.

Topography

Ghastria is a hilly island with many slopes and small valleys. Even the hills are capped with smaller hills. The trails and farmer's fields work around the terrain, weaving and curving erratically. It can be tricky to navigate across the island, as the paths do not always lead where you expect and the hills make it difficult to see long distances.

The island lacks rivers or large waterways but there are a large number of streams and creeks that provide much of the fresh water for farmers and ranchers. The creeks have cut a number of small, rocky gullies through the terrain, creating hidden drops that can send an unwary hiker tumbling. These creeks are swift flowing and treacherous during the spring, fuelled by winter runoff, but many dry up during the summer months. Regular rain manages to sustain most of the streams during the year, so fresh water is seldom scarce.

There are few dense forests on the island. According to local lore, the island was once heavily forested but the trees were cut down for farmer's fields. The northernmost tip of the island is sparsely wooded and there is a denser patch of woodland along the western coast. The two woods are unnamed, simply called "the wood" or "the forest" by locals. When needed, these are differentiated by their location, such as "the north wood" – curiously unimaginative for such a poetic people.

Much of the surviving forests have been cut into by loggers and turned into

fishing vessels or homes. The loggers have typically looked for the best trees rather than just systematically working their way inward, so the forests have retained their size but are not particularly dense. Thick underbrush has spread in response to the thinning trees so it's rare to see below one's knees when moving through the woods. My imagination was quite active while exploring these woods, and I kept imagining stealthy beasts or fey moving unseen around my ankles.

Thankfully, I am told there are no snakes on the island.

This is not simple paranoia: not all travellers emerge from the woods. There are rumours of fey creatures hidden in the trees, especially the western wood which is said to have a grove of enchanted trees at its heart, untouched for centuries. These trees are said to impart their magic on whatever is crafted from them, such as a boat that will not sink, a walking stick that cannot be broken, or a house that will never leak. But as the forest has shrunk, the grove's fey guardians have grown more dangerous and merciless.

The soil of Ghastria is rich and fertile, easily taking to a myriad of crops. It is a common farmer jest that they only have to throw seed at a flat piece of land to sow their field. However, there is some subtle yet noteworthy imperfection in the soil. All crops grown on the island are tasteless, lacking any flavour until they go off. Curiously, the food retains its smell and is indistinguishable from normal food until placed in one's mouth. In Ghastria, this curious quality is known as the *farmer's lament*. I've heard speculation that it is a curse on the island, the result of it the proximity of the Mists, or just a weakness of

Ghastrian taste buds (a theory long since discredited given the waves of immigrants, yet one that continues to be told). All attempts to import soil to negate the *farmer's lament* have failed. This malady somehow also affects all livestock that feed off local crops, resulting in bland meat, eggs, and milk.

The *farmer's lament* even affects fish caught close to shore or inland, such as those pulled from rivers. This is possibly due to erosion, with whatever property of the soil being carried into the surrounding water. Fishermen have to travel several miles from land to find fish with flavour. Unscrupulous fishermen practice the local tradition called "boxing the catch": mixing fish caught in distant waters with those caught closer to shore. (This name is a reference to a technique for mixing paint.) This practice is publicly discouraged, but regularly practiced, as the waves are less severe near the shore and there is less danger of a sudden storm.

Curiously, the crops are not bland every year. Every two or three years a "high harvest" is predicted at midsummer and the island plans for a celebration. Tradition holds that the festivities encourage the crops and the land itself to celebrate, resulting in a flavourful harvest. While I find this doubtful (or else indicative of some supernatural interference), both locals and foreign traders attest to its truth. The Marquis is particularly celebratory, and always invites a large number of guests (both local and foreign) to his manor home and throws an elaborate party. The last one was particularly noteworthy, as he invited several personages, celebrities, minor nobles, and even a couple of famed monster hunters.

This last high harvest was a few years ago, so I did not have the chance to experience it firsthand. The locals expect a good harvest any year now.

Settlements

Much of Ghastria is devoted to small farms and ranches some distance from their neighbours. There are few settlements of note, and only one of any real size.

Ghastrian homes are usually stone, as wood is needed for boats and the journey to the forests is long. Lumber from old boats is often salvaged for cheap homes and the wealthy pay to import lumber from the Core.

There is little difference between urban and rural construction. Older homes were crudely constructed out of loose stones puttied-together with mud, but newer construction tends to favour bricks and mortar. Most homes and buildings are single-storey affairs, but a few in East Riding have had wooden second storeys constructed atop the stone. Regardless of the upper storey's construction, roofs are wooden and sealed with tar.

The exterior stone walls are kept bland, as paint is quickly stripped-off or bleached by the salty sea air. Interiors are often plastered and painted bright colours for a more comfortable living space. The locals say a good home must be warm, brightly lit, and comfortable.

Farms are separated by low stone walls. Most of these walls pre-date ownership of the land and fields are divided and parcelled to accommodate these pre-existing barriers. It is not uncommon to see the ruins of an ancient wall cutting through a farm, partially dividing a field. Even wealthier farmers

Food in Ghastria

All crops grown or animals raised in Ghastria have no flavour whatsoever. The locals attribute this to the soil, but it is actually a magical effect that affects the entire domain and only applies to plants grown or animals raised within its borders.

Imported fruit and vegetables retain their flavour so long as they have already been picked. Transplanted plants quickly lose their flavour the longer they remain in the soil, becoming bland within days. Imported livestock will keep its flavour as long as the animal was already mature, unless it is fed local produce. Fish caught in the rivers or on the coastline are also flavourless, but fish and sea life caught just over the invisible border retain their full flavour. It is difficult for sailors to gauge the exact distance of the border, which seems to ebb and shift over time, so many consider a flavourful catch to be a bonus.

Food remains flavourless until it begins to go off, at which point it gains the standard rotting or moulding taste.

have their land sectioned into a myriad of smaller fields by these ancient and moss-covered barriers.

East Riding

The first question newcomers to the island invariably ask the residents of East Riding is "What is East Riding east of?" or, alternatively, "Is there a West Riding?" The response is usually an overly loud and dramatic sigh paired with a rolling of the eyes. As "Riding" is actually derived from an old Mordentish word meaning "one-third", I occasionally varied the treatment by asking after a North or South Riding, which invariably got confused looks and a change of subject.

East Riding (small town): Conventional; AL LN; CL 8; 800 gp limit; Assets 44,000 gp; Population 1,2000; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Marquis Stezen d'Polarno III (see Appendix), Baron Camar D'Marosso (see Appendix)

Important Characters: Javier Villafane (the Opium King and spice merchant), rog 3/exp 2

Despite being the most common profession on the island, there are almost no fishermen living in East Riding: its population is composed of merchants, traders, and craftsmen. Many of these were born in other lands and have immigrated to Ghastria. East Riding is a small yet growing town, which has doubled in size over the last decade. In the twenty or so years since Ghastria was revealed by the Mists, East Riding has attracted settlers from across the western Core: just over half its population are long-time residents of the island – native Ghastrians if you will. Foreign traders and retired fishermen make up a shifting quarter of the population, with much of the rest of the inhabitants being struggling artists or Core expatriates, typically Mordent or Dementlieu.

East Riding is set some distance from the coast. This caught my attention, as it seems odd that the primary settlement of a fishing island would be so far inland. The two possibilities are that East Riding might have once been a satellite community of a larger city (the fabled West Riding perhaps?) or that Ghastria might not always have been a literal island, or possibly both.

East Riding is the central hub of the island. All the farmers and ranchers journey to the town to sell their wares and buy the goods they cannot craft themselves. Ghastria has no travelling merchants or vendors. Even the rare

Vistani visitors to the island limit their activities to the area around East Riding. The market square in East Riding was a once-sizable open area, but this has shrunk as stores and stalls moved into the formerly green space. There is no organization to the market, with food sold between furniture and cookware.

One of the larger features of East Riding is the ruined Chapel at the center of ground. One of the larger buildings in the village, its valued real estate makes the fact it has remained vacant for so long unnerving. Only recently have attempts been made to restore the building, rededicating it to Ezra. At the time of this writing, the church has yet to hold its first service.

There are a large number of art galleries in East Riding, and every shop and stall also has some art on display to be purchased. Most of the galleries double as supply shops, offering paint and brushes or chisels and hammers, but there are a couple dedicated galleries. The famed artist and recent Core expatriate Henri Milton has recently established a small gallery here, escaping from his latest scandal in the core. There is also a wax museum owned by one Alexandre du Cire. Formerly of Port-a-Lucine, his first museum tragically burnt to the ground, and the wax sculptor has relocated.

The town is ruled over directly by the Marquis, as his manor overlooks East Riding. However, the Marquis is often occupied by matters that concern the entire island and frequently delegates responsibility for the town to one of lesser nobility. In the past, this was typically the Barons of D'Marosso, a line that dates back to the early years of the D'Polarno rule. The patriarch of the family was Camar D'Marosso, whose great-grandson and namesake currently

resides in East Riding. Rumour has it the D'Marossos have fallen out of favour with the young new Marquis. Dark rumours surround the current Baron, and he is said to trade in dark magics and can share the secret of eternal life with those who can afford his cost.

Where to Stay: There are a number of cheap boarding houses in East Riding to accommodate traders and farmers, but I would recommend few of these. There are two large inns for travellers. The first is the *Dark Heart*, which caters to ranchers and farmers (average quality food, poor quality rooms). Merchants and wealthy travellers typically stay at the *Gold Wolf* (good quality food and rooms). There is also the *Useless Tastebud*, which is known for its drink "Drowning-in-Sorrows", a brew that would be undrinkable on any other land

(and is periodically used by local artists as paint thinner).

The Docks

The small settlement known only as "the Docks" is quite literally that. Set in a rocky natural harbour, the Docks is downhill from East Riding and just far enough away to be considered a separate settlement. The center of town is the expansive set of piers and boardwalks that ring the harbour.

The Docks house much of the island's fishing and trading fleet. The entire population lives off the sea, and it's been remarked that the town's sole inhabitants during daylight hours are wives and children. Once, the Docks were inhabited almost entirely by fishermen. Now a sizable percentage of the population are traders and merchants

The Black Baron

The immortal Baron Camar D'Marosso was the vassal and servant of the Marquis Stezen d'Polarno prior to Ghastria's entrance into the Mists. He has long served as the Marquis' eyes and ears on the Core and at times has been the de facto ruler of Ghastria.

As d'Polarno struggled with his curse and lack of will, D'Marosso took more and more power for himself. D'Marosso was also instrumental during the period when d'Polarno faked his death to escape mob justice. This earned the Baron even greater favour and responsibilities, as d'Polarno opted for less "hands on" ruling. However, after reinventing himself a second time, d'Polarno has taken back much of the power he formerly delegated, causing a schism with D'Marosso.

Lamenting his declining status, D'Marosso currently resides in East Riding enjoying his local predominance. Corrupted by his evil habits over the centuries, D'Marosso has been transformed into a ghast, albeit one able to disguise its undead features through regular feeding. The dead D'Marosso is the master of Ghastria's cemeteries and rules the pack of ghouls dwelling within or roaming the countryside. When the bodies pile up after one of d'Polarno's celebrations, it is D'Marosso and his minions that clean up the scraps.

When he had power, d'Marosso was content to restrict the number of ghouls on the island and limit their feeding. Now D'Marosso wonders if enough ghouls could depose d'Polarno and seize the island. Slowly, with the patience of an immortal, he is planning for the day when d'Polarno pushes him too far. D'Marosso is stockpiling corpses to feed to his slowly increasing number of ghouls as he builds a small army of the hungry dead. D'Marosso wonders how immortal flesh will taste.

For more on Baron D'Marosso refer to the NPC Gallery.

The Docks (hamlet): Conventional; AL N; CL 8; 100 gp limit; Assets 1,500 gp; Population 125; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: "Captain" Anthonie Drake (de facto mayor), male human Ari 3.

Important Characters: Guy Buonocore (fence and acquirer), male human rog 4; "Smooth" Bruno Dimarrco (Borcan smuggler), male human rog 5

who call the hamlet home when not on the waves.

Much of the hamlet is composed of small houses built out of the remains of ships: old sailing vessels and the remains of shipwrecks are salvaged and repurposed for building materials. Quite a few sailors live on their boats, with all their worldly possessions kept below deck. Retired seamen have started permanently mooring their vessels, so the village is spreading out seaward as much as it is expanding overland.

The exceptions to the makeshift buildings are the large warehouses owned by the wealthy traders, which are constructed of sturdy stone and mortar. As locally grown food is flavourless, there is a booming business importing

food and spice to the island. At any given time there is a disproportionate amount of wealth sitting in the dockside warehouses, perpetually under heavy guard. There is a continual arms race for sellswords to guard warehouses and track down thieves, and for skilled burglars to bypass the defences and escape the guards.

I have few underground contacts in Ghastria, but my discreet inquiries have revealed that there is no single organized thieves' guild in the Docks, and that there is an unseen war raging between various criminal organizations, both native and foreign, seeking a foothold in the Western Sea. I know that the Dementlieuse criminal mastermind known as The Brain has begun establishing a force in The Docks. I imagine it is only a matter of time before one emerges triumphant.

Where to Stay: No one who can afford otherwise stays at the Docks overnight. There are occasionally rooms above taverns that can be rented for the night (or the hour). Most sailors that decide to stay overnight typically do so in the rented room of a working girl.

The Unseen Menace

An aboleth known as Ony'lolago recently settled into a series of underwater caves close to the Docks, and has begun to spread its influence to the surface. The aquatic aberration is still lethargic after centuries of underwater slumber, and still spends much of its time in a hazy torpor. When the aboleth first began its rest, it was in a barren stretch of sea, but awakened adjacent to an island. This has confused even its great intelligence, and it is proceeding slowly. Foremost it is curious about this unfamiliar land and its inhabitants.

The aberration has few thralls, having claimed less than a half-dozen former sailors. For now, the creature works through these agents, attempting to learn of this new world. These thralls have not been completely "broken in" and retain much of their humanity and free will. Most think they are suffering blackouts or walking in their sleep. They have no idea they are occasionally the puppets of an inhuman and alien intelligence. Ony'lolago is slowly becoming aware of a distant intelligence on the far side of the continent, one whose recent activity might have been responsible for its awakening. This intelligence quietly whispers to the aboleth during its sleep; Ony'lolago is growing increasingly curious about this strange presence and is planning to send agents to investigate.

Norshore

Far away from East Riding and the Docks is Norshore, a small settlement on the northeast cost of the island. This settlement is positioned to take advantage of the *Ghastrian Shallows*, the aforementioned stretch of sea with ideal fishing conditions. There is little of material value in this town, despite its inhabitants feeding much of the island: there is nothing to steal except the fish.

As one might expect, the majority of the population are fishermen. A small number dabble as traders and make trips along the coast to sell their wares at the markets of the Docks and East Riding. The few with larger and more seaworthy craft occasionally made treks to Blaustein or Dominia to sell their wares. The fishermen with smaller vessels are at the mercy of those with large ships, as the traders are needed to sell their wares.

Norshore is mostly independent, with the local mayor acting on behalf of the Marquis. However, he is little more than a figurehead, as the town is controlled by the merchants. The fishermen who risk their lives for the foodstuff see little money, being unable to sail around the island or across the sea to sell their goods. Traders, acting as middlemen, make a comfortable living buying the bulk quantities of fish for a barely adequate rate, then shipping them where they can fetch a higher price.

Norshore (hamlet): Conventional; AL CG; CL 7; 100 gp limit; Assets 1,500 gp; Population 75; Isolated (human 99%, other 1%).

Authority Figures: Bluff Harker (mayor), male human Ari 3.

Important Characters: Cardack Blackwell (shipping magnate), male human Ari2/Exp2

Recently, one trading company, *Blackwell's Watermen*, has grown in power, working towards a shipping monopoly. The master of the company claims this is through shrewd negotiation and exclusive contracts, but the talk suggests he has benefited from a series of lucky accidents. Fishermen who have rejected him have had their vessels capsize or nets catch on the rocks, while competitors run aground on unseen shallows or are simply lost at sea. I have my suspicions but care little, and I suggest it is easier for our Brotherhood to do business with the company, and advised Captain Howe to do the same.

Where to Stay: There is no inn proper in Norshore. A Mrs. Milligan operates a bed-and-breakfast (average quality rooms, good quality food) out of her home. Once the matron of a large family, she lost her husband and sons when their boat was lost in a squall. Her home is beside the butcher shop of one Todd Barker who does the cooking for her excellent breakfasts.

Reavers in the Storm

While at home in deeper waters, a small school of reavers has claimed the coastline around Norshore. They have struck an alliance with Cardack Blackwell of the trading company *Blackwell's Watermen*. The reavers were simple predators, content with unfocused raiding, but their obvious attacks threatened to bring adventurers or the gaze of the Marquis upon Norshore. Blackwell focused their attacks on his completion and convinced the reavers to guise their attacks as accidents. The reavers earn plenty of fresh meat and do not arouse suspicions. Blackwell is currently becoming a victim of his success. The reavers have all but eliminated his competition so he is having trouble finding fresh victims. But he dare not break ties with them or risk the safety of his own ships, nor can he unleash them on fishermen or traders he has agreed to protect.

Locales of Interest

As always, a number of smaller sites also needed inclusion in this report -- places of interest or power in the countryside. During my journey across the landscape, I saw many curious places and forgotten sites, but cannot include everything in this report, so I only list those places which may be of interest to my Esteemed Brothers and our continued mission.

Marquis Manor

I visited the estate of the Marquis Stezen d'Polarno. I used the guise of a travelling scholar here to visit the famed art gallery of his forefathers (although I am sure my Esteemed Brother Dmitri would mock my poor disguise, saying I really was a travelling scholar.

I was escorted through the collection by the Marquis himself, who seemed slightly older than I was expecting. A man in his mid-twenties, Marquis d'Polarno III looks closer to his early thirties and seems to be attempting to hide the fact he is aging poorly.

The gallery is impressive and has grown to encompass much of the Manor: even rooms not officially included in "the gallery" have stray pieces of art most museum curators in the Core would give their right index finger to have hanging in their collection. The collection is extremely impressive.

The Marquis showed me through collections of portraits, halls of primitive art, galleries of sculptures, and more. There were grotesque and yet beautiful works of depravity and torture (purchased by his grandfather, or so I was told) and works of calm tranquility that inspired a temporary enlightenment

in the viewer. There were mundane works of common paint and there were works augmented by a skilled magical hand. There are works from the greatest artists of the Core, from all of the known islands in the Mists, works from hitherto unknown lands, and even pieces that seemed to defy a human origin.

The collection is divided into three sub-collections located in three different wings of the impressively large manor; three-fifths of the entire structure is devoted to the gallery. In the family portrait gallery, I saw d'Polarnos dating back several generations, and my host told me stories of his grandfather and great-grandfather. There is certainly a strong resemblance between the Marquis and his forefathers. "The blood is strong" as a certain Esteemed Brother would say. d'Polarno seemed rather distracted here, and kept turning as if he heard something.

I suspect there is some magic at work in the gallery. As mentioned, it fills the majority of the sizable manor. But when walking the halls, the gallery seemed larger than it should have been, as if the manor subtly grew to accommodate more pieces. I did not detect any overt magic, so this could actually be an architectural illusion paired with the daunting size of the collection.

I should note that all is not as it seems in the galleries of d'Polarno. While examining a breathtakingly terrifying painting of Mount Ghakis I saw a pale fair-haired woman in the distance. Moving onto the next painting, a stormy seascape with a fishing boat tossed about the waves off the coast of Graben, I thought I saw the same figure on the boat. I turned to my host to ask if this was a subtle signature of the artist, but when I looked back the figure was gone.

Lady Annelise

Once the mistress of King Oderic, Lady Annelise was the spell-caster hired to trap the soul of d'Polarno in his portrait, setting in motion the events that led to his fall and the creation of the land. She was repaid for her deed through a slow and painful poisoning. But Annelise refused to remain dead.

Her spirit was tied to a painting d'Polarno made of her at the time of her death, Annelise is bound to the world of art. Her spirit can freely move between paintings in d'Polarno's gallery but she can never step beyond the frame. Annelise can interact with the contents of a painting as if it were real. To her eyes, a painted scene is real. However, she cannot move or modify any object painted in the foreground; she can sit in a chair but could not turn it to the side or move its position. The Lady can interact with objects in the background (closing a door, turning off a light) but cannot destroy or alter objects. A short time after she leaves the painting returns to normal. As silent as art, she finds it difficult to communicate with those outside.

Annelise was partially responsible for the destruction of East Riding's chapel, having moved to that building's religious art and posed as a divine figure. Through careful prompting, the clergy discovered several of d'Polarno's secrets. The Marquis discovered some of their plotting and razed the chapel. Recently, writings of what the priests witnessed have been rediscovered, and the clerics of Ezra wonder if their Lady paid an early visit to the island. The destroyed husk of the chapel is on the verge of becoming a holy site for pilgrimages.

For more on Lady Annelise refer to the NPC Gallery.

Slaver Cove

Hidden by the Mists on the Northwest coast of the island is a small inlet, used by pirates and slavers. It is difficult to find without direction, easily missed under the grey skies and fog common near the Misty border. Thankfully, the inestimable Captain Howe discovered its location.

Here, slaves and workers captured on the sea are held and sold. Many are bought by the nobility as temporary and expendable playthings or extra servants. Thankfully, these occasions are rare and for the most part the cove is just used for smuggling contraband. It is rumoured the pirates of Blaustein make use of the cove and Bluebeard is believed to have some ambition at turning it into a defensible dock. Having a second island from which to launch his raiders would

increase his reach across the sea, but I doubt the Marquis would approve of his island being used in such a way.

I mention this cove as a secluded locale to make land, if one needs to come ashore without the notice of the dock masters or merchant companies. Silence cannot be bought in the Docks and fishermen are prone to gossip.

Stone Cairns

Atop several small hills in the countryside are small stone structures. Mostly ignored by the locals, these are the cairns and tombs of forgotten ancestors of the island's inhabitants.

The cairns are larger than they look, built on flat ground, with artificial hills built-up around the structures. They grew as the dead accumulated, until each hill was complete and the catacombs

Slavers

The Vistani are not welcome as traders in Ghastria. Their barges are turned-away from the Docks, forbidden from laying anchor. Fishermen are to report Vistani sightings immediately – although few do to avoid the ire of the Vistani.

This hostility is because a caravan aided a group of adventurers in stealing the Marquis' portrait. While the portrait could not leave the island, the Vistani kept it with them, moving from place to place while forever pursued by the agents of the Marquis, until a group of mercenaries managed to steal back the portrait.

Slaver's Cove was established before the Vistani were unwelcome, with the travelling people trafficking in flesh, providing the Marquis with victims for his revelries or entertainment for the same. Ever the entrepreneurs, once they were barred from the island the wandering folk began taking advantage of their secretive mooring place to bring ashore things not easily moved past customs, such as drugs from Hazlan and fresh food that might be "impounded".

capped by crude stone piles and standing stones. Inside are the ornate graves of many ancients, with mud-plaster walls decorated with painted drawings and symbols. The dead clutch ancient relics, objects of great value interred for reasons only the ancients know. These priceless objects are as much works of art as archeological finds, beautiful to behold.

Rumour has it the bodies themselves were painted, and their bones remain stained. I do not know for certain because I did not venture far into these tombs before deciding the risk outweighed any reward. The dead do not rest easy in these cairns. The nearby hamlets have many tales of intruders being haunted by visions of "painted gods" or being cursed after the theft of some item from the gravesite.

Flora

Ghastria is not a large island and most of it has been touched and impacted by people. For centuries, ranchers have been nomadically wandering its hills and farmers claiming their lots. There is precious little wilderness in Ghastria. Most of its native plants have dwindled in number and are now only found in the deeper woods.

Painted Gods

The ancient dead of the Ghastrian cairns sleep lightly. Once heroes of their clans, they painted themselves to be representations of their gods and gain their power and favours. In death, the bodies of the chosen were adorned with the holy paints.

They guard their possessions and remains jealously, often tormenting those who disturb their rest. These restless dead can travel magically as coloured smoke, and are relentless when reclaiming what is theirs. Sometimes they merely torment thieves with visions, but sometimes the ancient dead destroy prized possessions or strike through loved ones.

A few are unhappy with their small lairs and long for the warmth of flesh. These dead can inhabit the bodies of those who remove items from the cairns. Possessed victims have their skin stained with the appearance of warpaint.

Examining soil and sediment is not my speciality, but I have learned enough to say that Ghastria was once heavily forested. These were likely varieties of oak, birch, pine, and beech. Outside of the two small forests, there are precious few trees remaining, due in part to the lumber industry. The wind and hard sea breezes are not kind to the trees, frequently toppling isolated specimens. Small fruit trees are somewhat common across the island. Initially introduced for orchards, they have spread wild across the countryside so it is not uncommon to find wild fruit available. Berries are more rare and typically confined to gardens. Given that few plants have any taste it is hard to tell ripe berries from unripe, let alone toxic ones.

A wide variety of ferns grows across the island, especially near the coast and streams. Gorse is also common and Ghastria has several varieties of this hardy plant. A few varieties have proven especially vociferous and have been declared weeds by local gardeners.

Most surviving native plants are notable for the hue and colouration, which makes them usable in paints and dyes. This is part of the reason they have survived and thrived, being cultivated for their use. Local staples include a variant of St. Jon's wort, dogwood, pigweed, weld, mullen, bloodroot, broom, woad, and umbral weed. The last is unique to the island and is the most striking shade of grey, but as a plant is deadly poisonous.

Farmers also grow a small variety of grains in their local plots, typically rye and wheat. The local grains are hearty and sturdy, yet often as tasteless as other produce and typically used for plain white breads so the absence of flavour will be less missed.

Umbral Grey

Umbral weed is relatively easy to find growing in the wild with a DC 15 Knowledge (nature) or Profession (herbalist) check. Umbral weed can be turned into a paint known as umbral grey with a DC 12 Profession (herbalist) or Profession (painter) check.

Umbral weed is fairly poisonous but the distilled paint is even more toxic, thankfully only when ingested. The taste of umbral grey is nauseating, an exception to Ghastria's normally flavourless plants. There are ways to mask the flavour of umbral grey, but these are known only to the Marquis Stezen d'Polarno and the Baron Camar d'Marosso. When these techniques are employed, victims suffer a -4 penalty to saving throws against umbral grey.

Umbral Weed

Type poison, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 11

Onset 15 minutes; **Frequency** 1/ minute for 2 minutes

Effect 1d6 Con damage and sickened;
Cure 1 save

Cost 50 gp.

Umbral Grey

Type poison, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 14

Onset 5 minutes; **Frequency** 1/ minute for 6 minutes

Effect 1d6 Con damage and nauseated;
Cure 2 saves

Cost 200 gp

I was told the local crops were used to make a variety of spirits, such as beers and whiskey, but because flavourful harvests come so seldom, this was not a productive use of grain. The island is practically dry, save what is brought by the sailors or imported by the wealthy.

Flavourless Fluid

Ghastrian alcoholic beverages have no taste, but still have the burn of harder alcohols unless diluted or brewed to be particularly smooth. Due to its increased value when undetectable, most Ghastrian brewers aim for the least rough drinking experience.

There is a small underground market for Ghastrian's tasteless liquor. Many artists rely on the substance to find their muse or escape from creative failure. As poor artists, they can seldom afford the imported flavourful liquors.

Others enjoy the illicit uses of a flavourless intoxicant, using it to lower inhibitions or impede judgement. A few immoral merchants rely on Ghastrian spirits to gain an advantage in business dealings.

Ghastrian spirits are one of the few exports that sell well in the Core. The spirits are used by many who wish to take advantage of almost undetectable alcohol.

There are a number of distilleries that brew drink from the flavourless crops, but these typically only allow the desperate to escape sobriety, or aid those wishing to take advantage of alcohol that cannot be detected.

Fauna

An isolated island, Ghastria possesses only a few animals common on the mainland. Typical animals are smaller mammals such as hedgehogs, moles, badgers, foxes, and hares. There are a few deer that live in and around the woods, but these are growing increasingly rare. There are precious few predatory animals on the island, most having been hunted to extinction generations ago. The Marquis has the

hide of the island's last wolf hanging in his study (and it is not a particularly striking example of the species either).

Birds are by far the most common animal, moving freely between the small islands and feeding off the ample fish. Common are sparrows, wrens, gulls, owls, tits, woodpeckers, robins, and blackbirds. There are a number of birds of prey including kestrels and hawks.

While not technically island fauna, fish are the animal most commonly encountered. There is such a wide variety in the surrounding waters, I scarcely know where to begin. The warm currents from the north bring with them a wide and varying variety, especially larger and more exotic species. Meanwhile, the cooler currents from the south bring their own varieties. Theoretically, as long as it is a salt-water fish it can be found off the coasts of Ghastria. Common fish include cod, haddock, capelin, and herring but I have also heard of more exotic varieties, such as marlin and dolphins. Sharks are also

Whalers

A booming business, whaling is a reliable way to end up rich, if one can survive. Whales are hunted for a number of reasons. The meat is edible and a tasty staple of Ghastrian cuisine and an expensive delicacy to the mainland. Whalebones have a number of uses and there is a growing artistic medium in carving them.

Whales also produce ambergris, a waxy foul-smelling excretion that can be used in the making of perfume.

In the Mists, whales do not always remain dead. Whales cruelly or disrespectfully killed sometimes arise as zombies. There are rumours of a land in the Mists where a whale even rose up as a revenant, hunting its killer.

common along the coast, posing a hazard for any attempting to swim in the waters or unfortunately washed overboard. While not as common around Ghastria as other waters in the Western Sea, they still claim many lives every year.

There is also an abundance of shellfish off the coast. This is mostly lobster and clams, but there are fertile crab waters off the western coast. However, as this is perilously close to the Mists the sea currents, are unpredictable. Sudden storms are common. Many lives are lost in the pursuit of crabmeat.

I should also note the whales of Ghastria, as a number of larger pods regularly swim nearby, passing the island twice in their circular tour of the sea. As Ghastria's trading ties with the Core have strengthened so has its interest in whales, now a burgeoning industry. Mostly operating out of the Docks, whalers risk much but have the opportunity to make much money.

Magical creatures are not unknown in Ghastria, and there are a large number of carrion crawlers that dwell in the hills and coastal caves. Ghouls and other eaters of the dead are also common, such as cannibal zombies. Aquatic threats are far too common such as massive pre-historic sharks or lobsters altered by the Mists into huge deadly beasts.

People

The folk of Ghastria physically resemble those of Mordent and Dementlieu, which is hardly surprising given the claim of a shared heritage. More accurately, I might describe them as resembling the population of Richemulot given the increasingly mixed heritage of that population.

Encounters in Ghastria

Wildlife: CR 1/10 – bat; toad; CR 1/8 – rat; CR 1/6 – donkey; lizard; raven; CR 1/4 – cat; owl; pony; weasel; CR 1/3 – dog; hawk; CR 1/2 – badger; eagle; CR 1 – dog, riding; manta ray; octopus; shark, medium; CR 2 – boar; lizard, monitor; shark, large; CR 5 – whale, orca; CR 6 – whale baleen; CR 7 – whale, cachalot; CR 8 – octopus, giant.

Monsters: CR 1/3 – cat, crypt*; dire rat; skeleton, human commoner; CR 1/2 – geist*; jermlaine*; zombie, human commoner; CR 1 – bakhna rakhna; bat, carrion; ghoul; ghoul, lacedon; sea spawn, minion*; CR 2 – carrion stalker*; dire badger; dire bat; skin thief*; CR 3 – broken one; cat; ghastr; impersonator; remnant, aquatic; lycanthrope, wereboar; shadow; wight; CR 4 – reaver*; wight, dread*; CR 5 – nightmare, dread*; sea spawn, master; wraith; CR 6 – bastellus*; jolly roger; zombie, sea; CR 7 – aboleth; chuul; ghost; spectre; CR 8 – ghoul lord*; CR 9 – shark, dire.

Ghastrians have pale skin that is frequently tanned and worn from the sun and wind. The salty ocean breezes take their toll on the local complexions. Inhabitants typically have dark hair of varying hues, but there is some variation. Those with fair hair are less common but not unusual. There is no predominant eye colouration and it is as common to see blues and greens as it is to see browns and hazels.

As I shall describe in the History section, the folk of Ghastria claim to be the descendants of noble families that set sail from Dementlieu generations ago and settled the island. These ancient founding families interbred for some time before they started marrying servants, local fishermen, and even

The Ghastrian Hero

Races: The majority of Ghastrians are human. While not overtly racist, the domain's isolation and remote location works against its diversity. There are a number of elves and half-elves in the cities. These came from Sithicus when the two lands were connected by a Mistway; some were trapped after the Grand Conjunction and have accepted their exile, while others have settled down willingly.

Classes: Bards are a common class, for their musical and creative inclinations. Fighters, rogues, and rangers are also quite common. Clerics and paladins are very rare, after religion was unofficially banned on the island for a few generations. Given the lack of open wilderness, barbarians and druids are rare.

Recommended Skills: Appraise, Craft (sculpture, painting), Gather Information, Knowledge (nobility and royalty, local), Perform (dance, oratory, sing), Profession (fisherman, merchant, sailor), Swim, Use Rope.

Recommended Feats: Ancestral Legacy, Athletic, Endurance, Investigator, Iron Will, Muse, Negotiator, Persuasive, Smitten

Ghastrian Male Names: Alexandre, Blaise, Danyel, Estienne, Guillaume, Isembart, Romain, Ralf.

Ghastrian Female Names: Alize, Avice, Beatrice, Fleurie, Isabeau, Joan, Laurente, Margery, Victoire.

shipwreck survivors. The resulting bloodlines are so mixed and convoluted there is no longer any clear heritage.

The surviving noble families – typically legitimate births and first-born children – claim a superior heritage, but with few clear birth records this is difficult to prove. However, the wealth and estates of the surviving nobility give them an air of respectability; they try very hard to *act* the part of nobles. This posturing has variable results: the people of Mordent view Ghastrians as elitist fops with more in common with Dementlieu, while the actual Dementlieuse view the islanders as common fishermen playing dress-up. Having spent time in both lands I see elements of both in the Ghastrians: the nobles are clearly imitating the behaviour of Dementlieuse and Borcans to the point of exaggeration, but the common folk are as humble and plain as any fishermen, unless you ask them about their hobbies.

The Ghastrians view themselves as old souls with a potential for greatness. It is a rare Ghastrian that does not have some small creative endeavour as a side hobby. It is less common amongst the traders and fishermen, who tend to be less artistic, but this might be the result of long hours and hard work leaving few free moments for creation. Because of this noticeable feature of the populace, Ghastrians have a growing reputation as brooding or tormented artists, especially amongst the romantic and foolish youths of the Core. More noteworthy scholars and critics dismiss the Ghastrians, a view I rather agree with. While I am sure some of their work has merit (I know one of my Esteemed Brothers is fond of invoking the “Law of Averages” in such matters) the majority is trite, cliché, and utterly terrible.

Daily Life

The Ghastrians have a lifestyle known as “Island Time”. One needs to be on

Island Time or understand it to interact with the natives. While I view myself as adaptable and quick of wits, this was initially infuriating! All Ghastrians plan their days around two activities: the tides and their leisure time.

Being an island, the tides are immensely important to everyone. Fishermen of course need to arrange their days accordingly, but businesses that rely on the fishermen also need to vary their days accordingly. Merchants, craftsmen, and vendors seldom keep regular hours and are simply open when it is convenient. The local market squares have rotating occupants who come when it is convenient and leave whenever.

Leisure is equally important as *everyone* has a hobby, from the elder fisherman who carves whalebone sculptures to the merchant who writes sonnets. All Ghastrians tend to set aside an hour or two every couple of days to indulge themselves in their pursuits. They schedule their days around their free time, giving priority to their personal pursuits.

At first this behaviour was curious at best but I quickly adapted to this aspect of Island Time. Of course, my hobby is more scholarly, but I was pleased to discover I was not the only enlightened soul who spent his off-hours in East Riding's limited book stores or perusing a noble's private collection. To each their own.

Thankfully, most Ghastrians are able to restrain themselves and perform their day-to-day activities even when they would prefer to be engaging in their leisurely pursuits: the need to feed and clothe oneself is urgent and omnipresent. A noted few have less restraint, which the locals forgive and dismiss as having a loud muse that cannot be ignored or the spark of true genius. I am less forgiving of the dereliction of one's responsibilities. A local I had hired as a guide abandoned me one morning claiming he had just been struck by inspiration, leaving me to find my own way across the island. I instantly regretted having paid in advance, but thankfully the dependable Captain Howe arranged for a couple of his stouter men to secure a refund.

Tortured Artist

One of the artistic expatriates currently living in East Riding, Astolfo Pagnotto, is a Borcan musician. He is known for is passionate yet dark music and gripping melodies. He has performed in various venues across the Core, mostly confining himself to the West. While most musical critics and scholars are dismissive of him, his music and performances are popular with younger audiences. Pagnotto has a reputation as a brooding yet sensual soul and has left a trail of broken hearts in his wake, along with several illegitimate children.

Having struggled with his most recent pieces, which were not well received, Pagnotto decided to rest in Ghastria to renew himself. He is also hoping to escape the wrath of one Piero Fiorentini, the father of Tecla Fiorentini, who found herself with child after Pagnotto performed in Sturben. Fiorentini is enraged and seeking vengeance for the dishonour brought to his family. However, Pagnotto has proven skilled at eluding capture.

More recently, Pagnotto has caught the attention of a red widow, who now seeks his affection. She will not tolerate someone else interfering with her beloved, and may respond violently.

The Muse

When the artists of Ghastria speak of being inspired by their muse, not all are being strictly metaphorical. Wandering across the land is a spirit whose presence inspires those it deems interesting.

The ghost is a failed artist who dedicated herself to what should have been her greatest masterpiece, forgoing food and sleep until its creation. She died of starvation just before it could be completed and the painting was sold for a pittance to pay her debts. The buyer saw it was incomplete and eventually finished it, unknowingly aided by the ghost.

With the painting complete, the buyer claimed the finished work as his own and sold it to a gallery in Chateaufaux. The spirit was outraged but could do nothing, and her anger prevented her passing.

Now the spirit is torn and conflicted. In enabling the completion of her life's work, the ghost discovered she could influence the creativity of nearby artists. She is still driven to create, and works through the living, but never stays for the completion. As she will never receive credit, she cannot bear to see the works of her unlife finished and claimed by lesser hands. Those who manage to finish on their own earn her wrath, and discover she can sap creativity and as easily as she can gift.

The Ghastrian national obsession tends to attract like-minded folk from across the Core and even farther away lands. I met an engraver from Paridon and a woodworker from a small town in Nova Vaasa. Occasionally, a celebrated artist from the Core will decide to vacation in Ghastria to "soak-up" the artistic ambience. I met no less than three expatriates in East Riding, including a noted composer who, I remember, fascinated my young niece.

Most recently, the "art" of alchemy has found some interest in Ghastria. A number of foreign intellectuals heard about the curious properties of Ghastrian food and have come to investigate. Mostly hailing from Lamordia, these chymists wonder if the science could be used to find a way around the cursed soil. Others are hopeful the soil can be used to make unpalatable medicinal elements easier to swallow. Quite a number of Borcan alchemists have also shown an interest, but I wonder if they are more curious about the possibility of rendering plant-based poisons tasteless.

Fashion

Sturdy clothes are the garb of the island. Common folk favour wool and linens, dyed simple colours with the popular hue varying every few years. The nobles of Ghastria wear imitation dress of the mainland's upper class.

Fishermen, lower merchants, and ranchers lean towards simple and functional garb: thin linen shirts with sturdy wool or hide pants and a heavy vest or coat that can be removed when hot. Given the unpredictable sea weather, most Ghastrians dress in layers and have a warm jacket ready in the event of rain. Tall boots are also fashionable yet functional, with only the poorest not investing in solid footwear. Currently, the favoured footwear is tall leather boots with the top folded-down.

Women favour fancier and less sturdy dresses of the finest material they can comfortably afford, typically linen or fine-woven wool. Jewellery and accessories are an important sign of wealth, so most women try to have a variety of complementary items for their

wardrobe. Like the men, they dress in layers, with shawls and outer-coats kept handy in the event of colder weather.

Nobles do their best to imitate the mainland, with their attempts being perpetually three or four years behind the most recent fashions. Silk, cotton, and more exotic fabrics are also often too expensive to import, or for these lesser nobles to afford, so they badly mimic the designs using coarser materials. The more elaborate and delicate garbs seldom hold up well to the salt air and sea winds

However, this is just a general and generic overview of the land's fashion. Given the local's unique worldview (described below) the fashion is often adjusted or modified to fit each generation. Dramatic colours are the norm now; while not necessarily bright, colours are vivid and stand-alone, seldom mixed or patterned.

Food

It is no surprise that fish sits atop the list of Ghastrian dishes, being found in large numbers and possessing a flavour that other local dishes lack. It is used as primary ingredient of most local meals, and as a seasoning for other items. Fish is so predominant I quickly grew quite sick of it, and the flavour repulsed me for many a week after. Again, I much lament the fact this was but my second stop on the tour of the seas.

Given the limited staple, Ghastrians have myriad methods of preparation, hoping variety in presentation will make up for a lack of ingredients. I have seen fish stewed, steamed, flaked, boiled, smoked, baked, fried, and more! It is possible to have very different fish meals three times a day. Early in my stay I had a kipper breakfast, breaded fish for lunch with a side of fried potatoes (heavily salted), and a fish-steak for dinner.

Aside from fish, the local dishes tend to make use of a hodgepodge of

You Are What You Eat

Founded a half a century ago, the *Divinité de la C'air* is a culinary organization that stages an elaborate meal every month, with members taking turns trying to outdo each other with delicious and exotic meals. Members import food at great expense, so only the exceptionally wealthy can afford membership for long.

The group hires hunters and adventurers to seek out rare fruits, animals and spices, then bring back specimens that can be prepared as meals. They've financed multiple trade missions with Sri Raji and other exotic lands.

Thirty years ago, when the group felt they had eaten everything possible, Baron Camar d'Marosso briefly joined the group and introduced a new idea: human flesh. At first the members were aghast and it took a number of years for them to succumb to temptation, then they discovered something few know: the meat from intelligent creatures retains its flavour on Ghastria. Importing not being required, this made the meat eminently affordable. Now the group feels it has exhausted humans and is looking enviously at other demihuman races, especially elves and halflings. The group is only just now noticing an unusual side effect of their cannibalism: their aging has slowed but they must consume the flesh of an intelligent being each year or suffer symptoms akin to withdrawal, followed by rapid aging and death.

ingredients. Given the locals live with bland food most years they are accustomed to mixing ingredients most others would blanch at, but which the locals cannot taste. They base their meals on complimentary scents and textures, mixing and contrasting between firm and soft foods. Cows and sheep are raised on the island specifically for their differing texture, a change from omnipresent fish. Common staples of other lands, such as soups and stews, are rare on the island as they make the ingredients a uniform texture, depriving the last ounce of joy from imbibing.

Imported spices are also common, especially with the nobles who make liberal use of salts and peppers. A few enterprising locals are experimenting with ways of distilling salt from seawater in large quantities, to sell locally.

The largest risk with the local food is testing the quality of the meals. It is a common practice of the island's inns to pass inferior meat and produce onto non-locals knowing they will be unable to notice that it has gone off or is overripe. Some more foolish foreign sailors claim the island's food is cursed because of

suffering endured after ingesting local meals, but these frequent visits to the privy or the edge of the deck are strictly mundane in cause.

Language

The Ghastrians claim to be the descendants of Dementlieu. This rumour is strengthened by their shared language: Ghastrian is a terrifying mixture of High and Low Mordentish with some limited evolution attributed to a few centuries of isolation. For example, the Ghastrians refer to Dementlieu as *la Ter de Mèr* – a name which threatens to make my eyes bleed (it should be *la Terre Maternelle*).

Older generations of Ghastrians apparently worked to keep their language “pure”, avoiding degradation of the Mother Tongue. Ironically, they rejected changes that the Dementlieuse embraced, so Ghastrian roughly sounds like accented and antiquated Mordentish. New concepts and innovations of the last two centuries often have different names and backgrounds. However, since conservative Ghastrians scoffed at adding new words, the local dialect has many compound descriptors, which have been abbreviated to contractions creating a curious slang.

Since the revelation of the land, the island's language has been influenced by sailors and traders from across the Western Core. Local knowledge of foreign tongues has been greatly impacted by sailor parlance; when a guide attempted to give me directions in Vaasi he used “starboard” and “port”. The nautical instructors have also introducing many of the colourful phrases only sailors know into the local vocabulary. The Ghastrians I spoke with had no idea of their Lamordian phrases' salty meaning. Even the Ghastrian

Language Primer

Art	–	Artz
Fish	–	Phoissom
Harbour	–	Phortes
Magic	–	Mhagei
Monster	-	Behte
Paint	–	Painder
Rain	–	Rhaim
Sailor	–	Marhin
Sculpture	–	Bhoust
Sea	-	Cha

nobility knows how to curse in three languages or accidentally drift into nautical terminology.

Beliefs & Worldview

Ghastrians have a lyrical worldview influenced by generations of musicians, artists, and poets. There is no single dominant or prevalent worldview or philosophy I can point to as “archetypal Ghastrian”.

A Ghastrian’s worldview and attitude is based on whatever art form or medium they follow: a poetry enthusiast might view the world in allegories and flowery metaphor, a painter in composition and hue, and a dramatist might divide the world into tragedy, comedy and history. Even the working class fishermen have an artistic slant, with most enjoying the rhythm of sea shanties and working songs, pacing their life on tempo and tone. An individual’s artistic inclination colours their behaviour and attitude and all aspects of their life. This is not to say everyone on the island is an eccentric artist. Most people keep their expressive preference to themselves, restricting it to their private life.

Local Ghastrians tend to socialize with people of the same artistic leaning: painters group with painters, sculptors are friends with sculptors and so on. This is not merely clubs or associations of likeminded fellows, they simply congregate together. It is almost innate, with Ghastrians of similar dispositions just finding each other.

In previous lands I would attempt to use the science of sociologistics to study the populace’s behaviour and mores. In Ghastria, I found few common or traditional social movements at work and instead had to apply art theory and

artistic movements to the behaviour of the populace. Each generation of Ghastrians embraces its own artistic style or movement, rejecting the conventions and values of their parents. This in turn influences elements of politics, beliefs, fashion, and even personality.

To properly evaluate the Ghastrians I took copious notes, which I then dispatched to mainland art critics or Esteemed Brothers with knowledge of such matters. Two generations ago, Ghastrians had very much embraced *romanticism* as the dominant artistic movement. Currently, the dominant movement is *fauvism*, as embraced by the adults of the land. In response, the youth of Ghastria are experiencing a swelling of *realism* and *naturalism* but it remains to be seen if this will gain permanence.

There are also elements of *bohemianism* in a minority of Ghastrians – typically those of mixed heritage, especially those with Vistani blood. Non-natives and those of shared familial ties often do not share the mindset of the populace, often simply following the dominant trends.

There also many numbers of other philosophies that draw people from varied walks of life, these are mostly the usual fraternities and guilds with some mutual goal or ambition found in any land: hunting lodges, gentlemen’s clubs, and the like. I mention this only because a surprising number have dietary prohibitions or restrictions: philosophies that advocate vegetarianism, or raw food, or avoiding animals seen as unclean. A few groups even promise adherence to their lifestyle will prolong life, stave off illness, or promote creativity. There are even a few culinary

organizations, although the benefits of such a group are lost on me.

Religion

For the last few generations, organized religion was banned on the island. The first Marquis closed down the chapel in East Riding and abolished religion. For a time it appears attempts were made to worship quietly in the home, this caused the number of faithful to dwindle due to isolation and fear of interaction. This unofficial "ban" was slowly lifted over a number of years.

Given their background and claimed former nationality, it is no surprise the Church of Ezra is establishing a foothold on the island. Missionaries of the Home Faith landed on the island in 755 and began to convert the locals.

The priests began construction of a small cathedral five years after they arrived, but the building remains unfinished. The locals hold services in makeshift shrines built into existing structures. The cathedral's dedication is anticipated to be in four or so years, close to the faith's centennial. Numerous local artists have been hired for its construction and the cathedral's massive ceiling mosaic is being heralded as a masterpiece in the making, with its planned design telling a pictorial history of the entire realm.

The priests typically hail from Dementlieu, and follow that nation's dogma. A few preachers from rival denominations have recently landed and begun attempts to sway the converted or attract more followers. While most factions have been civil, the Darkonian clerics have been particularly vocal in their condemnation of the other denominations.

Arts & Trade

It is hard to write a separate section on art for Ghastria when so much of their lifestyle is interwoven with their art. I almost excised this section as superfluous. Instead, I decided to focus on trade and art as a commodity.

Despite the prevalence of Ghastrian art, little of it is traded overseas. There are occasional talented individuals whose works become vogue for short periods, but few have any lasting or permanent value to the Core. Few Ghastrians make a true living as artists. However, while few Ghastrians produce worthwhile contributions to art, the sheer amount of art produced still generates a tidy revenue flow for the island.

Craft goods are curiously rare. While the populace undoubtedly has the talent for well-made and quality goods, production is unheard of; Ghastrians make what they need or enough to earn a living but few craftsmen exist that produce goods worthy of export. No matter how creative or skilled the craftsman is, they prefer to funnel that talent into non-utilitarian works rather than useful items of beauty.

For example, a skilled woodworker would rather create a sculpture from a block of wood than turn it into a set of chairs that would pay his bills. And, instead, he would work as a manual labourer to support his creative woodworking hobby.

In terms of trade, Ghastria produces an unsurprising amount of fish, which is sold along the Core's coastlines. Rarer deepwater fish and shellfish are the most commonly traded foodstuff. Whales are especially profitable. Local traders make a comfortable living exchanging Ghastrian fish for fruit and vegetables grown on the Core.

It should be noted that Ghastrian artists are not limited to the physical arts and there are a large number of poets and other writers residing on the island, both local and expatriates. The current trend in Ghastrian literature is the dark and supernatural, possibly prompted by the volumes of Erick Alain whose stories are quite popular, despite persistent rumours they "encourage deviant behaviour" from their readers or "corrupt the youth of today" as his critics allege. The young Lamordian expatriate Jayde Rothwelle also lives in Ghastria with her lover, the poet Clare Rothwelle. I've read the works of young Miss Rothwelle, all historical fictions, and I would recommend them to my Esteemed Brothers. I've acquired several copies and attached them to this report, they

The Writer

A writer of dark and macabre horror stories, Erick Alain has a reputation as one who corrupts the youth. There have been several noted incidents of young fans repeating acts they read in his works or following examples of their fictional heroes.

What few know is that the books actually *do* corrupt their readers, bringing out their dark side or encouraging them to act on repressed desires. While only a small number of individuals respond to each book, the numbers are increasing.

Alain himself is unaware of the effects of his book, being little more than a puppet. The editor of his works, an elf named Lyanna, is in actuality a shee from the Shadow Rift. The fey creature is interested in the human reaction to art and is using Alain to compose her works. She is fascinated by the subconscious manipulation of mortals, as well as their comparatively strong emotional reactions to art.

make an... interesting reading.

Speaking of art, a mention should be made the most famous artistic work from the island, the writing of the first Marquis d'Polarno. It is well known that the Marquis was a dark and evil soul, which shows in his work. The Marquis wrote extensively during his life, penning essays and short stories, often with a dark erotic slant. Even now, years after the Marquis death, new works of blasphemy, torture, and pornography are unearthed and discovered. The works frequently mock and parody organized religion or authority figures such as judges, merchants, and lesser aristocracy.

The Deer

Once the loving wife to a lesser Lamordian noble, Jayde Rothwelle ran away with her poet lover to Ghastria. Once there, Jayde married her lover despite her earlier marriage. Her old husband is still looking for his wayward wife, hoping to take her back.

Mrs. Rothwelle writes historical fictions, based on tragic events from the early years of the Core. She pulls interesting and dramatic incidents from several lands, all adaptations of well-known events, and uses them as the inspiration for tales of loss and murder, darkness and curses, horror and betrayal.

What few know is that Mrs. Rothwelle is unknowingly and unerringly reciting the true origins of several darklords, including Strahd von Zarovich, Wilfred Godefroy, and Camille Dilisnya. Rothwelle does not realize what she is writing, and says her inspiration comes to her in dreams. So far, the tales have been dismissed as sensational fantasies and have escaped notice but it is only a matter of time before someone notices the similarities between her works and the truth.

These foul and libertine works were first discovered during the looting of the Marquis' manor in 737 B.C. and have since spread across the Core, printed secretly and distributed despite their illegality in many nations. They have become a desired taboo, an open secret spoke amongst the nobility. Now, a generation after the Marquis death, when the memories of his tyranny have faded, he is being held-up as an icon by the grandchildren of the revolution.

History

The local history of Ghastria is not an easy topic of research. Enough books and material exist to piece together a lengthy and expansive history of the land, but much of the work of the last two centuries is poetic in form and written for dramatic effect or thematic elements, rather than historical veracity.

Finding the distinction between the false history of the land and its founding proved awkward, as there were two possible moments. I have decided to describe both for the sake of comprehensiveness.

Early History

The earliest history speaks of the island being colonized by a fallen but wealthy noble who had been expelled from the

polite society of his homeland. He moved to a remote land with his extended family and an army of servants, and took command of the local population. This is likely part of the land's False History, or part of its history prior to being taken by the Mists.

The fallen noble declared himself the monarch of the new land, and adopted the title "king". The oldest son followed his father's example, but only permitted his brothers to take the lesser title of marquis. The succeeding generation then passed the marquis title to their own heirs, quickly creating several competing families.

It is worth noting that the noble is quoted as moving to "a remote location" and "an unsettled land", not explicitly mentioned as an island. However, the locals are described as farmers and ranchers more often than fishermen, suggesting Ghastria was not always a true island. However, as there are no maps and the text is vague, this could just be conjecture on my part.

The earliest histories are curiously the most authoritative, being less... poetic. They are descriptive yet simple in their prose and structure. In short, they read like history books. It is only after the first possible moments when Ghastria entered the Mists that the histories became more creative,

Dread Possibility: The Polonists

A dark, hidden cult of sadists, the Polonists follow the work of first Marquis d'Polarno. They reject the aristocracy and religion, believing only in the satiation of desire. They have small underground meeting rooms where they discuss and enact their desires, often using kidnapped victims or purchased slaves to sate their urges.

Initially just a group of like-minded deviants, the club has grown influential as a growing number of wealthy and influential figures have joined. Some years ago, a few bold members journeyed across the sea to start new clubs in other urbane locations. These smaller groups are just beginning to grow, but members now visit from other lands to take the opportunity to enact fantasies they dare not do at home. The cult's connections and influence are growing and spreading. Someday soon, the club's owners might decide to try their hand at influencing policy and see how much power they have.

suggesting the earliest date is also the most likely time of entry.

Counting back through generations, I would place the colonization of the island roughly four centuries ago. Since the island joined the Sea of Sorrows, the Ghastrians have claimed that their homeland was Dementlieu, but the details of their original homeland are sparse. It could have been anywhere, even Nova Vassa or some fallen land. While the shared language would suggest otherwise, the forces at work in our land mean this cannot be conclusive.

Into the Mists

A little over two centuries ago (somewhere between 580 and 560 B.C.), Ghastria likely entered the Mists as an independent Mistbound island.

This is based on two pieces of evidence. Firstly, by the sudden change in the narrative style of the histories, and secondly by repeated historical descriptions of the land being “cut-off” and its being “isolated and alone”. However, as Ghastrian history books become exercises in poetry at this point – with the narratives of this period being

extremely erratic, flowery, and poetic – the descriptions of being isolated could therefore be entirely metaphorical. But the inclusion of both elements so closely dated together make a strong case for this being the date of entry.

Noteworthy events from this period include the deaths of the entire ruling family and most nobles, who were all apparently poisoned at a feast. The last king of Ghastria, King Oderic, died at this time, along with almost all the marquis (at that time his distant cousins and kin).

The only survivor of the *Pasques Massacre* was the Marquis Stezen d’Polarno, the grandfather of the current Marquis: Stezen d’Polarno III). It was at a great seasonal feast, a holiday known as *Pasques*, that the entire royal family was killed. A spring rebirth festival, but has not been celebrated on the island since and the day has a dark reputation.

Earlier, before the massacre, the first d’Polarno had a reputation for kindness and equality, much like his grandson’s reputation. He was very popular with the common folk, but in the years leading-up to the massacre, d’Polarno suddenly

Dread Possibility: Pasques

Occurring just days before the spring equinox, *Pasques* was a festival of renewal, a day of celebration. Celebrants engaged in simple rituals, like cooking and eating eggs and drinking fresh water from the winter runoff. It was a time of happiness until the Marquis Stezen d’Polarno killed the royal court.

Pulled into the Mists, d’Polarno soon discovered he could regain his mortality at the equinox and solstice. Coincidentally, the first day he was able to plan for this returned humanity was on the following *Pasques*, the anniversary of his entry into the Mists, and he planned a grand celebration. So many people died, it was impossible for the survivors not to notice the drop in population: everyone lost a neighbour, friend, or associate. This second massacre forever associated *Pasques* with death instead of rebirth.

Save occasional small parties or potent adventurers, d’Polarno has all but written-off this day as a time to renew his emotion. A death at *Pasques* just attracts too much attention. However, when the opportunity does present itself he is unlikely to resist the temptation and act rashly without proper forethought.

developed his infamous reputation for cruelty and heartlessness.

Tyranny

Despite being the sole survivor of the royal line, the Marquis declined to assume the title of "king". He still assumed leadership of the land. This is quite probably when Ghastria entered the Mists. Presumably, the Watchers in the Shadows witnessed d'Polarno's mercilessness and granted him power. If he were responsible for the famous Pasques Massacre then this might be even more likely.

There are a number of histories of this era, including *The Unauthorized Biography of the Marquis Stezen d'Polarno* as told by His Vassal, the first Baron Camar d'Marosso. This tome is part of a collection of works, penned by the Baron a little over two decades ago. The book is light on details and glosses over much of the violence of this early period, but has the redeeming quality of being *readable* (as it was penned by an individual who claims to predate the land's entry into the Mists). However, the Baron was absent during the revolution of 737 and omits this part of the national history. The author is also very respectful, even sycophantic, to the Marquis, putting his reliability to question.

This era of Ghastrian history was bloody. The power vacuum left by the massacre left room for numerous lesser nobles to attempt to seize power. The Ghastrian upper class and wealthy quickly began to fight and quarrel over titles and lands, with numerous familial blood feuds remaining to this day.

D'Polarno was unconcerned with the petty power struggles as long as his own power remained. He quickly developed a

lush and lavish lifestyle, holding opulent and extravagant balls every few months. Visitors to the land were frequently invited to these festivals of hedonism and decadence, but few told their tales after.

The balls and manor of the Marquis soon developed a high upkeep cost, which was levied on the populace. The only income came from a reliable Mistway that led to the enchanted forest of Sithicus, and the fey of that land were infrequent trading partners. Still, the fey wood proved a viable gateway to the rest of the Core and merchants could not be held back.

Archetypal of d'Polarno's cruelty was the destruction of the chapel in East Riding, essentially abolishing religion on the island. Little reason was given for this condemnation of faith, but there are rumours the priests had discovered a dark secret of the Marquis' and were punished for their curiosity. Given later rumours of the high body counts after his balls, I suspect the clergy asked too many questions about the influx of corpses. Or perhaps the clergy had just gained too much power and influence over the common folk of the island and were becoming a competitor.

The common folk strained under the heavy tax burden. The Marquis was the only law and it was his capricious whims that decided a criminal's fate. D'Polarno ruled firmly, with hard and arbitrary justice meted out by his personal guard, who were above the law. Commoners were frequently imprisoned, tortured, or killed for little or no crime.

Revolution

This period of oppression and the ever-increasing hedonism and taxation began to come to an end in 736. The Marquis

d'Polarno had been ruling un-aging for over a century and a half, attracting the notice of the populace and travelling adventurers that discovered the land.

The Marquis' fortunes changed when one such group of adventurers survived one of the Marquis' celebrations and retaliated. They reported that their best efforts to kill him failed and he was immortal. They also reported that he was "draining the very life" of his guests during his parties. Unable to kill d'Polarno, the adventurers instead set fire to his mansion and stole something of immense value to him, although details are vague on what this was. Most reports claim it was a valuable piece of artwork; conceivably, d'Polarno was a lich and this was his phylactery, but I am uncertain.

Seeing their formerly unassailable lord humbled by travelling riff-raff, the population was emboldened and began a campaign of rebellion. At first this was quiet and secretive but it quickly grew in intensity. Taxes were withheld and the Marquis' private guard was assaulted.

The revolution ended after a year of turbulence, in early 737. A second group of adventurers stormed the Marquis' manor and fought him to a bloody end. Leaving him for dead, the group departed and the manor was stormed by the locals who discovered the twitching body, which they staked and decapitated. Evidently, the rebels presumed the Marquis was a vampire, a not unreasonable assumption.

It is for this reason I am uncertain the Marquis is or was the master of the land, as Ghastria continued to exist after his death. Conceivably, after this incident, the Watchers found a new figure to curse and empower. Alternatively, the Marquis could have survived, which is a possibility I shall discuss later.

Joining the Core

In the aftermath of the Marquis' deposing, the power struggle of the nobility resumed. During the late years of the Marquis' iron fist, the struggle had quieted and slowed but not ended; now it began anew with leadership of the entire land as the prize. Old hostilities and feuds resurfaced as the rebellion turned on itself.

With no single central authority, taxes were not collected and the public offices collapsed. The Marquis' militia – the only true law enforcement on the island – became a band of thugs extorting money for protection. Vigilante action was common as people fought and killed to protect their few belongings.

Four years after the Marquis' death, in 741, a man claiming to be his son surfaced, one Stezen d'Polarno, the second. This Stezen claimed to have been sired thirty-five years previously, and claimed a former concubine of the Marquis as his mother. Despite being a bastard he claimed his father's lands and wealth. The new Marquis d'Polarno II worked to cement his position with the militia and defend the citizenry, openly ignoring the feuding nobles. With his power thus established and backed by the populace, he slowly worked to quell the fighting.

Within months, early in the fall of 742, the Mists parted, revealing the Sea of Sorrows, to the surprise and enthusiasm of the populace. Since the island joined the sea, the ancestral homeland was quickly assumed to be Dementlieu and sailors moved to renew ties with their kinsfolk.

D'Polarno, the Second

This younger Stezen d'Polarno is noteworthy for being markedly different from his father, in both attitude and appearance. While his father had grown portly after a century of opulent living, this younger Stezen was lean and gaunt. And despite being a hundred and sixty years younger than his father, this Stezen looked older, with thinning grey hair and a slightly lined face. This younger d'Polarno had a reputation as a cool, logical man of order and balance, with a desire for fairness in the world.

D'Polarno ingratiated himself with the masses by distributing much of his father's wealth and initially rejecting the title of "Marquis". He vocally boasted that he wished to restore the d'Polarno name to what it was when his father was young, before the *Pasques Massacre*, and even condemned the later actions of his father.

This d'Polarno began by working to end the noble feud, but was only partially successful. With the Western Sea revealed, the Docks were quickly constructed, using funds from the d'Polarno family treasury. D'Polarno unearthed several hidden caches of treasure which he distributed amongst the populace. It was law and trade that proved to be d'Polarno II's legacy, as he soon restored the old royal law his father had abandoned and began to revise and update the antiquated legal system.

Quickly respected, the populace soon insisted he assume his rightful hereditary title, which d'Polarno reluctantly accepted in 744.

This period is also noteworthy for the landing of missionaries of Ezra on the island, who were neither welcomed nor rejected by d'Polarno. The memories of his family's destruction of the old church were still too new for the Ezrites to open-up to the Marquis. Shortly after their establishment, the Marquis agreed to partially sponsor the construction of a church in exchange for tutelage of his son – then roughly eighteen – on the mainland. The priests agreed and began hunting for an appropriately holy site and construction began three years later in 760.

The reign of Marquis d'Polarno ended abruptly in the spring on 759 during a hunting trip, when the Marquis was injured by a boar and succumbed to his wounds.

D'Polarno, the Third

It was slow for word of his father's death to reach the younger Stezen d'Polarno III, where he was being educated in a small monastery of Ezra in Mordent. It took until 760 for the young Marquis to arrive and assume leadership.

This proved fortunate for the youth as mere days after the young Stezen left, the monastery was burnt to the ground, killing all present.

Less than three full years into the new lord's reign, it is uncertain how this new ruler will lead. His father's short eighteen-year reign was punctuated by the restoration of order and law and renewed faith in the Marquis. However, it would not take much to lose the trust of the populace.

Government

The island is ruled by the Marquis, with the current ruler being Marquis Stezen d'Polarno III.

Marquis d'Polarno III is a soft, rounding man with a familiar face and build as his father and grandfather, only less thin and rigid than his father. While his father had a reputation for hard honesty, this younger Marquis has a reputation for his soft hand in affairs of state and infrequent use of force.

In addition to the Marquis, there are several wealthy noble families that hold sway over their lands and collect some taxes from farmer. The heads of these families hold a variety of titles such as Baron or Duke. The titles are only loosely hereditary as it is possible for wealthy commoners to buy a title from the Marquis, which is a simple form of taxation. However, the Marquis must

Timeline

- 584 Land Founded
- 589 Mistway with Sithicus discovered
- 591 Destruction of chapel in East Riding
- 736 Stezen d'Polarno's Portrait stolen
- 737 Portrait regained; Revolution; Death of d'Polarno I
- 739 Works of Stezen d'Polarno first published
- 741 Stezen d'Polarno II reveals himself
- 742 Ghastria joins the Sea of Sorrows
- 751 The Polonists is founded
- 755 Missionaries of Ezra land
- 759 Stezen d'Polarno II dies
- 760 Stezen d'Polarno III returns to Ghastria and assumes leadership.
- 762 Current year

still approve the ascent to nobility and can refuse a claim. Impoverished nobles can also sell their titles as a means to escape debt, which can be cheaper for

Thutthroat Business

Javier Villafane, also known as the Opium King, is a spice trader who uses his shipping fleet and contacts to import opium from Hazlan into Ghastria. Not content with his disgusting profits selling favourable spices and narcotics on the island, he occasionally blends the two so spice buyers keep coming back.

Unsatisfied with just his growing wealth, Villafane now wishes to become titled. He has the money to buy a title, but two factors prevent this. Firstly, he is far too greedy to part with his money to pay the asked price. And secondly, the Marquis suspects the merchant is poisoning the people of the land and does not want to see Villafane rise above his station.

As such, Villafane is seeking to buy a title from a debt-ridden noble. As there is not currently a noble in such dire straits as to sell their title and lands to Villafane, the scoundrel intends to create one. Through a widespread campaign of blackmail and extortion, Villafane is slowly seeking to create one or two desperate nobles willing to hand over their titles for peace and freedom from their obligations.

This is working, but the nobles do not plan to fall without a fight. One has come into possession of a map that is reputed to lead to the most terrifying painting ever committed to canvas (hidden by its author after completion before he went hopelessly insane), which should fetch an inestimable price on auction. Another noble is planning to devote the remainder of their wealth to hiring assassins or adventurers to deal with Villafane in any way possible.

the purchaser than buying a new title from the Marquis and, through a loophole in the law, does not require the Marquis' permission.

Despite being a loose monarchy, the land is governed by strict laws that have been revised and codified over the past two decades. The noble families are limited in power and the populace has a surprising number of rights allowed them. The Marquis has the authority to adjudicate and pass judgement but typically it is an appointed magistrate that oversees hearings.

NPT Gallery

Marquis Stezen d'Polarno,

Lord of Ghastria

Marquis Stezen d'Polarno lives a joyless life, his soul trapped in the canvas and paint of his portrait. He can restore his humanity once every season by drawing the souls of onlookers into the painting. He calls this his "revelry".

Background

Once, two centuries ago, the d'Polarno name was associated with kindness and charity. He was the noblest of the marquis and respected by the masses, appearing as a benevolent, even philanthropic, nobleman. He championed the causes of the peasants: lower taxes, fewer public beatings, more spectacular festival entertainments, and larger food rations during the winter.

All this was a ruse. D'Polarno was actually a very shrewd, duplicitous politician. He publicly supported populist causes while secretly working for personal gain. Those who discovered his agenda and threatened to reveal his scheming turned up dead. The public

adoration of d'Polarno drew the ire of the King Oderic IX, who could not stand to have someone else given more respect. During a long, cold winter the King saw his opportunity to eliminate d'Polarno. It had been a hard year: grain stores were low and unrest was high. D'Polarno revealed that the king had a secret store of food, orchestrating riots. All this was foreseen by the king, who quickly ended the rebellion, executed key rebels, and placated the population with a share of the grain, which he claimed was being stored for the commoners.

King Oderic IX arrested d'Polarno, and threw him into the dungeons. But the King had an insolvable problem. If he executed d'Polarno, the Marquis would become a martyr, but neither could d'Polarno be left alive. King Oderic spoke with the sorceress, Lady Annelise, and arranged to have d'Polarno enchanted. She wove her magic on a specially prepared portrait of d'Polarno's. As the painting was finished, a fraction of his essence was drawn into the canvas. The painting held his vibrancy and love for life.

Bound by invisible chains, d'Polarno was released. The king had various protective incantations cast on the portrait, then put it on display in his throne room. D'Polarno became a blatantly self-serving politician. The king had his revenge and he did not have to do a thing, d'Polarno very effectively killed his own reputation, and could do nothing against the king; Oderic made it very clear that any attack meant the

Marquis would lose any hope of regaining his soul.

The Marquis eventually found a way to extract his revenge, using the pigment umbral grey, a paint with a unique hue that was also one of the land's deadliest

poisons. During the celebration of Pasques, he poisoned the feast, killing the entire noble line and many of the guests. D'Polarno regained his portrait but it still held a fragment of his soul. He lacked the means of releasing his trapped life force.

Uncertain of his next move, d'Polarno was unaware of the Mists spreading across the countryside. Dark forces watched and waited patiently for d'Polarno's next move. Some months after the massacre, the Marquis was being attended by a pretty young serving girl. D'Polarno's mind wandered. He found himself musing "if my heart were not so dead, I would seduce this girl. I wish I had my soul back once more." At that moment the girl glanced at the portrait of Stezen and froze in place. Her life rushed into the portrait and vitality and emotion flooded into the Marquis. But, a scant hour later, the renewed life faded and d'Polarno was an emotionless husk again.

For three months d'Polarno struggled to reactivate the painting, until the seasons changed and d'Polarno once again felt alive, but again only for a brief moment. It was another three months before d'Polarno was certain the painting was tied to the seasons. His next opportunity to use the portrait was Pasques, the anniversary of the massacre. Greedy to live as the marquis was, many died that day.

D'Polarno settled into a routine of life, governing firmly and harshly, ever anticipating his next opportunity to feel. This grim routine changed twenty-six years ago. d'Polarno killed a group of outlanders who attended his reverie, but they did not remain dead and rose as revenants to seek revenge. When they discovered they could not kill d'Polarno, the group settled for alternate vengeance

and stole his portrait. The painting was given to a band of Vistani to hide from the lord. The painting could not leave the land, being bound to d'Polarno, but the Vistani kept it hidden, continually moving it across the island.

After a year of searching, d'Polarno finally discovered the location of the portrait and dispatched a band of mercenaries to recover his painting. He repaid them with betrayal, but they managed to set fire to his manor as they fled. Emboldened by the blaze, the long-oppressed populace rose up against d'Polarno.

Left for dead, d'Polarno spent the next few years recovering and reviewing his life. After this period of introspection, he realized he had become complacent, too visibly unaging and tyrannical. Adventurers had hindered him twice and, if he continued to draw attention, it was only a matter of time before another group managed to kill him. D'Polarno decided to reinvent himself, masquerading as his son and rule fairly, while being more subtle in his revelry and cunning with his kills.

The Dark Powers seemed pleased with d'Polarno's deception and reinvention, for shortly after d'Polarno II finalized his power the Mists pulled back from Ghastria and revealed the Sea of Sorrows.

Seeing how well his deception worked, d'Polarno decided to maintain the ruse. After enough time had passed he determined it was time to change again and began establishing the groundwork for his next rebirth.

Recent History

After centuries d'Polarno has recently discovered he is still aging.

He had spent the last few decades feigning aging through strategically cutting and dying his hair only to discover he has noticeably aged, albeit slowly. Now The Marquis has to pretend to be younger than he actually appears, hiding wrinkles and darkening his hair.

D'Polarno ages normally during his revelry and the days have slowly added up. He estimates he has aged a full decade since he became a lord.

D'Polarno amuses himself with his writing: planning and concocting elaborate and disturbing sceneries of carnal activities, frequently violent or depraved. He writes lengthy poems and short stories to entertain himself and attempt to heat his dead soul between seasonal reveries.

After the uprising, his works were discovered in his manor. Some of the more salacious pieces were copied and have spread across the Core. D'Polarno occasionally publishes new works, disguising them as "recently discovered" pieces penned by "his grandfather". It amuses d'Polarno (to the extent he can be amused) that his works have developed a following, but it frustrates him that he cannot come forward publically as the author, nor can he reveal himself to his unwitting followers. This is especially frustrating during his revelries, as he knows there are likeminded individuals on his island with whom he can indulge his perversions, but he must remain anonymous.

Personality

Twisted and cunning, d'Polarno's soulless nature has made him patient and calm. He has the focus and emotional detachment of a sociopath, yet he can remember what emotions were like. The absence of feeling gnaws at him; they

are akin to a missing limb, and it is a hole he can never fill.

Devoid of emotion, d'Polarno is calm and logical when dealing with problems. He is able to learn from his mistakes and never repeats them. As a nigh-immortal being, he has the benefit of time to reflect on his past.

However, as divorced from feeling as d'Polarno is, he cannot abandon pleasure. He cannot stop drawing the life force of others into his portrait and restoring his emotions. He continually looks for new ways of finding victims and disposing of the remains, learning from past failures that have attracted attention or left too many bodies.

The Marquis knows he is vulnerable during his periods of emotion and works hard to protect himself, to the point of paranoia. While he is loath to cancel his plans, he has put off his revelry on occasion, due to security concerns; he is not willing to risk immortality for a week of pleasure.

During his periods of mortality, d'Polarno is much more erratic, impatiently trying to fit as much living as possible into his few brief days. Prior to a revelry, he spends weeks planning and scheduling his latest debauchery to avoid a wasted moment. Much time is spent devising new pleasures and creative endeavours. D'Polarno dares not waste a second of true life, and often forgoes sleep, becoming irritable and prone to errors of judgement. He knows that he will regret these lapses in judgement for days once his revelry has ended but cannot stop himself.

Combat

Marquis d'Polarno prefers to avoid direct combat, relying on guards and servants to protect him.

If forced into combat he reveals himself to be quite adept with his rapier, having had centuries to perfect his fencing technique. He has a wide assortment of rapiers in his manor from several different lands, but he favours one enchanted with preternatural speed.

Killing the Marquis is no simple task. His spirit is bound to his painting, which is indestructible during much of the year. During his seasonal reveries (or if d'Polarno dies) the painting becomes mere canvas and wood with Hardness 2, 15 hit points, and a Break DC 18.

If d'Polarno is killed but his painting left intact, he can be easily resurrected and there is a chance his soul will become a vengeful spirit. If the painting is destroyed but d'Polarno left alive his soul will travel to a random painting in the land, which will slowly change into d'Polarno's portrait.

D'Polarno

CT9

XP 6,400

Human Aristocrat 3/Fighter 8

NE Medium Humanoid (human)

Init +7; **Senses** Perception +6

Defence

AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+4 armour, +2 shield, +3 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 73 (8d10+3d8+11); regeneration 5

Fort +7, **Ref** +6, **Will** +5; +2 vs. fear

Defensive Abilities bravery +2, immortal;

DR 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** bleed, disease, poison.

Offence

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +2 *Rapier of Speed* +17/+17/+12 (1d6+7/15-20)

Special Attacks steal soul, weapon training abilities (light blades +1)

Statistics

Str 14, **Dex** 16, **Con** 11, **Int** 14, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +10; CMB +12; CMD 26

Feats Critical Focus, Dodge, Improved Critical (rapier), Improved Initiative, Persuasive, Quick Draw, Skill Focus (appraise), Toughness, Vital Strike, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (rapier), Weapon, Specialization (rapier)

Skills Appraise +22, Bluff +15, Craft (painting) +10, Craft (sculpture) +5, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +8, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (nobility) +15, Perception +6, Perform (oratory) +10, Ride +10, Sense Motive +8

Languages Mordentish, Balok, Lamordian, Vaasi

SQ seal border

Gear +1 studded leather armour, +1 light steel shield, +2 rapier of speed

Special Abilities

Immortality (Su) D'Polarno is functionally immortal when not under the effects of his revelry. He does not age and will continue to regenerate regardless of the state of his body. Even if his body and remains are destroyed, he will slowly regenerate from spilt blood or other debris.

During his revelry, d'Polarno loses his DR and regeneration abilities and can be killed normally. Additionally, as he is more erratic due to his surge of emotions, d'Polarno's alignment becomes Chaotic.

Seal Border (Su) D'Polarno can seal his land at will. As a free action, he can concentrate, turning the borders of Ghastria into huge paintings, like the backdrop of a theatre play.

These paintings appear as lifelike panoramic landscapes, and only by sailing into one can it be discovered that it's not real. The paintings cannot be harmed or breached by mundane means, nor can they be climbed, swum under, or flown over.

d'Polarno cannot close the borders during the effects of his revelry.

Steal Soul (Su) Once a season, d'Polarno can steal the souls of people looking at his portrait. This power recharges after a solstice or equinox, so long as at least three months have passed since the last time this power was used.

D'Polarno can affect anyone within 50 feet of the portrait and up to fifty people can be affected at a single time. Targets gain 1d6+1 permanent negative levels for each round they look at the painting. After the first round, targets are allowed to make a DC 25 Will Save to avert their eyes. D'Polarno gains one hour of emotion and vigour for each negative level bestowed.

Spells and items that protect a creature against spells such as *magic jar* or *trap the soul* prevent this effect, but spells that only prevent energy drain or negative levels are ineffective. Creatures who gain more negative levels than they have Hit Dice are slain by the effect and can only be raised by a *wish*, *miracle*, or similar spell.

Curse

D'Polarno's soul is contained within his portrait. He cannot experience any emotion without his soul. He feels neither happiness nor sadness, and while he can still experience physical pleasure, it brings him no joy or satisfaction.

Four times a year, during a solstice or equinox, the Marquis only need wish to have his soul returned to him to have his portrait drain the life from the onlookers and deposit their life energy within the darklord.

Annelise

Spirit on Stretched Canvas

The ghost of a murdered witch, trapped forever in the world of art. She bound d'Polarno's soul into his portrait.

Background

The wife of a minor member of the court, one Baron Leighton, Lady Annelise had two dark secrets that could end her life. She was the secret lover of both Marquis Stezen d'Polarno and King Oderic XI, and she was a dabbler in dark magic. She kept her witchcraft a secret from all except King Oderic IX, who occasionally employed her to poison his enemies.

When King Oderic had grown tired of Marquis d'Polarno, King Oderic turned to Annelise and asked her to find a way to eliminate him as an enemy without killing him. Failing that, she was to make his death seem like an unlucky accident.

Despite her ambition, Annelise opted to spare d'Polarno's life, removing the Marquis' vibrant spirit and ambition. It is uncertain if she could not kill Marquis because she was his lover or if she hoped to continue using the Marquis against the King to further her own power.

After the Pasques Massacre, Annelise saw that the Marquis was next in line to be king. Approaching d'Polarno, she suggested he make her the queen. Lacking emotion, d'Polarno easily resisted her charms. He played along with her dreams long enough to paint her portrait. During the painting he poured umbral grey paint over her, coating her with the deadly poison. Her death was agonizing, as the venom was slowly absorbed by her skin. With her gasping final breath, she cursed "As you

paint over my life, so shall your life be coloured! May you always be covered with the umbral grey!”

Recent History

Lady Annelise arose as a ghost, but one doomed to haunt the world on the other side of paintings. She exists in the world of art and can interact with a painting's contents as if that were the real world. Annelise can manipulate objects in the background and touch objects in the foreground, but cannot destroy or permanently alter a painting: some time after she leaves, the painting returns to normal.

People and animals in paintings remain like statues to her. She can touch them, move them, and even take their clothing but they remain lifeless and inanimate. After centuries alone, more than anything, Lady Annelise desires companionship. She longs to hear another voice, to hold and be held by someone else. She is hoping to find a way to draw the souls of others into her world. Currently, she believes that if she can arrange the death of someone near an occupied painting, she might be able catch their spirit.

It has not escaped her notice that she is immortal and can effortlessly travel across the island by hiking from painting to painting. She can be anywhere, hear anything, and see everything. There is little that occurs on the island that escapes her notice, she just cannot share what she knows.

Personality

Ambition drove Lady Annelise for much her life. She used her mind, her arcane skills, or her body to further her dreams of power. She longed to be the woman beside the king, the power behind the

throne. She surrounded herself with ambitious men who ended up using her as much as she used them.

Her feelings to d'Polarno have become confused after years of watching him, unseen. Her feelings for the Marquis vary between rage at her death, adoring love, and jealousy at his “infidelities”. She remembers they were once lovers, but also that he killed her. Yet she remembers that he was under the effects of her curse and might not entirely be at fault for her murder. And after centuries of watching, he remains the one constant in her life. She has alternating, yet simultaneous, plans to arrange his downfall or draw him into her painting, potentially one and then the other.

The centuries of solitude have not dulled her ambition. She desires little more than to be able to escape into the real world and resume her scheming.

Combat

Lady Annelise cannot currently engage in combat as she is trapped in paintings. Attempts to injure her only damage or destroy her occupied painting.

Unknown to her, Lady Annelise's spirit is partially tied to the painting d'Polarno made of her at her death. If this painting were destroyed her spirit would be untethered. The exact consequences of this are unknown. Destroying her portrait might allow her to pass onto the afterlife or might allow her to manifest as a normal ghost. The painting has Hardness 1, 10 hit points, and a Break DC 13.

Lady Annelise

CR11

XP 12,800

Human Ghost Aristocrat 1/Witch 11

NE Medium Undead (augmented humanoid, human, incorporeal)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +9

Defense

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 15 (+1 Dex, +5 deflection, +1 dodge)

Hp 129 (1d8+11d6+71)

Fort +8, **Ref** +5, **Will** +10; +4 bonus vs. channeled energy

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4, incorporeal, rejuvenation; **Immune** undead traits

Offense

Speed 0 ft., flight (30 feet, perfect)

Melee melee touch +7

Special Attacks corrupting touch 12d6 (DC 21), draining touch, frightful moan (DC 21), hexes (DC 18 - cauldron, charm, disguise [11 hours/day], evil eye, misfortune, poison steep), malevolence (DC 21)

Witch Spells Prepared (CL 11; Concentration +14):

6th—*inflict light wounds*, Mass (DC 19)

5th—*baleful polymorph* (DC 18), *dominate person* (DC 20)

4th—*black tentacles*, *dimension door*, *enervation*

3rd—*unadulterated loathing* (DC 18), *lightning bolt* (DC 16), 2x *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *dispel magic*

2nd—*false life*, *daze monster* (DC 17), *calm emotions* (DC 17), 2x *hold person* (DC 17)

1st—*unnatural lust* (DC 16), *mage armor*, 2x *cause light wounds*, *ray of enfeeblement* (DC 14)

0 (at will) —*daze* (DC 15), *bleed* (DC 13), *dancing lights*, *message*

Statistics

Str —, **Dex** 14, **Con** —, **Int** 16, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 21

Base Atk +5; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 24

Feats Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, Deceitful, Dodge, Forge Ring, Greater

Spell Focus (Enchantment), **Spell Focus** (Enchantment), **Spell Penetration**

Skills Acrobatics -4, Appraise +9, Bluff +24, Craft (alchemy) +13, Diplomacy +20, Disguise +16, Fly +12, Heal +10, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (nature) +11, Knowledge (nobility) +10, Perception +9, Sense Motive +10, Spellcraft +12, Stealth +7; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Fly, +8 Perception, +8 Stealth

Languages Mordentish, Draconic, Elven, Infernal

SQ arcane familiar nearby, deliver touch spells through familiar, empathic link with familiar, patron spells (enchantment), share spells with familiar, speak with animals, speak with familiar, witch's familiar (house centipede called Pède)

Baron Camar d'Marosso

The Immortal Vassal

The Baron Camar d'Marosso is a fop and lesser noble, the former herald of d'Polarno whose only loyalty is to the Marquis... or was.

Background

During the reign of King Oderic IX, Camar d'Marosso was a commoner with ambition to spare. He allied himself with the Marquis d'Polarno, working to undermine the king. D'Marosso whispered venom into the ears of the commoners, fed information to d'Polarno, and earned the good graces of the servants from several noble houses.

D'Marosso remained loyal during d'Polarno's imprisonment and subsequent release, offering counsel and support in the time leading up to the Pasques Massacre. He was not directly privy to d'Polarno's experiments in masking the taste of umbral grey but did

the footwork in acquiring the ingredients.

Once d'Polarno became sole ruler of Ghastria, he rewarded d'Marosso with a barony, both title and land near East Riding. Despite his new noble status, d'Marosso continued to serve as d'Polarno's attaché and herald.

The Baron, always having a penchant for fine cuisine, was dismayed to discover Ghastrian food had no flavour. In desperation, he tried more and more bizarre foods looking for palpable means. This continued until he made the ghastly discovery that human flesh retained its flavour. Once he discovered he could taste man-flesh, d'Marosso began to regularly dine on the corpses of d'Polarno's revelries. He ate surreptitiously at first and then more openly. He experimented with different ways of preparing human flesh for his cannibalistic feasts.

The Mists took notice of his diet and soon D'Marosso's body began to twist and alter into that of a ghost. His unlife is impermanent. So as long as D'Marosso eats human flesh at least once a week, he retains his undeath. If he lapses in his feeding his undead immortality fades and he begins to rapidly age. He usually keeps a store of well-cured bodies between revelries, and has no compunction against killing travelers while he's abroad.

While the domain was still an Island in the Mists, a Mistway emerged connecting Ghastria with Sithicus. Curious of the land beyond his borders, d'Polarno dispatched his trusted advisor to investigate these other lands. D'Marosso was more than happy, as it allowed him to indulge his decadent side. The Baron spent a number of years exploring the Core and bringing back reports of the lands outside of Ghastria.

Recent History

As he explored, the Baron's sojourns from Ghastria became longer and longer. It was at the end of his longest venture that the Marquis was assaulted and humiliated: d'Polarno's portrait was stolen, and after its recovery, the manor was partially burnt and d'Polarno was almost killed.

Hearing the news too late to intervene, d'Marosso still rushed home, only to be stymied by the Grand Conjunction. The Mistway vanished and d'Marosso was cut off from Ghastria. He eventually returned to find a reinvented Marquis d'Polarno, who was less interested in sharing power with his former vassal.

D'Marosso told himself his demotion was not personal, that it was simply a ruse created to sell the Marquis' new persona. However, after reinventing himself a second time, d'Polarno retained the power he formerly delegated. When this new d'Polarno does share authority, it is with newer nobles and even newcomers to the island. With dozens of sailors bringing news to the island and regular trade relations with the Core, d'Polarno has less need of an informant, and D'Marosso is kept closer at home.

The always loyal D'Marosso is beginning to wonder if it might be time for a change of rulership. After years investigating the Core and being left to his own whims, D'Marosso finds himself missing being his own master.

Personality

Twisted and corrupt, d'Marosso was never particularly humane when he was alive and any shreds of decency have withered over his centuries of unlife.

The Baron is an epicurean, a man who enjoys the finer things of life. He likes the feeling of soft silk, the scent of fine wine, the sound of excellent music, and most importantly, the taste of exquisite food. While the bland flavourless of Ghastrian food irritated d'Polarno, it infuriated d'Marosso.

D'Marosso fancies himself a ladies man but does not handle rejection well. He often uses his paralyzing touch to keep women he's interested in from leaving. However, he can seldom restrain himself with a helpless victim, and will often end up feasting instead of wooing.

Combat

D'Marosso feigns being a coward, initially crying he is unarmed if attacked.

He will then rely on his bardic spells to hinder his allies and augment his own power, trying to stay out of reach of melee weapons. But this is a ruse, designed to draw enemies in close as they attempt to strike the "helpless spellcaster". After a couple of moments he will reveal his true potency, striking with his claws and laughing as he paralyzes his foes.

D'Marosso

CR8

XP 4,800

Ghast Aristocrat 3/Bard 6

CE Medium Undead

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +16

Aura stench (DC 15)

Defence

AC 24, touch 18, flat-footed 18 (+2 armour, +5 Dex, +4 natural, +2 deflection, +1 dodge)

hp 97 (11d8+44)

Fort +7, **Ref** +11, **Will** +13; +4 vs. bardic performance, sonic, and language-dependent effects

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +2;

Immune undead traits

Offence

Speed 30 ft.

Melee Bite +12 (1d6+2) and 2 Claws +13 x2 (1d8+2)

Special Attacks bardic performance (18 rds), fascinate (DC 17), inspire competence +2, inspire courage +2, suggestion (DC 17), disease (DC 15), paralysis (1d4+1 rounds, DC 15)

Spells (CL 6th; Concentration +10)

2nd (4/day)—eagle's splendor, glitterdust (DC 16), minor image (DC 16), alter self

1st (5/day)—*sleep* (DC 15), *cause fear* (DC 15), *hideous laughter* (DC 15), *disguise self*

0 (At will)—resistance, mage hand, detect magic, read magic, ghost sound (DC 14), prestidigitation (DC 14)

Statistics

Str 15, **Dex** 20, **Con** -, **Int** 19, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +7; CMB +9; CMD 27

Feats Dodge, Eldritch Claws, Improved Natural Attack (claws), Rending Claws, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (claws)

Skills Acrobatics +19, Appraise +12, Bluff +18, Diplomacy +18, Disguise +18, Escape Artist +13, Knowledge (local) +16, Knowledge (nobility) +17, Perception +16, Perform (act) +18, Perform (oratory) +18, Profession (chef) +11, Sense Motive +18, Sleight of Hand +10, Stealth +18, Survival +8,

Languages Mordentish, Balok, Darkonese Elven, Lamoridan, Vaasi

SQ bardic knowledge, lore master (1/day), versatile performance abilities (acting, oratory), well versed

Gear masterwork leather armour, *ring of protection* +2

Cynthia De Grieves

Unlucky in Love

By Ren "Genzo Ren" Laufer

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"To live in hearts we leave behind, is not to die."

- Thomas Campbell

Cynthia De Grieves cr12

Female human vorlog, Commoner

2/Rogue 10

CN medium humanoid

Init: +3; **Senses** Perception +15

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 16 (+2 armor, +3 natural armor, +3 Dex, +1 Dodge, +1 deflection)

hp 74 (2d6+10d8+12)

DR 5/(magic and silver)

Immunities mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep, paralysis

Fort +3 **Ref** +10 **Will** +1

Defensive Abilities evasion, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +3, fast healing (puddle of tears at 0hp), resiliency, Combat Expertise, Mobility

OFFENSE

Speed 30

Melee stiletto of venom +15/+10

(1d4+5/19-20 + venom as per dagger of venom)

unarmed strike +13/+8 (1d3+5 + 1d3

Wis drain)

Special Attacks sneak attack +5d6, bleeding attack 5/rd, opportunist, spring attack, improved feint, greater feint Charm Person (at will, Will DC16 to evoke pity/sympathy)

Animal Rage (at will, Will DC21 50' radius. Affected animals attack the nearest creature)

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 16, **Con** 10, **Int** 13, **Wis** 7, **Cha** 20

Base Atk +8/+3; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 26

Feats Combat Expertise, Improved Feint, Greater Feint, Deceitful, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Alertness*, Improved Unarmed Strike*, Weapon Focus** (stiletto)

(*Vorlog Bonus, ** Rogue Talent Bonus)

Skills Acrobatics +16, Appraise +5, Bluff +22, Climb +9, Diplomacy +9,

Disable Device +7, Disguise +15,
Escape Artist +7, Intimidate +9,
Knowledge (local) +5, Knowledge
(nobility) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6,
Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge
(Ravenloft) +6, Linguistics +9,
Perception +15, Ride +7, Sense Motive
+15, Sleight of Hand +16, Stealth +23,
Swim +9, Use Magic Device +18

Languages Darkonese, Balok,
Mordentish, Vaasi, Falkovnian,
Lamordian, Tepestani, Nidalan

SQ Fast Healing: 1hp/hr or 1hp/rd when
near surrogate. When reduced to 0hp,
wails mournfully and collapses into
puddle of tears, retreating at speed 20 to
find a dark haven within 1d4 hours to
recuperate for 8 hours before resuming
humanoid form.

Trapfinding, Stand Up, Opportunist

Other Gear: stiletto of venom, belt of
dexterity, +1 padded armor, ring of
protection +1

Description

Cynthia DeGrieves is a slight, blonde
woman, with porcelain-pale skin, loose
shoulder-length ringlets, and a constant
subtle dilation to her pastel blue eyes.
She is always dressed in impeccable
fashion, appropriate to the latest styles of
wherever she is currently residing, with
an emphasis on elaborate gowns in black
and deep red fabrics. She is careful not
to open her mouth or smile too widely,
in order to hide her incisors, which are
just a bit longer than normal.

Regardless of her expressed mood,
there is usually an undercurrent of
doleful longing to her expression and a
perceptive observer will notice the well-
masked aura of one who is just barely
holding herself together, in the face of

unbearable tragedy. There are some
women who are exquisitely beautiful in
the trembling moment before they begin
to cry. Cynthia has that quality at all
times.

When she is encountered with a
surrogate, her demeanor is improved,
and she appears animated and driven -
bubbly, even. But the faint twinge of
fear and loss colors her mannerisms, as
though she is overcompensating,
reassuring herself, as much as anyone
else, that she is doing fine -- yes, just
fine, thanks.

Background

Those who have read the works of the
famed monster hunter Rudolph Van
Richten know well the tale of his first
encounter with the creatures of the night
that led him on a lifelong struggle
against them. One vampire in particular,
Baron Metus, was the impetus for Dr.
Van Richten's ceaseless quest, as the
Baron had turned the doctor's only son,
Erasmus, to undeath, and Van Richten
was forced to slay his own child. Metus
slew Van Richten's wife in revenge, and
Van Richten replied in kind, slaying the
Baron to avenge her murder.

What is not so well-known is that in
the time it took Van Richten to prepare
for his assault on the Baron, track the
fiend down, and destroy him, Metus had
found a new companion to replace
Erasmus, a young Martira Bay cutpurse
named Cynthia DeGrieves. Growing up
an orphan on the streets of the bustling
city, Cynthia learned to fend for herself,
eventually becoming adept enough at
thievery to qualify for entry into the
local thieves' guild. She never
progressed far enough into the
organization to learn its connection to
the Kargatane, as her life as a pickpocket
came to an abrupt end the evening when

she chose the dashing Baron Metus as her mark. Metus's supernatural senses alerted him to her attempt, and he caught her gently by the wrist, then suavely lured her into an alley where he could prey on her instead. Cynthia was instantly intrigued by the sophisticated and preternaturally graceful nobleman and, mistaking his bloodthirst for lust, tried to entice him into a tryst, showering him with flirtatious compliments on his perceptiveness and agility. Metus was intrigued by this fearless and feisty thief, and changed his mind about feeding on her. He wondered if, despite her humble station, she might be worthy of more than becoming a quick snack. Instead, he invited her to accompany him to the theater production he had been on his way to attending that night.

Thus began a whirlwind love affair between Cynthia and Metus. He showered her with gifts of fine clothing and jewelry far beyond what she could ever have afforded on her own. At the same time, he quickly brought her up to speed on the ways of the nobility, attempting to make her presentable among his high society peers. He taught her crash courses in etiquette, fine foods and wine, fashion, and culture. Cynthia soaked in the attention and mentoring. She became increasingly smitten with the handsome baron who, like a fairy-tale prince, had pulled her out of the gutter and given her a life that she had never dared to dream possible -- a life which felt like exactly what she deserved after years of toil. Whenever Metus fed upon her, it was disguised within romantic liaisons, and he used his vampiric domination powers to insure she would forget the feedings and remember only his passionate embrace. So, never knowing that her benefactor was a vampire, nor that he had been a

member of the Kargat, she fell in love with him, and he with her, and they were engaged to be married.

It was at this point that the gravely wronged Dr. Van Richten arrived to exact his revenge. Though inexperienced, he was driven by rage and naturally astute, and not to mention, quite lucky, and the good doctor was successful in vanquishing Baron Metus. But he had no way of knowing that Metus was already in the process of turning Cynthia into a Vampire Bride, and that killing him would leave her in a state trapped between life and death. Not quite human, but not quite a vampire, she was something else: a Vorlog, cursed to forever seek out men who remind her of her lost love, without knowing exactly why.

She did find out from the local authorities the identity of the man who was to blame for Metus's death, and set out to continue the cycle of revenge by killing Van Richten. She sought a vistani medium to find "the murderer," Dr. Van Richten, for her. The gypsy mystic's gruesome death was the first time Cynthia saw The Mist, a strange white cloud that kills with a touch, becoming tinged with red. Cynthia spent years searching in vain for Van Richten, and The Mist followed her, killing every person she came to care for along the way. She roamed the western core, alternately searching for Van Richten and becoming distracted from her quest by a string of lovers, each one reminding her of some facet of her dead fiancé - and each one left as a desiccated corpse when The Mist caught up to them. After each death, she renewed her vow to find Van Richten, which was, of course, exactly what the Mist intended -- for the Mist which Cynthia came to dread was none other than the man she eternally

longs for. While Dr. Van Richten would go on to send dozens of vampires to their eternal rest, he didn't start out with all the knowledge he would later pen into his guides. Perhaps he missed a crucial step, or perhaps Metus possessed some quirk that made him hard to kill, but whatever the reason, something didn't go quite right in Van Richten's second vampire slaying. Baron Metus rose as a Crimson Death, the ghost of a vampire, and he stewed in rage every time his erstwhile fiancée was waylaid on their shared quest for revenge. The vistani seer's death was an accident, as Metus tried to allow himself to be channeled by her in order to communicate with Cynthia. But each of Cynthia's lovers was killed deliberately, as Metus fought to keep her on Van Richten's trail. As Cynthia fled the Mist in terror upon its every appearance, Metus was unable to explain his current condition or reassure her. She developed a phobia of all mists and fog, as well as an irrational hatred of all vistani, blaming the medium for sending the deadly Mist as a curse on her.

Her most recent Metus surrogate is the only one to have survived beyond their relationship. In Krezk, she met Conrad Shadowlands, a refugee widower from Nidala. Conrad is a miner, an unassuming and taciturn man who refuses to discuss his past. Despite being nothing like the sophisticated Metus in any other way, he bears an uncanny likeness to the late vampire. If Conrad were to cut short his shoulder-length hair, and shave his drooping mustaches, the resemblance would be near-perfect. Due solely to this physical quirk, Cynthia fell instantly in love with him. As usual, she convinced herself that she no longer desired revenge on Van Richten, preferring to remain happy

with her new love. She and Conrad courted for a year, and were married for four when she could take the rustic Barovian lifestyle no longer, and convinced him to move to Port-a-Lucine. Once there, she took work as a scribe, while encouraging Conrad to start a new career as a sculptor. She sought to bring him up through the classes of high society, as her late fiancé Metus had done for her long ago. (It is at this point in Cynthia's life that she appears in the adventure, "Feasting with the Falcons" in *Quoth the Raven 20*.)

But having avoided the Mist for so long, Cynthia's innate vorlog tendency to find fault in her surrogate was finally allowed to develop. As Conrad failed more and more to live up to Metus's example, she turned on him, becoming belittling and abusive. Worse, once Cynthia was no longer hidden in a small town, and began mingling with well-known socialites, Metus was able to find her. Conrad was only spared the deadly wrath of his disappointed wife and her incorporeal ex-lover due to the timely intervention of a group of adventurers, who destroyed the Crimson Death and forced the Vorlog into liquid form for the first time.

Confused and distraught, she seeped into the cracks of the Port-a-Lucine street, and eavesdropped on her attackers as they discussed the truth of the situation with Conrad. At first, she refused to believe their claims that her beloved Metus was a vampire, and had become the deadly Mist. But she couldn't deny her strange transformation, and reasoned that the do-gooders had no reason to lie amongst themselves. The more she thought about it, the more it made sense. The stinging pain she felt in the sunlight, the blurred mirrors, the small, budding fangs she had taken great

lengths to conceal, the youth her face retained, the longing hunger to touch and be touched... all these things she had either willfully denied, or chalked up to a disease or vistani curse, and now everything fit together. She felt intense guilt for spurning the Mist that had been her beloved, and for mocking him by trying to love another, and another... and another. But hope came to her then, as she realized that Metus had risen from death twice already. Perhaps he could rise again. She vowed to find a way to bring her beloved back from the Gray Realm and into her eternal embrace.

Current Sketch

Cynthia has not been seen by Conrad since Metus's apparent destruction, nor has she taken another surrogate. With the conviction that the real Metus is not forever lost to her, she has been able maintain the willpower to suppress her need for a substitute. Her renewed purpose has led her to explore and develop her powers, learning as much as she can about her own nature and that of vampires.

With the knowledge she has collected from far-flung corners of the world, she has pieced together a ritual that she believes will return her lost love to unlife. Her research has brought her throughout the Core, and led her back to Port-a-Lucine. (Even with the knowledge that Metus was the Mist that pursued her, she still can't shake her fear of the Misty Border, and will never be encountered in an Island of Terror or Cluster of her own free will.) The bulk of the ritual's procedure comes from notes stolen from the Kargat archives and is supplemented with information procured from the vaults of the University of Dementlieu. (She has learned that few security plans include a

provision for stopping intruders in liquid form. While she can't dissolve into tears voluntarily, she has no qualms about "killing" herself to do so. The pain is a small price to pay for getting closer to her goal, and her twisted sense of guilt sees it as repentance for her betrayals of Metus.)

The bits of lore and arcana that she picked up on her quest all came together into a cohesive whole when she discovered records of a little-known death goddess known as Evening Glory. Unworshipped in the Lands of the Mists for decades, Evening Glory is the advocate of love everlasting through undeath. (See *Libris Mortis* for more on Evening Glory.) The goddess's message was precisely what Cynthia wanted to hear, and she quickly became a devotee of the Deathless Beauty. Now settled back in Port-a-Lucine, she has gathered a flock of like-minded individuals around her, and declared herself to be their high priestess, the Celebrant of the Eternal Lover. The cultists, who call themselves "Beloveds," consist of star-crossed lovers, young romantics, widows and widowers - anyone to whom the message of eternal love after death would appeal. Each of them has a brand or tattoo of a heart on the palm of their hand, echoing the holy symbol of Evening Glory.

Cynthia leads the cult in worship, in a makeshift chapel that was once the home she shared with Conrad, but also uses them to acquire what she needs to perform the ritual. If all goes well, she will be ready to proceed at the next solar eclipse. In the chill of an ice house along the docks of Port-a-Lucine, the cult will gather and summon a fiend devoted to Evening Glory, who will serve as clergy in Cynthia and Metus's unholy wedding from beyond the grave. They will surround Metus's original

coffin and grave dirt with incense, candles, runes, and an unholy brew made from the run-off of vampires immersed in running water. Then, six couples from among the Beloveds will stab each other in the heart, with the promise of undeath as their reward. The dying lovers will provide heartsblood which Cynthia will collect and feed to the unwilling vessel trapped in the coffin, who will house Metus's reborn spirit: Conrad Shadowlands.

Cynthia's demeanor, goals and personality vary greatly depending on which point in her journey she is encountered in. Once she found her purpose in resurrecting Metus, she became single-minded, confident, driven, devious, and ruthless. The seeds of these qualities were evident when she was still a human thief skulking in Martira Bay's alleys, but they were stunted when she fell under the thrall of Metus and then strangled by the unending cycle grief and fleeting infatuation that is the life of a vorlog. There were occasional glimpses of this bold aspect in the intervening time, but for the most part, she was too consumed with sorrow over Metus and her dead surrogates, or too smitten with her current living one, to make any long-term plans or deliberate plots. Only with the possibility of reuniting with the man whom she's never been able to replace has her industrious and scheming side been able to truly thrive.

Prior to this new direction in her life, she had two distinct states. When she had a living surrogate, she would be madly in love and desperate to keep him. She would become ferociously jealous of any potential rivals, and delusional to the point that any attention at all from a female toward her surrogate would be dealt with fiercely and decisively. While

Metus left a trail of dead surrogates behind him, Cynthia left a comparable trail of dead women - from lovers and wives that her men left behind when falling under Cynthia's influence, to streetwalkers who propositioned every man who walked past their corner, to shopkeepers who had the gall to ask her surrogate what he needed to purchase. Toward the end of each relationship, she'd begin to confuse the surrogate for Metus himself, blending memories from her actual time with her first love and those from other surrogates between them. At times she seemed to forget that Metus had died at all, fusing the surrogates and the Baron into one long and wonderful relationship in her mind.

But inevitably, the real Metus, now a Crimson Death, would arrive and drain the surrogate, and Cynthia would fall into fear and despair. It was at these times that she would flee in panic from the Mist, and eventually recover enough to rediscover her grudge toward Dr. Van Richten. She would achieve some more clarity at these times, recognizing that the surrogates were individuals who weren't truly Metus. This cycle of love and death instilled in her a severe persecution complex. She became convinced that the world was conspiring against her and that all who crossed her path -- Van Richten, the Mist, the vistani, and any number of misconstrued bystanders along the way -- were determined to keep her from her beloved Baron. In her darkest times, she would find a tavern to drink her cares away, lamenting her rotten luck to anyone who would listen. Given her unnatural beauty, and innate ability to evoke pity, there was rarely a shortage of willing ears, and on more than one of these occasions, she awoke the next day with a new surrogate.

A complex individual, her moods are never absolute, and in each aspect, echoes of the others come through. When deeply in love with a surrogate, she still holds the deep fear that her bliss won't last. In her darkest depths of despair, she retains the stubborn will to take on the world that has trod her down, and make those who wronged her pay for the injustice. And even now, the driven Celebrant holds hidden doubt in the success of her plans, sure that some meddlesome do-gooders will try to thwart her. Her fears, drives, hopes, and sorrows never fully disappear, but rather wax and wane with her fortunes.

Combat

Cynthia is a lover, not a fighter, for the most part, but when pressed, she is deadly with a blade. Favoring a stiletto or other small dagger that can be easily concealed in a bodice or boot, she uses her unnatural speed and grace to full effect. Fighting alone, she will use her wiles or other distractions to feint, allowing her to capitalize on the misdirection and slip past her opponent's defenses for a deadly sneak attack. When fighting with the support of her cultist minions (Com2-4, for the most part), she will hide behind the masses, other allies, or cover-providing terrain, using Spring Attack to tumble into flanking position with the minions to deliver a sneak attack and then to retreat to safety behind her human shields.

Adventure Ideas

Because Cynthia is very difficult to kill permanently, she makes an effective, and potentially very personal, recurring villain. PCs could first meet her when with a surrogate, allowing her jealousy to fester against any females in the party, as she tries to protect her man from their

"advances." Once the surrogate inevitably dies, depending on the circumstances, Cynthia might easily blame the party for his death, and add them to her list of lifelong grudges.

Cynthia might be encountered again in the aforementioned adventure "Feasting with the Falcons" (from *Quoth the Raven 20*), or if the PCs are friends of the good doctor, they may cross paths with her as she tries to hunt him down. Alternatively, if they've never met Van Richten, she might play the victim and hire the heroes to hunt down the man who murdered her fiancé. After a few encounters with her, perhaps even becoming the heroes who saved Conrad and "destroyed" the Crimson Death, they will be ready to catch wind of her new cult and their scheme to return Metus to life, and then race against time to disrupt the ritual.

Since she and Metus are effectively immortal, they can be used even after the death of Dr. Van Richten. But if the campaign is set during the fabled hero's lifetime, his involvement can provide added poignancy. If Cynthia manages to capture him, she might present him as a "rebirth present" to her beloved, providing another innocent to be rescued for heroes attempting to stop her.

Individual DM's may want to make some changes to Cynthia's background cast. If Van Richten doesn't feature in your campaign, or is long dead, he and Metus can be replaced with any other vampire and monster hunter. The character of Conrad can also be replaced with any friendly male NPC, preferably one with personal ties to one or more PC, such as a father, brother, or mentor. Any appropriate NPC could also fall in with her cult for added drama.

Mist-fortune

101 Mishaps, Linxes, and other forms of Bad Luck

By Stephen "ScS" Sutton

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Bad luck is no mere superstition; it is a malignant force that warps reality to plague individuals. Whether they have carelessly crossed the path of a black cat, negligently broken a mirror, or deliberately eaten a gnome's beard, these individuals have performed a taboo act that has allowed ill luck to attach itself to them. Once infected with bad luck, these people suffer seemingly random events that continually re-enact a pattern of misfortune.

Outsider observers will perceive bad luck as random chance. For every effect there is a cause, unique to that time and place, causing the effect. However, to the sufferer and his or her companions, the pattern of woe is unmistakable.

Bad luck effects should not overly affect a character, and clever players will devise work around strategies. Bad luck effects occur infrequently, so that a character with bad luck might even forget their affliction, at least long enough for it to strike at the worst possible moment.

Below are just a few of the possible effects of bad luck. Bad luck effects can be assigned randomly, but can also be

chosen to ensure that the character experiences the consequences of misfortune.

1. When drawing a weapon in combat the character has a 13% chance of mistakenly drawing a different weapon or tool that was on their person. This effect occurs only once per week.
2. The character has a forgettable face. Friendly non-player characters will fail to recognize the character on sight.
3. The character has an unlucky color. To determine the unlucky color roll 1D6, with the following results: 1 = Red, 2 = orange, 3 = yellow, 4 = green, 5 = blue, and 6 = violet. The character with this bad luck effect suffers a -1 luck penalty to skill checks and attack rolls made against opponents who are coloured or are wearing clothing primarily of the unlucky color.
4. When the character uses a bludgeoning melee weapon and rolls the minimum for the damage roll, he

- or she suffers 1 point of damage. In chain or flail weapons, this is caused by the head bouncing off of the target, while in solid weapons the damage is caused by shock moving through the handle.
5. Rats, insects, frogs, or some other type of lowly creature are drawn to the character. The vermin are not hostile towards the character, though they may pose a problem for anyone else nearby.
 6. The character is a natural laughing stock. Falling or other slapstick mishaps will cause observers to burst into uproarious laughter. Just the sight of the character inspires mocking songs from children and bards. The character suffers no negative consequences, except to their pride.
 7. Friendly gamblers near the unlucky character have a 50% greater chance of losing their wagers. This effect only occurs when the wager is for money or some other valuable. The House is always unaffected by this brand of bad luck.
 8. Others perceive the character as a fool and are not likely to heed his or her advice. He or she suffers a -2 luck penalty to diplomacy checks with people of higher intelligence score than the unlucky character.
 9. Whenever the character is attempting to arrive at a specific place at a specific time, he or she is always delayed by some happenstance. A wagon ahead of them might overturn, or a bridge might be under repair, or a long procession blocks an intersection. Travel time is always 50% greater than it ought to have been.
 10. The character has a knack for alienating powerful people. When visiting a strange town, city, or settlement, the character has a base 13% chance of accidentally showing disrespect to a very powerful and important person. The character might accidentally bump into a rich merchant, splash mud on a noble lady, or sneeze on the mayor. Word travels fast and the initial mood of the settlement becomes unfriendly.
 11. When the character succeeds at some difficult challenge, others perceive that task to have been easy and mundane. The character suffers a -13 luck penalty to checks made to improve his or her reputation.
 12. Whenever the character is wearing expensive or formal attire, he or she has a base 50% chance of being splashed with some sort of staining substance. This chance increases depending on how important it is that that character appears clean.
 13. Every day the character loses 1d6 coins or other currency from their supply of money. This effect only applies to currency, not bartered goods.
 14. When the character rolls a natural 1 on an attack roll with a bow or crossbow, the bow string becomes loose and the weapon unusable until restrung. Restrunging the weapon requires 1 minute, during which the character is flat footed and cannot defend.
 15. Each week, the character has a 13% chance of finding a valuable object

- that appears to have been forgotten or abandoned. The rightful owner of the property blames the character for stealing or misplacing the valuables.
16. Horses, dogs, and other domesticated animals become disobedient, skittish, or irritable from prolonged exposure to the character. Each week that the animal is near the character imposes a cumulative -1 luck penalty to checks to handle or influence animals, to a maximum of -7.
 17. Regardless of appearance or manners, the character has very little sex appeal, especially to anyone to whom the character is attracted.
 18. The character is a magnet for friendly fire. If the character is engaged in melee, and a friendly PC or NPC fires a missile weapon into melee, and misses, the character is 50% more likely to be struck by the attack.
 19. Through no fault or malice, people who owe the character money are always temporarily out of currency. The character must accept a promise of later payment or make some other arrangement.
 20. Due to dress or behaviour, others perceive the character to be high nobility or otherwise extremely important. Should people thus mistaken learn the truth, they will likely be angry and feel that the character was putting on airs.
 21. The character has a very recognizable face. People recognize the character wherever he or she goes, and can identify the character based on only vague descriptions. As a result, anyone trying to track the character will have no trouble finding witnesses to locate them.
 22. Death follows the character wherever he goes. Any friendly character near the character with this bad luck effect will die at -7 hp, rather than -10.
 23. Whenever the character pays for a meal at an eating establishment, he or she has a base 13% chance of getting mild food poisoning and being nauseated for 1 hour afterwards. The character has a +2 luck bonus to any saves to resist any poison that might have been deliberately placed in the food.
 24. The character is the plaything of the Mists. When the character travels more than one day's journey there is a base 13% chance (+7% per day of travel beyond the second) that the mists arise and take the character and his or her party to a seemingly random location, possibly at a different time period. After some amount of time at that different location, the mists arise again and deposit the characters at their original destination. No matter how many days were spent at that different location, the Mists deposit the party at the exact time that they would have arrived, had the mists not interfered at all.
 25. The character draws unwarranted curses for real or imagined wrongs. Every time that the character causes even the smallest harm to an NPC, that NPC tries to lay a curse. The NPC makes the curse check with a +13% chance of success. These curses are only embarrassing or annoying, and are either temporary or easy to remove. This bad luck

- effect stops as soon as the character is afflicted with a curse. However, as soon as the curse is removed, this bad luck effect resumes and the character draws more unwarranted hexes.
26. Bad things come in threes. On any given day, the first bad thing to occur to the character (struck by a particular enemy, spring a trap, fall down a steep slope, etc...) is improbably likely to reoccur a second and third time in short succession. After the first occurrence, the character suffers a +21% probability to fall victim to the same bad effect. After the second occurrence, the probability rises to +39%.
 27. The character is a bane to ocean currents and sea winds. Any boat that the character sails upon will be frequently becalmed. The journey will be safe and smooth but will take 50% longer than it ought to have required. Supplies and fresh water may run out. Veteran sailors have a base 13% chance of determining the cause of their misfortune.
 28. The character has an air of disloyalty. Non-player characters are reluctant to trust the character. Schemers and intriguers will approach the character and try to entice them to betray their friends. If the character has the Leadership feat, he or she suffers a -2 luck penalty to their leadership score.
 29. The character's presence causes plants to spontaneously sicken. The character suffers a -7 luck penalty to checks to raise gardens, farms, trees, or living plants. The character may prepare food normally.
 30. The character draws evil magic like a lodestone. Whenever a friendly character is attacked by a magic spell or effect with an area of effect, the center of that area of effect is drawn 5 feet closer to the character with this bad luck effect— regardless of whom the spellcaster targeted.
 31. The character has an unlikely antipathy for wheels. The character has a 13% chance of breaking a wheel or an axle when riding in a carriage, on a wagon, or using some wheeled device such as a wheelbarrow.
 32. The character looks like a strong opponent. Opponents who intend to attack the strongest member of a group always attack this character. The character is frequently challenged to fights in taverns.
 33. People have a compulsion to tell the character whatever they think the character wants to hear. Though not deliberately trying to mislead the character, these people will understate obstacles, exaggerate potential gains, and try to convince the character that any situation is better than it really might be.
 34. Craftsmen and merchants commonly mistake the character for a fool and try to sell them old and shoddy merchandise or short them on delivery. The quality of items is reduced by one step and the quantity of bulk goods (arrows, candles, etc...) will be 13% less than the listed number. If the character succeeds at an appraisal check, the merchant apologizes and sells them proper goods with no hard feelings.

35. When playing games of chance, the character has a cumulative 7% greater chance of winning. However, with each victory, he or she receives a cumulative 13% chance of being accused of cheating. This effect only occurs when money or something of value is wagered. Each day the cumulative bonuses and penalties are reset.
36. When the character defeats a human or demihuman opponent, there is a base 13% chance that the vanquished opponent elicits the sympathy of bystanders. These observers do not interfere, but harshly criticize the character from harming someone so defenceless. The character gains a local reputation as a ruthless bully.
37. Non-player characters quickly forget any conversations they have had with the character. Through no fault or malice, spoken promises are not honoured and verbal agreements are broken. To make a lasting pact with others the character will need to make written agreements.
38. The character is attractive to all the wrong people. The character is perceived to have great sex appeal by married people, young adolescents, and even dangerous criminals or villains. The character will need to take action to avoid inappropriate courtiers and jealous rivals.
39. The character is a deadly fighter, especially to his own side. Whenever the character accidentally strikes a friendly character in combat, he or she deals double damage.
40. For unfathomable reasons, infants and young children begin crying loudly as soon as they see the character. The children continue to bawl until the character is out of their sight.
41. The character exposes shoddy workmanship, the hard way. The character has a base 13% chance of tearing, breaking, or otherwise wrecking any poor quality tools, clothing, or furniture the first time he or she tries to use it. Moderate and high quality items are immune to the effect, so long as they are well maintained.
42. The character never fails to miss a sure thing. If the character succeeds at an attack or a skill check by greater than 7, he or she must immediately reroll the check with a luck penalty of -13. This effect occurs a maximum of once per week.
43. Should the character find a sum of money, whether as loot or as discovered treasure, 50% of the value will be in low denomination coins. The bulk weight of the coins may be too great a burden to make carrying the treasure practical.
44. The character has a face that aches for a slap. Each time that the character attempts to use the diplomacy skill there is a 13% chance that any bonus from charisma is instead treated as a penalty.
45. Each time the character defeats an opponent in combat, that opponent has a 13% chance of getting a second wind. That opponent lives or remains conscious just long enough to deliver one more attack, provided that attack is against the character with this bad luck effect.

46. The character is especially susceptible to vibrations from beyond the veil of death. When a ghost, odem, or other incorporeal undead attempts to possess an individual, the undead invariably target this character before anyone else.
47. Whenever the character tries to open a door, window, or box there is a 13% chance of the opening being firmly fixed. The door, pane, or lid is jammed, warped, locked or otherwise stuck in place cannot be opened from the side he or she is standing upon. An Open Locks check or Strength check is necessary to open the portal.
48. When the character needs to buy something, he or she finds that merchants and tradesmen are overstocked in premium goods and understocked in cheap, moderate goods. The character will either have to buy expensive masterwork items, or else spend twice the amount of time shopping for lower quality bargains.
49. The character a knack for picking the wrong employees. For every week that the character employs a hireling, that hireling becomes 13% less effective than they were the week before. After six months, the hireling stops doing any noticeable work.
50. When the character sleeps within 5 feet of a fire or lighted candle, there is a 13% chance that a random spark ignites his or her bedding. In such a case, the character awakes before taking any fire damage but the bedding may sustain damage. The character must either sleep in the cold and dark, or risk being awoken by licking flames.
51. The character has a bull's-eye on his head. Each day the character has a 13% chance of being accidentally struck on the head by falling debris, hurled objects, flying birds, or even emptied chamber pots. These strikes deal no damage, but cause embarrassment and annoyance.
52. The character is nearly identical to well-known outlaw. The character can prove his or her innocence, but not without time and effort.
53. The character tastes delicious. Whenever an animal or monster makes a successful bite attack on the character, that monster is compelled to continue making bite attacks on that character until reduced to 7% of their hit points, or the character dies, or combat is otherwise ended.
54. The character inspires others to acts of honesty at the worst possible times. Non-player characters will not tell lies on behalf of the character.
55. The character's travel plans conflict with the whims of the Darklords. When crossing a domain border, there is a 13% chance that one, if not both, domain borders are closed for unrelated reasons. The border remains closed for 7-13 days before opening once more. This bad luck effect does not affect borders that are always closed (ex: the Shadow Rift), or always open.
56. The character's lifeforce radiates like a flare in a darkened room. While in combat, specters, vampires, wights, and other life-draining undead are compelled to target this character

- with their draining attacks. These creatures ignore other opponents and will not use other attack forms, unless they succeed in a Will save against a DC 20.
57. Whenever the character works for someone else, that employer continually asks questions and issues criticism and contradictory instructions. The character's employer demands to be constantly informed of every event and tries to micromanage every decision.
 58. Due to dress or behaviour, the character is frequently mistaken for a servant or some other menial. Some characters may be required to react indignantly or else suffer from a loss of reputation.
 59. Whenever the character is trying to be quiet there is a base 13% chance that something unexpected occurs nearby, making a great deal of noise. This event does not necessarily reveal the character's presence, but may cause nearby people to investigate the area.
 60. Roots and weeds are constantly tripping the character. When moving through undergrowth at any speed greater than walking, the character has a 13% chance of being tripped by some root or other plant. This effect occurs no more than once per day.
 61. The character stands out in a crowd. Whenever the character tries to hide from view by blending into a crowd of people, he or she remains as visible as though they were all alone. They may make Hide checks, but with no bonus from the crowd of people.
 62. The character is a lightning rod for damage. Whenever the character and at least one other friendly character are caught in a damaging area of effect, 1 point of damage is transferred from each friendly character to the character with this bad luck effect.
 63. The character looks like a generous person and is always beset by beggars and almsmen. Service staff will treat the character with great respect, but become angry if they do not receive a significant gratuity.
 64. The character is adept at finding bargains, but only when they are broke. Merchants offer the character superior and masterwork quality goods and services at 50% less than the normal cost, but only when the character does not have enough coin on hand to purchase it. Such deals are always short lived and if the character can't beg and borrow enough funds, the bargain vanishes.
 65. The character has a way of bringing out the flaws in anything. Each week that the character owns a masterwork quality item, the item has a 13% chance of degrading into an item of normal quality. Normal quality items do not degrade further, but will begin to look worn and overused.
 66. The character would lose his head if it were not attached to his neck. Every week the character has a 13% chance of losing some small article of clothing or equipment. Other player characters will automatically attempt a search check (DC 13) to notice the lost article. Whether they return the article or not is up to them.

67. The character has a guilty look about them. The character suffers a -2 luck penalty to Bluff or Diplomacy checks to convince someone that they have committed no crime or wrongdoing.
68. An ancestor of the character was at one time a werewolf or some other lycanthrope. Though not afflicted with the curse, the character's blood is tainted with a lingering lycanthropy. The character exhibits some of the classic signs and symptoms of that type of lycanthrope (hairy palms, single eyebrow, markings and blemishes). The character suffers a -7 penalty to saves to resist contracting that type of the dread disease. Silver and lycanthropic allergens do not harm the character, but do cause a visible allergic reaction.
69. Food and supplies owned by the character rot and foul twice as quickly as normal.
70. The character has an unwanted companion (a cat, a dog, or bird) who is always close at hand. The creature does not obey the character, but does announce his or her presence at all times.
71. By happenstance, merchants are always out of low denomination coins. If the character uses gold, gems, or larger denomination currency to pay for goods, the merchant will not be able to return the balance of the cost. The character must use exact change, accept the overcharge, or purchase more items to make up the difference.
72. Any fire-based illumination the character carries is likely to be snuffed by a sudden gust of wind. Torches or bigger flames are large enough to stay lit.
73. The character is a jinx at sea. Any boat that the character sails upon will be struck by waves and storms throughout its journey. Veteran sailors have a base 13% chance of determining the cause of their misfortune.
74. Whenever the character meets someone from a strange and foreign culture, the character has a base 50% chance of greatly offending that person. If the character does not find some way to apologise the foreigner may become violent.
75. If the character is in a group that encounters a natural, mechanical, or magical trap, there is a 50% chance that the trap will not activate for any member of the group until the character with this luck effect triggers the trap. Group members preceding the character pass without activating the trap, but those following the character, as well as anyone in the area of effect, are subject to the trap once it activates. Spotting and disarming the trap prevents this luck effect from occurring.
76. The character is despised by his or her elders. Anyone in an older age category than the character is initially unfriendly to that character for no discernible reason.
77. If an opponent makes an attack roll against the character and fails by more than 7, that opponent immediately rerolls the attack roll but with a +13 luck bonus. This

- effect occurs a maximum of once per week.
78. The character is a living lightning rod. In any thunderstorm the character suffers a base 13% chance of being struck by lightning. The character may avoid the effect by taking shelter. This effect occurs only once per storm.
 79. The character is especially unlucky on one day of the week. All skill checks made on that day suffer a -1 luck penalty. If the day of the week is not known, roll 1D8 and reroll any results of 8. A roll of 7 indicates that the current day is unlucky.
 80. Edged weapons in the character's hands chip and deform rapidly. If the character rolls a natural 1 on an attack roll with an edged weapon, that weapon is chipped and imposes a -1 luck penalty to damage rolls until it is honed with a whetstone.
 81. The character appears to be especially unaware of his or her surroundings. When an opponent attempts an ambush or other sneak attack, they feel compelled to make this character their first target.
 82. The character has great difficulty demonstrating his or her prowess. The character suffers a -13 luck penalty to skill or ability checks made for the purpose of impressing others.
 83. Bad weather is a constant traveling companion. Whenever the character travels more than a day's journey he or she is beset by rain, snow, frost, or fog.
 84. Any business, farm, or property that the character owns begins to decline when the character is not present to watch over it. The estate never becomes worthless, but its value will not recover until the character returns to set things to right.
 85. When the character sleeps at an inn, he or she has a 13% chance of catching lice, bed bugs, ticks, or some other parasite.
 86. The character looks like an easy mark for con-artists and pickpockets. Whenever such thieves are present, they inevitably target the character.
 87. If the character slays an enemy who was roughly equal to his or her own level and power, there is a 13% chance that the enemy had a friend, sibling, or other compatriot who will swear revenge against the character. This new foe has similar statistics to the slain enemy, but with one more level, hit dice, or some similar advantage. Should the character with bad luck slay that person as well, there is a 26% chance that a third, even more powerful, opponent seeks to avenge the first two, and so on.
 88. The character reeks of the essence of evil, regardless of their true alignment. The character suffers a -1 luck penalty to diplomacy checks with strangers, but receives a +1 luck bonus to intimidate checks.
 89. The character is perceived to be a know-it-all, making other people loath to follow his or her advice. The character suffers a -2 luck penalty to Diplomacy checks when dealing with people of a lower intelligence score than him or herself.

90. When the character makes a successful melee attack with a piercing weapon, the weapon has a 13% of getting stuck inside the target. The character must abandon the weapon or spend one standard action pulling the weapon out of the target.
91. The inn is always full when the character comes to town. For however many people with which the character travels, there will only ever be rooms, beds, or space for that number of people minus one. If the party uses random chance to determine who must go without accommodations, the character with this effect is always chosen.
92. The character appears to be the heroic type of person. People with problems are drawn to the character and beg them for assistance.
93. People are constantly short-changing the character. Whether by accident or by greed, employers and merchants always pay 13% less than the agreed upon sum. If they are corrected, the employer or merchant pays the balance of the bill, if they are able.
94. Fish and game go scarce when the character is near. Checks made to hunt or fish for food suffer a -2 luck penalty when the character is with the hunting party. This penalty only applies when the purpose of the hunt is to obtain food.
95. All magical and mundane attempts to read the character's future reveal misfortune and hardship. Fortune tellers feel compelled to reveal their dark visions, even if they know the character would pay them better for happier auguries.
96. The character looks like a weak link. Opponents that intend to attack the weakest member of a group always target the character first. The character is often targeted by bullies.
97. By coincidence, blood relation, or reincarnation, the character is identical to someone who lived decades, if not centuries ago. Some powerful long-lived or undead individual recognizes the character. The character might resemble a former enemy, victim, or love interest. The long lived NPC is compelled to interfere with the character, in order to exact revenge, break a curse, consummate love, or finish some other business left undone so long ago.
98. The character is suffused with an intangible aura of goodness, causing instinctual revulsion in evil beings. Clerics with the evil domain, outsiders with the evil subtype, and other deliberately evil people are compelled to target the character.
99. Armour and clothing is not available to the character in his or her proper size. The character requires 50% more time to don any armour not tailored to their dimensions.
100. The character's presence is the bane of music. Whenever the character is nearby, musicians suffer a -2 luck penalty to Perform checks. Non-musical performances (poetry, oration, drama) are unaffected.
101. The character is a carrier for bad luck. All friendly characters to be affected with a bad luck effect so long as they are in close proximity.

Prince Doon
Bad Luck is Contagious
By Kadarin
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The Monster & The Duke

The players arrive in the duchy of Arnsten where a monster is devastating villages and killing peasants. After the heroes defeat the beast in a heroic fight, a great feast is hold in their honor.

The next morning, a messenger from the Duke arrives, inviting the players to his palace at the capital, Eboran. They are brought to a private audience with Duke Ubrecht. The duke is a heavy and tall man, almost bald, but sporting a full black beard and a heavy moustache. He looks prematurely aged. By his side stands the court-magician, Ian, brown-

A gorgon is recommended as the monster, but any monster able to damage the landscape and kill peasants will suffice. The Duchy of Arnsten could be a part of an existing domain, or an Island in the Mists.

haired and clean-shaved.

“Welcome. So, you are heroes. You freed my land of a mighty monster against which my best warriors could not or would not fight. And now you expect a reward? Well, there will be a banquet honoring you, but no gold, I’m afraid. Ours is a poor country, and I have to provide for my people who have lost their crops. But I have a proposition for you.

“My son Doon, my only son and heir, is a coward. Worse, he is a superstitious coward. Every time he even sees a black cat, he runs into the next house to hide. He sees, hears, and feels hundreds of signs of bad luck and he just flees from everything.

“I want you heroes to make a man – no, a hero – out of this frightened child. Teach him courage, vigor, and show him his superstitions are nothing real and nothing to fear.

“If you succeed, even partially, you will receive whatever I can pay. However, if my son is killed whilst under your protection, you will be

chained and sent to the lead mines of Halvemæn, where you will spend the rest of your lives... which will be, luckily, not very long."

The Prince and The Cat

Prince Doon, whom the players meet the next day, does not resemble his father. He has full, shoulder-long, silver-blond hair and is not only afraid of ill omens: he seems to be also extremely clumsy. As the players adventure with the prince they will not take long to notice what the duke meant. A black cat constantly crosses the Prince's path, always bringing with it bad luck. The Prince frequently breaks mirrors, always by improbable accidents. Fortune-tellers pale when the Prince approaches them. When he, as heir to the realm, demands a divination, the soothsayers either lie or predict premature doom. The Prince seems to be terribly uncoordinated. Though skilled when sparring, the Prince fumbles in real combat. He is unable to even walk down a road without tripping on a stone or ride a horse without being thrown. He seems to be living proof of Murphy's Law, that whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.

Doon's bad luck seems to be infectious. As long as the players accompany him, bad luck seems to accompany them as well. At first, there are only minor incidents, but the longer they are with him, the worse their luck becomes.

Keen-eyed characters may notice that a strange black cat is always around when something strange happens. Try as they might, the players cannot catch it, kill it, or even wound it.

The bad luck of the prince is mostly psychological. Doon believes in his bad luck and that his superstitions cause everything to go awry for him. This is, of course, not the only reason.

The GM should encourage the sense of bad luck in the players. The misfortune of the player characters (apart from bad die rolls) is explained below.

The adventures are left up to the DM, but should be adjusted to their levels, Doon's level, and the bad luck of all of them.

The Truth

There is another reason for Prince Doon's (and the characters') bad luck: his half-sister Aris. Duke Ubrecht fathered Aris but then fell in love with Doon's mother. To make way for his new mistress, the Duke accused Aris' mother of adultery, declared Aris a bastard, and expelled them both from court. Both Aris' mother and Doon's mother died on the day that Doon was born. Were her birth still considered legitimate, by law Aris would be the heiress of the duchy.

Aris grew up to be a mighty witch and is full of hate for her brother. Despite her anger, she still loves her father and does not want to hurt him. Aris wants to prove to him that she would be the better ruler of the duchy than her weakling half-brother. Aris will not use magic directly against Doon because she fears the court-magician Ian. Instead, she disguises herself as a soothsayer and foretells doom for the prince.

The black cat that follows Doon (and the characters) is not a *midnight cat*, as the players might have guessed, but an unusually big tom-cat. The cat is Solin, Aris' familiar, and is protected by her

spells. She usually sends it shortly before she intends to play a prank on Doon or the characters.

Aris is, like her half-brother, fair-haired, but has light-grey eyes which change their colors according to the lighting – or to Aris' moods. She is three years older than the prince, and not very tall, nor particularly beautiful.

How the characters solve this adventure – if they even guess the truth – is of course up to them. Killing Aris is a way to get rid of her, but won't remove

the superstitions and cowardice of the Prince. A peaceful solution would be preferable.

For the pranks Aris plays on Doon and the characters, see the Practical Jokes and Pranks Netbook at <http://www.padnd.com/jokesnpranks.php>.

Claude Renier

The Renier Patriarch

By Andrew "Ashcon" Pavlides

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Claude Renier sat down in his armchair, rubbing his temple, and enjoying the solitude of his manor's office. The trip to Mortigny, to make a deal with Burgeau and her clan, was exhausting. Burgeau had it all it seemed; ambition, a cunning mind, the finesse of a lady - unlike most of his own kin, who behaved like sewer savages, she even had the grudging loyalty of her own extended family. She could have made a good right hand for him, keeping the rest of the Mortigny wererats in order and the pesky human nobility in their homes minding their own business.

She would have made too good of a right hand; too influential, that one. Her brother Aimé, who took her life, was too thick-skulled to realize the dangers and responsibilities of the man on top; Claude guessed that Aimé would be murdered within a couple of years. Claude almost regretted nudging Aimé Burgeau to eliminate a threat to Claude and then supporting him indirectly for control of his disillusioned family. The Burgeau wererats would cause trouble under the ineffective leadership of Aimé,

problems Claude would have to solve later.

He took one of the dark chocolate candies that his servants had left on his desk. Enjoying the rare moment of relaxation, when nobody was bothering him and he could finally find a respite from all the intrigue, power-games and responsibilities to finally enjoy the privileges of his station. The very rare moment... suddenly alert, Claude realized that something was amiss; after all, there hadn't been a single moment of respite since he led his clan from the sewers of Falkovnia, escaping from the Talons. He took a careful sniff of the candy and wasn't surprised to pick up a very faint whiff of arsenic, carefully concealed amidst the scent of chocolate and rum. Rising, Claude sent a mental signal to alert the rats in the walls, ceilings, and floors. Pretending not to have noticed anything, he turned his back to his office's door and moved to the window. In case he was being watched, he pretended to eat the poisoned candy while he let it drop inside his fine white tunic. That will leave a stain, he thought. Then he faked

a surprised painful grimace, clutched his chest and coughed.

The door crashed open and Pierre Renier rushed in triumphantly in half-rat, half-human form, holding a rapier. Claude could smell the blood of his bodyguard on his nephew's weapon. "Your days are over, old coot!" he screamed and approached, as Claude made a show of a pained expression, grabbing his throat and his belly, his hand near his silver dagger, waiting to see who Pierre had convinced to come as his back-up.

Nobody came. Pierre hadn't even brought a weapon made of silver. It seemed that the whole of Pierre's plan was to put poisoned candy on Claude's desk, assassinate his bodyguard, and wait outside the door! Claude sneered at Pierre, a sincere grimace. He was more insulted by the stupidity of the attempt than the attempt itself. These were his kin, these were the offspring of those he led through the mists. These were those he had suffered so much to elevate to the position they now held. These were the wererats that would one day succeed him, although judging by Pierre's "plan," Claude thought he might actually die of old age.

He put one hand on the desk and fell to one knee. Dropping under Pierre's vision, he quickly drew his silver dagger with the hand that was on his belly and kept coughing. Pierre made a screeching sound and moved forward to finish him. Claude's sudden malicious smile made him stop in his tracks, surprise on his face. An act of will from the lord of Richemulot and Pierre was wracked in the throes of an involuntary change to the inferior human form, as Claude sprang into action and slashed viciously at his knee tendons, dropping him on the floor. Just then, dozens of rats rushed

into the room, climbing from windows, from cracks in the floor, from outside the door, and swarmed Pierre, as he still lay defenseless.

"How?" the too-human face of Pierre asked, as Claude kicked the rapier from his weakening hand and stabbed him again, injuring but not killing; he would enjoy this for as long as Pierre drew breath. "How?" Claude asked in a fatherly, affectionate voice, as he rebuffed Pierre's feeble counter attack. "You're not smart enough to understand, and I don't have the time to explain to you," he told his dying kin. As rats bit down on Pierre, Claude took out the poisoned chocolate piece from his shirt; it had indeed left a stain he noticed, but the shirt was already ruined by Pierre's blood anyway. Pierre's eyes went wide with fear, realizing Claude's intentions. Claude smiled and cracked open his nephew's mouth with his dagger. "Goodbye Pierre, send my regards to your father," he said, as pushed the poisoned candy into the dying wererat's mouth. A rat crawled inside and pushed it deeper, muffling Pierre's scream. Claude cleaned his blade on his nephew's clothes. A mental command sent the rats away as Pierre gasped for air, dying from his own poison and multiple wounds.

Claude heard footsteps approaching and transformed to his half-man, half-rat form; the shirt was ruined anyway. Light footsteps, from a child or teenager. Then he caught scent of his grandchild, Louise. Her footsteps stopped a bit outside his door, probably where she could see the corpse of his bodyguard. He could smell... surprise. So Louise wasn't aware of the plot. Good. At least he didn't have to worry about a 12-year-old... for now.

"My little girl, no point in hiding. I picked up your scent; come in, my sweet grandchild," he called, in a sweet voice, as he changed back to his human form and hid his dagger. Louise and her twin sister alone showed some promise among the sewer savages that were his kin, beyond murdering citizens for sport and causing him so much trouble like the others.

Louise entered and looked at his dead nephew. "Grandfather! What happened? Were you attacked? Your shirt is all ruined! Should I call for the servants?" She stopped short of pretending sincere concern for his well-being; at least she had the mind to realize that he knew how little his health meant for her.

"I am fine, my sweet girl. Your uncle Pierre just decided to make a very rash, very clumsy, and, if I may say, not especially smart attempt on my life. He paid the price. Let it be a lesson to you, Louise; never do your own dirty work. Now be a good girl, get someone to remove this imbecile's corpse and let grandpa have some peace." He turned his back on the girl and pretended to look outside the window, watching Louise's emotionless reflection on the glass, his hand on his dagger, just in case.

"Unfortunately, Grandpa, that's not possible. I have urgent news that requires your immediate attention."

Claude, not really surprised, kept himself from sighing and gazed upon his reflection in the expensive glass of the window. Will it ever stop?

Claude Renier

Appearance

Claude Renier in his human form seems like an elegantly dressed, slightly portly nobleman in his mid-fifties to early sixties, with a mane of light gray hair, dark eyes, and a thin gray moustache. To complete the deception of the old man, Claude wears a pair of glasses, although his vision is still perfect, and hides his still-vigorous build under loose, expensive clothing. In his hybrid or rat form, Claude is covered mostly black fur, with a bit of white here and there.

Personality:

Claude is a cunning manipulator who likes to pit his enemies, and occasionally his allies, against each other to keep contenders to his rule occupied and running in circles. However, he doesn't totally shy away from using his martial prowess to keep contenders intimidated with displays of sudden fury and brutality that have left several upstarts wounded or slain. He's been reigning supreme among the Renier family and the wererats of Richemulot for decades, facing contender after contender with cunning lies, blackmail, treachery, or brute force, depending on the situation.

Years of watching for the dagger in his back or treacherous whispers in his ear have left Claude Renier with little faith in his kin and borderline paranoia. He's afraid of anyone rising through the rank and file of wererats and with good reason. That leaves him with few capable lieutenants to deal with the problems created, accidentally or not, by the ever-growing number of wererats in Richemulot. Yet, for all his fear of the

one that will succeed him claiming his title and life, Claude is sorely disappointed when faced with inadequacy and bad planning, especially from his family. On one hand, he's doing his best to educate his violent kin in the subtleties of manipulation, planning, and blackmail and on the other hand he immediately sees danger in anyone who takes the lessons too well.

Several members of the wererat community and the Renier family have noticed this antithesis. The most successful and long-lived among the Reniers are those that manage to accomplish enough for Claude to notice them but also have a strategic failure or two so that the Darklord of Richemulot won't destroy them. It's that vicious cycle and balancing of success and failure that eventually would lead Jacqueline Renier to take her grandfather's life.

While Claude Renier is undeniably evil and self-serving with no hint of mercy in his heart and enjoys watching others dancing to the tune he whistles, he has a redeeming grace. Claude is wholly devoted to the Renier family -- not the individual members, whom he sees as expendable parts but the ideal of the family of wererats, as a whole, controlling a whole region of humans and monsters from the shadows. He tries to find suitable matches to bring into the Renier family since he considers a wererat married to a Renier nearly as someone born in the family. While Claude would have a family member that threatens his rule killed without a second thought, he's capable of risking a lot to save a promising member of the family... until he decides that relative is actually a threat to his rule, which he considers the best for the family. He loathes having to destroy those that are

capable, both because it increases his work-load but also because it culls from the family those he deems as worthy. Yet when someone seems too capable, he eventually feels threatened enough to have him or her killed nevertheless. As such, Claude usually concentrates on the youth of the extended Renier family, trying to teach them and also earn their loyalty.

Curse: What Claude Renier craves most is the opportunity to sit back and relax, enjoying being the boss of a successful, *loyal* family that does well and also caters all his needs. He would like nothing more than to be able to spend his days in luxury and comfort, surrounding himself with fine garments, food and the occasional female company to warm his bed, growing complacent and fat without having to fight to keep his position or fix problems his subjects (both men and rats) put on his feet. Yet, with each passing year, the numbers of the wererats and men swell, along with the problems this creates.

Whenever Claude Renier decides to ignore a problem or threat to sit back and rest, the Dark Powers make sure that this matter would turn into a tragedy or failure for his family, hitting Claude where he hurts most. This usually manifests in the form of terrible luck on the underling that is tasked to take care of the problem in Claude's place. Since becoming the Lord of Richemulot, Claude hasn't had a single day to enjoy his station without that eventually turning sour on him. He has buried children, nephews, and cousins that he considered loyal enough and cunning enough to allow them to deal with a problem in his stead, only to find out that the problem increased manifold in his absence. Magical means to ensure loyalty in a couple of his relatives have

worked only temporarily or even backfired when he tried to use that leverage to gain some "well-earned" vacation, so he rarely tries it. While Claude doesn't realize the subtleties of the Demiplane of Dread, he has realized through the years that he has to deal with the problems himself, convincing him even more that his relatives are unable to contain any kind of problem themselves.

Claude has come to loathe his domain, yet he doesn't dare to step down as head of the family, knowing he would be assassinated and feeling nobody in the family would be able to fill his shoes, thus destroying the position he carved for them with decades of sacrifice and hard work. He realizes he has locked himself in a golden cage that feels increasingly smaller each passing year.

Relations with adventurers: Claude always prefers to turn his enemies to allies if possible. Yet, if he decides that a clan would be more trouble than worth, he would have them all eliminated, down to the last infant or human ally. Preferring the shadows, Claude would seek to find their weaknesses and send human adventurers to deal with the most threatening members of other clans, promising to shield the humans from retribution. He also wouldn't shy from secretly hiring, blackmailing, or tricking humans into dealing with members of his own rebellious family.

Powers:

Claude has a several unique powers that allow him to rule his rebellious, treacherous kin and lord over the other wererat families and cults of Richemulot.

Force Involuntary Change (Su): Assuming the mantle of Richemulot, Claude Renier found that he could force

any wererat in his presence to assume monstrous or human form, forcing an involuntary change, even if the creature is a natural wererat, while in the past he could enforce such a change only to wererats afflicted by him. The change can be resisted with a DC 20 Will save, and natural wererats get a +2 bonus to their save.

An afflicted wererat with the improved change shape skill can change back to normal with a successful DC 20 check of that skill, but failing means he has to remain in this form until dawn. In all other regards this involuntary change is treated as a change by the full moon, including the shift of alignment and the horror check required by witnesses. Claude has used this ability on afflicted wererats he created who rebuffed his offer to work for him and also used the promise of preventing such changes, which might cause the afflicted to harm loved ones, to ensure the loyalty of others.

Since Claude avoids using this power on natural wererats, most of the Renier family that are aware of Claude's promises to his afflicted bodyguards, that his power will stop them from changing form and harming loved ones, consider them lies.

Sense Chemical Bane (Su): Claude Renier can tell a werecreature's chemical bane or allergen when he first smells the lycanthrope or one of the lycanthrope's possessions that holds the creature's scent. As such, he knows about Jacqueline Renier's allergy to dove feathers even though she doesn't. Resourceful adventurers could perhaps find discarded and surviving notes of Claude, in which he mentions the allergens and banes of many of his relatives, allies or enemies.

Summon Rats (Su): Claude can call upon the rats of the land to assist him. He can use a standard action to summon 2 rat swarms or 2d4+5 dire rats once per hour. The summoned animals arrive within 1d6 rounds and remain until Claude dismisses them or for up to 10 minutes. The power of the Lord of Richemulot gives the summoned creatures maximum hit points and a +2 to their attack rolls.

Alternate Form (Su): Claude can assume a bipedal hybrid form or the form of a dire rat.

Curse of Lycanthropy (Su): Any humanoid bitten by Claude must succeed on a DC 18 Fortitude save or contract lycanthropy. Claude has a +2 on checks to influence his cursed progeny, but no further control over them. He uses trickery and manipulation to ensure the loyalty of those cursed by him as much as with anyone else.

Rat Empathy (Ex): Communicate with rats and dire rats, and +4 racial bonus on Charisma-based checks against rats and dire rats.

Skills: Claude in rat or hybrid form uses that form's Dexterity modifier for Climb or Swim checks. He has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened. He has a +8 racial bonus on Swim checks when in dire rat form.

Claude Speaks Falkovnian, Balok, Darkonese and Mordentish.

Feats: Claude has Weapon Finesse and Iron Will as bonus feats from his wererat heritage.

Closing the Borders: When Claude Renier wants to close the borders of Richemulot, those that try to escape the domain (or enter it) find themselves facing their own fears and inner demons, requiring fear checks every round (DC 17+2 for each extra round). Those frightened run back towards the domain they came from and don't recover until they are away from the border. Immunity to fear and mortal magic cannot stop or protect against this effect; only mindless creatures can cross the closed borders.

Claude Renier

Aristocrat 3/Regent 7, Darklord of Richemulot

	Claude Renier, Human Form	Claude Renier, Dire Rat Form	Claude Renier, Hybrid Form
	Medium Humanoid (Human, Shapechanger)	Small Humanoid (Human, Shapechanger)	Medium Humanoid (Human, Shapechanger)
Hit Dice:	4d8+7d6+12 (60 hp)	4d8+7d6+12 (60 hp)	4d8+7d6+12 (60 hp)
Initiative:	+5	+8	+8
Speed:	30 ft.	40 ft., climb 20 ft.	30 ft.
Armor Class:	15 (+2 natural, +1 dex, +2 deflection)	20 (+1 size, +4 Dex, +3 natural, +2 deflection)	19 (+4 Dex, +3 natural, +2 deflection)
Base Attack/Grapple:	+8/+9	+8/+4	+8/+9
Attack:	Rapier +11 melee (1d6+1/15–20)	Bite +13 melee (1d4+1 plus curse)	Rapier +14 melee (1d6+1/15–20)
Full Attack:	Rapier +11/6 melee (1d6+1/15–20)	Bite +13 melee (1d4+1 plus disease)	Rapier +14/9 melee (1d6+1/15–20) and

	Claude Renier, Human Form	Claude Renier, Dire Rat Form	Claude Renier, Hybrid Form
			bite+8 melee (1d6 plus disease)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Force involuntary change, summon rats, sneak +4d6	Force involuntary change, summon rats, sneak +4d6, Curse of lycanthropy	Force involuntary change, summon rats, sneak +4d6, Curse of lycanthropy
Special Qualities:	Alternate form, rat empathy, low-light vision, scent, evasion, uncanny dodge	Alternate form, rat empathy, damage reduction 10/silver, low-light vision, scent, evasion, uncanny dodge	Alternate form, rat empathy, damage reduction 10/silver, low-light vision, scent, evasion, uncanny dodge
Saves:	Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +12	Fort +7, Ref +12, Will +12	Fort +7, Ref +12, Will +12
Abilities:	Str 13, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 16	Str 13, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 16	Str 13, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 16
Skills:	Bluff+16, climb+3, decipher script +8, diplomacy+11, disable device+8, disguise+8, forgery+9, gather info+7, hide+9, intimidate+11, knowledge(arcana, nobility)+8, knowledge(local)+11, listen+9, move silently+9, search+8, sense motive+11, sleight of hand+6, spot+8, survival+6, swim+3, use magic device+19 (+21 for scrolls)	same as human form except: climb +14, hide+16, move silently+12, sleight of hand +9, swim+14	same as human form except: climb +14, hide+12, move silently+12, sleight of hand +9, swim+6
Feats:	Improved critical, skill focus: Use magic device, combat expertise, improve feint, improved initiative, Iron Will ^B , Weapon Finesse ^B	(same as human form)	(same as human form)
Challenge Rating:	8	9	9
Alignment:	Neutral Evil		

The darklord uses his powers to summon rats at the first sign of threat so they will be on hand if needed, and he tries to always have at least one bodyguard nearby. He uses those allies to flank, if possible, and use his sneak attack on his target. He avoids using his ability to force involuntary change on enemies or his ability to use magic items to keep them secret from the rest of the family.

Signature gear:

Claude always carries with him a concealed silver dagger to deal with wererats. He also wears a special ring of protection +2 that gives him a +2 deflection bonus to AC and a +2 resistance bonus to all saves. Hidden in the folds of his cloak, Claude has a wand of enervation (12 charges). When expecting trouble, Claude carries a potion of cure serious wounds (3d8+5

hp) and a potion of invisibility on his person.

As for more mundane gear, when outside his manor, Claude carries a masterwork, stylish rapier that few outside the wererat circle know how well he can use. The sheath of the rapier is custom made; at the bottom, there's a small compartment which can hold a dose of an injury applied poison enclosed by a leather barrier. Claude can use a standard action to push the sheath against a hard surface to break the barrier with the edge of the rapier and thus safely apply the poison on his blade. To create a swift escape, Claude is known to carry a smokestick that can be ignited with a standard action.

In left hand, Claude wears a signet ring that can also hold a dose of poison.

His bodyguards are usually equipped with masterwork weapons and wear medium armor. They are often afflicted wererats created by Claude's bite and kept loyal with the use of gold, promises of fame, and that as long as they're loyal to Claude, they won't have to worry about the curse (which Claude accomplishes through the use of his Force Involuntary Change power).

Richemulot under Claude Renier

During Claude's reign, Richemulot has even less population in the cities than it will under Jacqueline's rule, but their numbers are mostly people born in rural Richemulot's false history, with no memory or link to the original inhabitants of the cities they occupy as the flock of immigrants from the other domains isn't as prevalent nor as encouraged in that era. The people of Richemulot were then welcoming of foreigners that occupied houses near them, although Claude allowed the

human nobility to define who could settle where and the terms of repatriation. Unlike Jacqueline, he didn't spend as much time dealing with humanity's affairs or dealing with the nobility and their own intrigues, being a more distant ruler, although those that tried to undermine his authority or allied with his enemies (even in their ignorance) were often found dead in tragic accidents.

While secrets, favors, and deals are traded as coins, personal power at this time is also considered insurance. The Richemuloise of Claude's era placed equal importance on martial prowess and on the ability to procure it with secrets or money. "Protect what you own," was the usual advice and unlike Jacqueline's rule, the nobles and city councils weren't as keen to have their subjects armed, in case a nobleman wanted to renege on a favor owed to a commoner.

Early in Claude's rule, the Reniers fight for dominance ruthlessly suppressed any other would-be-important clan of wererats or more mundane threat. Reniers that fail in such duties are ostracized and set aside, their former allies ignoring them and leaving them vulnerable to upstarts that covet what they have. Yet, failures are quickly eclipsed by successes and a Renier that brings the family closer to control finds his or her fortunes reversed.

While Claude preferred to find ways to earn the grudging subservience of other clans and individuals, bending them but not breaking them, his clan is more violent and so were the various other clans, whether allied or enemies. So it wasn't unusual for violent fights to erupt in the sewers, the back alleys of the cities, or even in the ball rooms of the nobility. Claude at the time clings to hope that once he secures the domain

and subjugates rebellious clans he will have more time to enjoy the fruits of his labors.

The state of Richemulot's cities in this era is better kept. Repairs are routinely made to the various facades, buildings, and statues by the new inhabitants. It's not unusual for workers brought in to work on these projects to start their families in Richemulot.

Later in Claude's reign, most of the other clans have come to realize that to openly oppose the Reniers is futile while an alliance with the dominant clan is profitable. People flock into Richemulot from other lands, trade deals are made between the various human nobles and the nobility of Borca and the promise of prosperity beckons. Yet, a generation of Reniers and other wererats that have spent their time plotting or fighting can't just sit on their laurels and accept the status quo. Restless or greedy wererats increase their attacks on the human populace while, the power-hungry that don't dare oppose the Reniers make their power-play to gain influence among humanity using blackmail or murder to secure their (or their protégées) position. The new generation of Reniers that grows up has little recollection of the days when they were hiding in the shadows and sewers of Falkovnia, and take less care to hide their true nature from humans, feeling comfortable in their numbers and powers.

In that era of Claude's rule, Reniers and other clans had swelled in numbers from the few dozen that arrived with Claude or were native to Richemulot, to hundreds. Infighting and intrigue is rife among the clans; the wererats use spies as often as humans and are even more ruthless in dealing with them. The increase of the attacks on a humanity increasingly aware of the supernatural

threat draws the attention of heroes that claim many victories against the wererats.

Claude in this era finds himself having to prove he's still as capable as ever of defending his position from those that covet his position, deal with his large and extended family, secure the gains of the family, and deal with all the problems of the increased population. He becomes progressively disillusioned with his family and realizes the futility of his desire to just sit back and rest as the years pass and he has as much to do as ever.

As Claude progressively realizes that his domain is actually a trap he can't escape and loses interest in ruling, the state of the cities worsens. Cracks appear in the pavement and nobody repairs them, people that would have sweep the pathways in front of the whole street won't even sweep their doorstep, and few seem interested to clean the various statues and architectural features from bird and rat droppings.

Adventuring opportunities:

Under Claude's reign, adventurers could be contacted by the Reniers (or their enemies - human or wererat) to deal with a certain troublesome wererat, human, or other problem. High standing Reniers or human mayors can offer noble titles or a seat in the town council. Material rewards aren't large, since the domain hasn't developed important trade deals or extensive manufacturing yet. Still, the adventurers can be paid in favors or rumors and scandals which they can hold over others to gain their rewards later. Adventurers could visit the new domain when hired to search the various abandoned buildings (which may actually hold enemies of whoever hired

them) or guard (or clear) a rural patch of undeveloped land with fertile soil or other precious resource while a small settlement is being developed.

Of course, the setting of Richemulot with the various factions fighting for control or increased position offers ample opportunities for intrigue. A rival businessman's ledger with his contacts, customers and income could be considered more valuable than his treasury chest. A noble could be paying good money to recover the letter his wife sent him - informing him that she is out

of the Asylum and staying with relatives to recover - before his enemies give it to his new, influential fiancée or her parents, naturally unaware that he's married to another woman. And while nobody raised in Richemulot is so naive as to scribe anything of real importance to his or her diary, newcomers are not always adequately prepared.

Special thanks to Rotipher of the FoS for helping me figure a unique curse for Claude Renier.

Cursed Charms

Omens of Ill Luck

By Jim "Jinso" Stearns

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From black cats to umbrellas opened indoors, the real world is filled with hundreds, if not thousands, of portents of misfortune. Some stem from ancient religious beliefs, and usually require a brief ritual (such as throwing spilled salt over one's shoulder) in order to ward off divine wrath. Some have their roots in secular myths, fables, and urban legends that have such resonance that people still act in accordance with them even though they know that rationally, there is little to no basis for such practices. The belief that saying 'good luck' to an actor on opening night is a curse is an example of this second origin. Finally, bad luck omens can arise from persecutory beliefs, which become exaggerated and magnified with time. Black cats, and their association with witches, are an example of this final type.

While the domains of Ravenloft almost certainly use the more common superstitions of the players, such as crossing beneath ladders or breaking mirrors, the Demiplane of Dread is home to cultures as different as they are numerous, and there is no reason that their superstitions should be any less so.

Presented below are a collection of superstitions from around the core, detailing the various ways that the common folk of Ravenloft believe they can fall victim to the dark side of fate.

Barovia

In Barovia, when the moon rises over the towering trees and the peasants huddle in their homes, there is precious little to do of an evening but tell stories to one another. Many Barovians pass tales down from generation to generation, such as the Left Handed Vistana, or the story of Blueberry Kathen. One such story tells of two young lovers meeting in secret. The young boy gave his lady love a single rose as a gift, but when she pricked her finger on one of the thorns, a vampire burgher was attracted to the scent of her blood and turned her into a member of the undead. The young woman returned to slay her former lover, but when he gave her another rose, she stared at it entranced until morning came and destroyed her.

Barovians believe roses are bad luck when given as a gift. In fact, they do not

give their lovers any form of thorn-bearing flowers. Consequently, they also believe thorned flowers to be capable of paralyzing vampires. So powerful is the bad luck of these plants that not even the dead can escape it!

If the DM wishes to have this curse to have a grain of truth, then anyone who has been given a gift of a rose does not need to invite a vampire in to become its prey. Until the next sunrise, all vampires can freely enter the home of the rose-bearer. On the other hand, any vampire which is given a rose forcefully enough to pierce its hand will be paralyzed, just as if its heart had been pierced with a wooden stake. This usually requires a grapple check in melee combat, and so is more common when the vampire is asleep in their coffin.

Borca

The world of fashion is a strange and unusual one. In Borca, it has long been the custom that Nottefolia, the Borcan holiday which commemorates that last day of summer, is the last day of the year when it is acceptable to wear green clothing. In the early 690's, an influx of imported silks resulted in a large number of new fashion moguls sending their works across the court. One designer in particular crafted a lovely series of vests and dresses in shades of verdant green. For a time it seemed as if Lady Camille was the only one who didn't appreciate the new fashions, finding the violation of tradition 'unseemly.'

Before the season was over, however, disaster struck. Many courtiers who favored the clothing of the new designer in question were found dead in their homes, covered in strange red sores. The public quickly decided that there was something wrong with the

dyes used, which had slowly poisoned the wearers. The designer hotly contested this, but the matter was finally laid to rest when he was found in his own workshop, covered from head to toe in red sores. To this day, Borcans consider it to be terribly bad luck to wear green after the last day of summer.

If this curse is true, then anyone in Borca who wears outfits of primarily green coloration after Nottefolia (around September 22nd) takes a -2 circumstance penalty on all Fortitude saves to resist poison.

Darkon

Across the wide expanse of the Mistlands, in the north of Darkon, the people have a number of legends about the strange things that have been known to come out of the misty border of the domain. These vary from settlement to settlement, but a traveler would be hard pressed to find a woman with loose hair in any of these villages, from coast to coast. Even the youngest child can recite a story about some foolish person with long, loose hair who was passing by an open window or door, only to feel gnarled, bony fingers in their tresses, a sharp tug, and then was never to be seen again. In some of these stories, the mysterious hand snatches the victim's head clean off, leaving the body behind, and in the most horrible, merely rips the scalp clear, leaving a screaming, bleeding victim.

If these stories are true, then there is something far more insidious in the Mists north of Darkon than what has been previously suspected. In addition to that, anyone in Darkon, man or woman, with hair longer than their shoulders who does not bind it in a braid, pigtail, ponytail, or underneath a hat of

some kind, risks being grabbed. Any grapple checks against such luckless individuals receive a +4 bonus.

Dementlieu

A popular theme in Dementlieuse ghost stories is the abandoned artwork. Although the fictional artist, as well as the medium they work with may differ, the broad strokes of the tale remain the same. A painter, sculptor, or other artist creates a lovely piece of artwork, but for some reason refuses to sign it or otherwise indicate it is his. Usually this is well meant, often as an anonymous gift. The subjects within the artwork, however, feeling abandoned and alone since they do not know who created them, seek to interact with the real world, either by coming to life (if a sculpture) or visiting viewers in dreams (if a painting) or possessing those who examine the piece (most common with music). Inevitably the artwork finds the artist, who, horrified, denies his creation, only to be found out and usually dealt with in a gruesome manner.

Artists from Dementlieu consider it tempting fate to not attach their name to their work, even if few of them really believe these stories. As a consequence, anonymous work in Dementlieu is incredibly rare, and usually the work of foreigners.

If this story is more than just hogwash, then for any artwork which is presented anonymously, with the originator making no attempt to attach his (or anyone else's) identity to the piece, there is a 1% chance that the artwork will be given life, and compelled to find its creator. DMs can use the Animated Object statistics from the Monster Manual, or seek more creative options.

Falkovnia

In the slums of Falkovnia, life is cheap, animal life especially so. Rats, pigeons, and other stray animals are often one step away from becoming a meal for the next peasant desperate enough to capture them. Cats, however, seem to escape the dinner table. No Falkovnian will willingly eat a cat, although the reasons given for this vary. Old tale tellers have sometimes been heard to remark that the cat will claw you up from the inside, until you're just a sack of blood waiting to be split open.

Should you decide this story has some merit, anyone who eats a cat within the confines of Falkovnia is cursed for d6+1 days. During that time, any wound with a slashing or piercing weapon will bleed for 1 point of damage per round until stopped with a successful DC 10 Heal check or any curative magic.

Forlorn

The tribal goblins of Forlorn aren't known for having a sophisticated or extensive culture. Nevertheless, they have their own beliefs, including their own superstitions. Of particular note is the fear of goblins they call 'arrowteeth.' While it's rare, goblins have been known to use weapons, especially while they are closing in to use their teeth and claws. Occasionally while feasting on their victims after a massacre, an unlucky goblin will bite into an arrowhead imbedded in his meal, forgotten in the frenzy. Should he break a tooth on the metal, then he is considered a terrible omen. Goblins believe that an 'arrowtooth' is a traitor, who will betray another goblin in the very near future.

Usually, the paranoid tribe members solve this problem by descending on the unlucky arrowtooth and tearing him to shreds.

While likely nothing more than a primitive superstition, the arrowtooth myth may contain a grain of truth. If you decide that it does, then for 24 hours, an arrowtooth goblin becomes terrible bad luck for the rest of his tribe! Any attack he makes on another goblin which catches his opponent without his Dexterity modifier automatically threatens a critical hit. Any goblin who survives the day as an arrowtooth will mark his victorious status by replacing the broken tooth with the arrowhead which caused it.

Hazlik

Once upon a time, the Rashemani people had their own class of spell casters, tribal witches who were both respected and feared. These mysterious women came into conflict with the rule of Hazlik, and although they tried to use their nature-based magics to save themselves, they were found out at every turn, and eventually destroyed. The Rashemani believe that the owls of the domain, once the favored familiars of the witches, became offended at some slight the witches had given them, and turned against the women, betraying them and their sacred meeting sites to the wizard-tyrant. Any Rashemani who hears a screech owl in the night will take refuge, lest the owl report their crimes (real or fabricated) to the cruel Mulan.

Ironically, the Mulan fear the owls too. Those few who are in the know remember the witches' use of owls, and the belief that the animals hold a grudge for their defeated mistresses is

widespread. The screech of an owl, they believe, is a warning that the animal is seeking to channel a portion of the witches' magic back on some luckless victim.

Only Hazlik knows the truth about the owls in his domain. If the animals are indeed omens of bad luck, for either race, then their screech bestows a -1 luck penalty on anyone who hears it, which applies to all saves, skills, checks, and attack rolls. The penalty lasts until sunup.

Invidia

In the domain of Invidia, almost everyone carries at least a single silver coin with them. Those who are wealthy enough to have a large coin purse are careful to make sure there is always at least a few silver pieces, but since that is fairly likely, it isn't something they fret over. Amongst the peasantry, it is common to give children a single silver coin worked onto a ring or pendant as a gift when they become old enough to wear jewelry. The origins of this myth are lost, but the folk of the domain believe that carrying at least one silver coin at all times will ward off attackers. Gabrielle Aderre has come to suspect the superstition has its roots with Bakholis, who she believes had some method of sensing the hated metal, and may have been less inclined to attack those who bore it.

If this superstition is true, then it would be frightfully bad luck to find oneself without silver on the roads in Invidia. In such a situation, the DM should double the chance for a random encounter for such an unfortunate. (Encounters rolled as a result of the additional chance should, naturally, be hostile ones!)

Kartakass

In Kartakass, among the lumberjacks of the region, one can find a curious tradition. The first time a man uses a new axe for clearing trees, he pricks his finger and dabs a drop of blood on the blade. The peasant belief holds that, after so long at chopping trees, an axe may grow curious as to what the blood of men tastes like. This anointing ritual is said to sate the axe's curiosity, and ensure its loyalty should the lumberjack ever need to use his tool as a weapon. Of course, should the blade be passed on to another, the new owner must satisfy the weapon's curiosity as well.

If true, then any axe which has not been anointed will turn on its wielder the first time a critical failure is rolled on an attack with it, regardless of the type of axe. Such an attack automatically hits the wielder for full damage. After that, all critical failures that wielder makes with that axe will be resolved normally.

Keening

The undead fey of Keening have few myths that they still remember, but they were always a people of legend, and their own legends have proven as reluctant to die as they. One story they tell concerns jade. According to legend, powerful shamanistic spellcasters from a distant land worked together to protect their people from the fey. Their life's work was a spell that would infuse the precious stones of their homeland with the ability to siphon the very soul from the fae. Supposedly, the fae fled that land seeking other homes, where the hated material did not naturally occur. Although this story once terrified the fae

of Keening, it is now whispered with both fear and hope, for if the legends are true, then what once was a curse may be a way out of Tristessa's clutches.

If the legends are more than just stories, worked jade objects have the power to siphon the spirits of fae into them, although each object can only hold a single soul. All that is required for this is contact, although the fae can resist with a DC 12 Will save. Should the fae be trapped within the jade, it is forever bound to the object, and destroyed if the object is. The malignant presence of the dead fae corrupt such objects, and anyone who bears such a fae-containing object takes a -1 luck bonus on all attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, and saves vs fear.

Lamordia

Lamordians are not, by nature, a superstitious people, but even they have their children's stories. For years they have entertained their offspring with tales of the grumblings, a mythical race of tiny tricksters who play cruel pranks on townsfolk. The wild grumblings, who live beyond the borders of cities, like to lure animals to waylay travelers. Once the travelers are dead, the stories say, the grumblings eat whatever is left. Wild grumblings can sometimes be spotted by the tracks of their mounts, the large and hardy Lamordian rabbit. After the first snow of the year, grumblings are supposedly very keen to stock up on food for the winter, and it is then that they are at their most dangerous. It is very bad luck to cross the trail of a rabbit during this time.

On the off chance that there is any truth to this, then it would be unwise to cross the trail of rabbit tracks in the first

snow of the year in Lamordia. Anyone who does so may very well fall victim to a wild animal attack, and in that event they would be horrified to discover that until the snow melts, all wild animals enjoy a +2 luck bonus to attack and weapon damage rolls against them!

Mordent

The Mordentish have more superstitions than they have time to recount them. Most of these beliefs are focused more around the restless dead, rather than curses of misfortune. One Mordentish superstition is notable for having nothing to do with death or the dead, but rather with birth.

Common legend holds that children with green eyes are cursed. Green-eyed individuals are often treated with mild unease, although foreigners are often unable to discern this from the normal reception that the Mordentish give to outsiders. There is no specific curse associated with green-eyed individuals, although the general belief is that their eyes are beacons to the unnatural.

If this superstition is more than just idle talk, then anyone in Mordent in the presence of a green-eyed individual will take a -1 penalty on all saves vs spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural effects.

Necropolis

In the streets of Necropolis, where the dead rule, there is little need for superstition. The apathetic undead who populate the city have very little to fear from the mundane effects of ill fortune. Still, since the Requiem, a number of

peculiar beliefs have begun to crop up among the unliving residents of Il Aluk. Of note is the fear of birds.

There is very little life left in the vicinity of Necropolis, although the rare animal can still be found. There is a rumor spreading among the undead that several citizens who met grisly ends from various methods share a common thread, which is that they all mentioned having heard a bird prior to their demise. While birds aren't unheard of on the outskirts of the city, they are still rare, and growing rarer still, since those who believe this story most intensely have taken to leaving the city and killing any bird they hear.

If this story holds any water, then any undead citizen of Necropolis who hears a bird becomes cursed. Anyone attacking such an unfortunate gains a +1 divine bonus to hit and weapon damage rolls. The undead can eliminate this curse by killing the offending bird.

Nova Vaasa

The Nova Vaasans are far from having a reputation for generosity, which is what makes one of the customs from that land so peculiar. Almost fifty years ago, a powerful merchant began striking his own coins, a not uncommon practice in some lands, but unheard of in Nova Vaasa. Although his coins bore the likeness of the current Prince on the face, the obverse showed, instead of the seal of the Lawgiver, the face of the merchant. Horrific misfortune began plaguing the merchant soon after. His livestock died of bizarre diseases, his family perished in freak accidents, and a series of personal injuries left him penniless, blind, crippled, and mute. Although death would have been a

mercy, he lived an additional thirty years, begging on the streets, growing more sickly and pathetic with each passing day, yet unable to die.

No Nova Vaasan is willing to accept this fate. Anyone who comes across one of these double headed coins will attempt to get rid of it by the quickest means possible. Superstition holds that the coins cannot be discarded, and if they are thrown away they will return to the bearer. Similarly, the Church of the Lawgiver will not accept the blasphemous currency. Anyone unfortunate enough to have a two headed coin will attempt to pawn it off on the next available person, preferably an outsider who doesn't know what they're getting into. Since few peasants can recognize the historical coins, this fear extends to ANY double headed coin.

Although it is likely a propaganda story designed to strike the fear of god (or more accurately, the Lawgiver) into would-be currency forgers, there is always the possibility that it is more than that. In such a case, within Nova Vaasa, any of the double headed coins (there are between ten and twenty thousand of them floating about, in silver, gold, and platinum, although they, the original cursed money, are the only coins that bring about doom) confer a -1 penalty to all saving throws onto the bearer. This penalty is cumulative for each coin possessed. Nova Vaasans are very careful about checking their money, and will never take any double headed coin.

Richemulot

For a domain that trades in knowledge and secrets, the origin of one of the nation's most pervasive superstitions is maddeningly impossible to track down.

Not for lack of evidence, but for surplus of it! The Richemuloise believe that it is frightfully bad luck to name a child for their parent, to do so is to destine the child to slay their own progenitor.

There are countless stories of this happening, as varied in the details as they are in the tellers. What makes this superstition more than just a rumor is its seeming validity. From Otto Sellers to Ferdinand Richard, even including Lumeo Renier, Richemulot history is peppered with patricide (and a few cases of matricide!) where the double-name phenomenon repeats itself. Few Richemuloise will chance such a bizarre and seemingly deadly curse, although there are always a few foolhardy enough to risk it.

If this myth is more than just a series of bizarre coincidences, and naming a child after its parent really does doom the poor tyke to one day killing their own father or mother, the details should vary from case to case. It needn't be murder, of course. Many a child who was the second of their name in Richemulot has killed their parent through an unfortunate accident. Mistaken identity is also a common factor. A sudden, mysterious temptation to murder is not out of the cards either, of course. Large inheritances can often provide all the 'accidents' that one might need, without supernatural interference.

Sithicus

Spellcasters traveling in the western Core often find Sithicus a welcome respite from the hostile reception they get elsewhere. Whether from the superstition and fear of the Mordentish, or the willful ignorance of the Lamordians, the end result is that the

arcane arts aren't appreciated in much of the western half of the Core. It's fitting, then, that the same tradition which makes the elves of Sithicus more accepting of arcane magic also informs their belief systems, pervasive enough to affect even the beliefs of the common population.

Of particular note is the Sithican dread of broken trinities. While trinities represent the triad of magical forces in Sithican belief, as well as the trinity of their ancestral deities, a broken trinity represents an impending misfortune. Interestingly, this misfortune varies in severity, although it's usually most likely to appear to and affect spellcasters. Peasant belief holds that carrying a small token of iron can ward off the effects of the curse, which is why almost every Sithican carries just such a small piece of metal. Spellcasters, however, open themselves up the arcane in ways which are too strong for such a small symbolic fetish, and are far more likely to avoid broken trinities.

Should a spellcaster (either arcane or divine) within Sithicus encounter a broken trinity, such as a cluster of three eggs, one of which fails to hatch, or three paintings, one a fake, or two fresh apples with a worm ridden one, they will avoid them at all costs. Should it prove impossible to avoid (such as a starving wizard being offered the aforementioned apples) or should they accept the broken trinity without realizing its nature, then they will bear a minor curse. Thereafter, they will suffer a 5% arcane spell failure chance on all spells they cast. This additional chance only applies to spells which actually matter, such as spells cast in combat, or spells which use an expensive material component. Once the additional 5% results in a failed spell, the curse is satisfied.

Tepest

In Tepest, one finds it impossible not to run into superstitions everywhere one looks. A casual traveler through the land will run into several such peasant beliefs, and someone born within the domain will have heard of hundreds. From the belief that unbound curtains will invite faeries into one's bedroom (who will, in this particular case, tie the victim's hair into knots) to the practice of stepping on the first picked berry of the season (to avoid the poison left by, again, the faeries) the Tepestani live in a world of labyrinthine, and often contradictory, superstitions. In order to navigate these beliefs and practices, many Tepestani order them based on the credibility of the individual who first told them about the practice. A grandmother is more reliable than a neighbor, a priest more reliable (usually) than a grandmother, and on and on it goes, in a complex web that only the Tepestani can unsnarl.

One Tepestani superstition that seems to be universal is the proscription against turning sister against sister. If a man should come between two sisters, and in seeking their affections, turn the siblings against one another, it is believed that he will suffer a dire curse. (Technically, this curse can befall women too, although they must be seeking romantic attentions from the sisters in question, and the curse does not affect those who turn brothers against one another.) It's almost certain that this is connected to the Mindefisk sisters, although it's unclear if this is a vendetta that they actively and consciously pursue, or if it's merely a spontaneous supernatural manifestation of their will.

In either event, this curse manifests in a variety of ways, but always results in the luckless paramour being permanently mutilated. This mutilation might take the form of a foot severed by a slipped axe, an eye put out by a stray arrow, or a hand lost to gangrene after a relatively minor injury. The loss always hampers the victim's ability to pursue his original profession or passion. Anyone attempting to use magic to regenerate this damage must first succeed at a dispel check as if dispelling a spell cast by a 16th level caster.

Valachan

In Valachan, the peasant population enjoys a healthy respect for superstition. Unlike the groundless superstitions one runs into in Tepest, many of the Valachani legends hold some useful (if complicated) wisdom. In order to ward off disease bearing spirits, wise women spread *ulati*, a paste of several pungent herbs, on the chest of those in need of protection. This frequently works, since it is often one of the realm's vampires causing the illness, and one of the components of *ulati* is a vigorous amount of garlic. Another superstition that bears mentioning is the fear of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is very uncommon in Valachan, and almost always at the hands of a foreigner (whether or not the victim of the abuse is a native or not doesn't seem to matter). Those who break this taboo seem to contract a hacking, coughing illness that has no name among the natives, who are too fearful to even speak of it. Even victims who survive the illness (which is the usual outcome, since it is a very mild disease) will find their neighbors

reluctant to speak to them, and usually wind up moving to a new settlement.

During each full moon, any man who has struck his wife during the last lunar cycle (this particular bit of bad luck doesn't seem to strike female abusers) must make a Fortitude save to avoid contracting a mild respiratory disease. (DC is equal to the total damage done to the spouse.) The disease has an incubation period of 1d20 days, and once symptoms set in, inflicts 1d2 Con damage per day. It can be recovered from like any mundane disease, and the Fortitude save to resist further damage is a DC 9. Each failed save worsens the coughs, however, and the victim takes a -1 penalty to Move Silently checks for each failed save against the illness. Even once the illness has passed, the abuser will find that his Outcast Rating in his home region has increased by 2.

Verbrek

The frontier-like settlements of Verbrek are home to a brutal existence, and it is no surprise that the traditions of that land are no less brutal. Although the peasants are thoroughly lacking in formal education, a state normally conducive to an intensely superstitious populace, the natives of Verbrek do not appear overly concerned with curses and dark spirits. The realities of their realm provide more than enough things to fear, so there is little need to fabricate more.

Women travelling through Verbrek would do well to pay attention to the 'moonfires' lit in towns. The moonfire is a cleansing ritual performed at a certain phase of the moon, though the exact time varies from settlement to settlement. All women of child-bearing age gather around the moonfire and burn green

wood, bathing in greasy smoke which is believed to cleanse their bodies and spirits for the next lunar cycle. It is said that a woman who does not cleanse herself will accumulate a scent that will entices wolves to attack.

If the legend is true, then any woman who has gone more than one month

without performing the ritual leaves an unmistakable trail for lycanthropes. Werewolves and other lycanthropes gain a +10 bonus to detect or track such a woman by scent.

Sea Wolves

Wolves on the Waves

By Mikhail "NecTiamat" Rekun

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*"There's no possible way / To describe
what you feel / When you're talking
to your meal!"*

"Hello Little Girl," Into the Woods,
Stephen Sondheim

The incident I now relate occurred several months into my research, as I was on the homeward swing of my journey. I had already collected several notebooks filled with nautical legendry of all variations, and I was looking forward to returning to my pleasant rented room in Port-a-Lucine and spending a few weeks categorizing them by location, culture, and age.

This was to be the last location on my itinerary, and so once more I set out to talk to the local seamen, asking them about the beliefs of those who go to sea. The first tavern I arrived at was a large, boisterous establishment, and I acquired a few new legends to add to my growing collection. Upon asking for directions to another place where sailors gather, I was told that the regulars of the Crying Seagull tavern tend to keep to

themselves, and the helpful fishermen gave me directions to it.

The Crying Seagull was a small, seedy hovel of a place at the edge of the docks, built opposite a short wharf out into the harbor. A crude sign identified the single-story building, and the sounds of voices came from inside. It was getting late, and I considered returning to my own inn for the night, but the smell of knowledge was in the air, and I entered.

The inside of the tavern was much as could be expected. A single bar ran across the back, and a roaring fire-pit in the center of the building provided considerable warmth. Despite that, it was poorly lit, the lanterns hanging from the ceiling providing only a half-light for the tavern. Stuffed fish and ropes hung from the walls, and maybe twenty people sat in clusters at tables or at the bar, or in rocking chairs before the fire. The building reeked of fish, smoke, and rotgut liquor.

*Seawolves and Sea Stalkers and
Were-Seals, Oh my!*

Sea Wolves, as non-lycanthropic shapechangers, appear in the Stormwrack game supplement. Sea stalkers, as lycanthropic sea lions, appeared in Gaz II. Still another permutation of this concept is presented in the DM Appendix of this book. For the purpose of this netbook, “seawolf” and “sea stalker” are different names for the same creature: a lycanthropic, wolf-headed seal which comes in standard and greater varieties, respectively equivalent to a werewolf and mountain loup-garou in power. This netbook (and Zeke, Richie, and Helmut) will use the term seawolf primarily.

Both “seawolf” and “sea stalker” are used interchangeably by the populace of Ravenloft, although the latter term is more commonly applied to the more powerful variety. “Were-seal” is almost never used, save by a few scholars, though it is perhaps the most technically-descriptive name.

I admit that I stood there blinking at this for a moment when I heard a rather peculiar voice call out.

“Well, lookee what the wind blew in. Don’t just stand there, Mistuh, come on in, pull yerself up a chair and sit a spell.”

I looked forward to see just who was doing the talking. The man was sitting by the fire-pit, and any description of him would undoubtedly have to include the word ‘scraggly’. He was scraggly everything. A tall, rail-thin man, I guessed him to be in his early forties, though he could be anywhere from thirty to sixty for all I could tell. He had a beaky nose, somewhat the redder for

drink, and a tri-colored beard, red and black and gray all mixed together in a rough-shorn, patchy mess. Red hairs peeked out from under a seaman’s cap, and strong teeth stained black by chewing tobacco showed when he spoke. He wore a long blue coat; from the look of him, he was a ship’s petty officer, a boatswain perhaps.

I sat down next to this apparition, doffing my hat in thanks.

“Well, don’t you look all fancy-like,” he said, in a voice every bit as gravelly – powerful, yet coarsened by a lifetime of salt air – as his complexion was weather-worn. “What’s a feller with posh duds like yers doing in a miserable hole like this?”

“My name is Rudolf von Holzen, and I’m doing research on sailors’ legends.” I replied, gazing a little dubiously at the tavern. It was rather dingier than most I visited.

“You’re one o’ them fancy scholars, ain’t you? Listening to old sailor’s stories? Well, ye just sit back and relax, ‘cause old Zeke is gonna tell you a whopper.”

Folklore

I sat back in the old rocking chair, expecting something to jab me as I lowered myself, but the cushioned chair was almost sinfully soft. I have to admit, for all the grimy splendor of the tavern, it wasn’t too bad. Warm, soft.... And Zeke’s accent had a hypnotic edge to it, for all that I was unable to parse its place of origin.

“Ever hear the story of ole Urdogen the Red? Well now, it’s as sad and sorry a tale as you’re ever likely to hear. Well ole Urdogen, he was called red not just ‘cause his beard looked like this ‘ere

fire, but 'cause he had a powerful hankering for blood. A cruel and vicious man...."

"We hear this story a hundred times now. Say something different for once, old fraud." The speaker was a man from one of the other rocking chair, leaned forward and playing dice with another sailor. He was a Falkovnian, that much was easy to tell, with the faded hawk-brand on his forehead and the short-cropped hair and clean-shaven look popular in that land. He also happened to have muscles like steel bars, from what I could see.

"Ah, Fritz, you old son of a dock-side doxy, was wondering when you'd butt in."

"Is Helmut, not Fritz..."

"I don't care if yer Vlad Drakov himself, go do something useful-like and get us a drink. All this talking is making me powerful thirsty." Zeke gave me an appraising look.

"I will of course be happy to pay for any drinks." I said right on cue. The Falkovnian grumbled and, surprisingly, returned with four mugs of ale. I sniffed mine carefully, looking for any flies floating in the brew, but when I noticed the other sailors all looking at me, I drank it. Not too bad, though I'd had better at the Chez Leon back in Port-a-Lucine.

The Falkovnian, Helmut, grunted as if I'd passed some test. "Instead of Zeke blowing hot air, tell us story of seals, Richie."

This was addressed to the third man there, a short, black-haired Rokuma fairly studded with knives. He must have had a dozen of them at least, hilts poking out from pockets and sheathes all over his utilitarian clothes. He grinned and launched into his narrative.

"In Rokushima Taiyoo, there is a story about the seals. You see them in the harbor, yes?" I nodded. "Before coming to the Core, I was a catcher of fish in Beikoku. Harbor there has many seals. Seals catch fish, some men train them to catch fish for men. There is a story about how seals came about."

"Many years ago, there was a mighty warlord who conquered all of Rokushima Taiyoo. Once, he came to a small village where lived a very holy man, beloved of the *kami*, who preached against the conqueror and his treacherous ways. The warlord, he was a proud man; he would not take such thing lightly. So he took a host of his *ashigaru*, and came down to the village to arrest the holy man. But kind people warned the priest, and he fled from the soldiers.

"But Rokushima Taiyoo is islands, and one can run only so long. At last he came to the sea, not two score paces ahead of the warlord and his soldiers. And because he was a very holy man, he stepped out onto the water, and his soul was so light that he could walk across the waves, away from the evil conqueror and his soldiers.

"But the warlord was a proud man, and a cruel one, and demanded that the holy man be brought to him. So with curses and blows he ordered his soldiers into the water, and one by one they swam out after the holy man. But no sooner did the last one enter the water than a mighty wave came and drowned them to a man, leaving their wicked master alone on the beach, cursing his fate. For his pride, he had lost his warriors, and his house would soon fall from power, not to rise again for many generations.

"The holy man, however, felt pity for the soldiers, who were only following

the orders of their daimyo, however cruel and proud he was. He asked the spirits to show mercy, so the *kami* turned the drowned soldiers into seals. Ever

The Origins of Seawolves

Where do seawolves come from? Possible origins of lycanthropes as a group have been more than adequately addressed in Van Richten's Guide to Werebeasts, but seawolves aren't precisely "normal" lycanthropes. Most curiously, their animal form – that of a wolf-headed seal – is not to be found in nature.

It is possible that seawolves evolved on some unknown outlander plane, possibly with the aid of magic, then were transported to Ravenloft by the Mists and deposited in the Sea of Sorrows. A dedicated scholar could, theoretically, trace the earliest seawolf attacks to the Sea of Sorrows in the mid-600s, and follow the infection's spread to the Nocturnal Sea and Great Mirror Lake.

Sailors, and seawolves by extension, being a superstitious lot, a number of folktales of seawolf origins have arisen, though all are fairly similar. The Sea of Sorrows' seawolves usually accept the story of Ezra and the Wolf God, while Rokuman seawolves speak of the warlord. Nocturnal Sea seawolves tend to split the difference, claiming that vassals of a corrupt Vaasi nobleman were ordered into the sea, then transformed by the Lawgiver in acknowledgement of their loyalty unto death. While not universally believed, such tales are fairly widespread, and are the cause of many good-natured (and a few less amicable) brawls, when nomadic packs holding contradictory views of their origin encounter one another.

after, they gather by the shore, calling out 'Haki, Haki!', the name of their master's clan. But their daimyo could not help them, and so they remain seals, forever."

As the end came to this tale, there was a brief silence. Then Zeke sniffed, a little jealously I thought. "Very nice tale, sure is, but I heard it a mite differently. Way I heard it, them soldiers, they weren't soldiers but wer-ee-wolves, and they was chasing none-other than Ezra, and the Wolf God was the one leading them along."

"So the way I heard this, this whole ravening pack of wer-ee-wolves comes loping along, all hell-bent on getting themselves a piece of god's meat, when Ezra came to the sea-shore. She, being a goddess and all, just up and walks out across the sea, but the wolves, they come up to the shore and stop. They ain't crazy, and they ain't fishies either, to go out swimming in the mighty cold sea."

"So the Wolf God, he gets all riled up and asks if there's a single wolf among the lot with enough guts to go and get wet. And this young buck, he goes up and dives in, and swims out after Ezra. 'Course, wolves not being what you might call nautically gifted, he starts to drown pretty quick-like. But the Wolf God, he was so pleased with his servant's loyalty; he turns him into the first seawolf."

"Ah, the seawolves." The Rokuma, 'Richie', nodded. "They were the closest followers of Haki, the cruel warlord. They were the ones whose evil gave them no rest, and as they preyed on their fellows as men, so they became the greatest hunters, the seawolves."

"Is stupid, say I." Helmut seemed unimpressed with the stories. "Seawolves, they are fact of life, who

care where they come from? Seawolves are."

"Just 'cause you ain't got the trick o' telling tales, don't mean ye got to go spill cold water all over ours, Fritzzy." Zeke said mildly.

"Excuse me, seawolves? What are they?" I admit to being intrigued. I'd never heard of such creatures before. A new legend... this could be very useful for my thesis. I snapped out of my reverie as I realized every eye in the inn was on me. They slowly turned to Zeke as their spokesman, and even the Falkovnian deferred.

"You ain't never heard o' seawolves?" I shook my head. "Well feller, ye jus sit tight, 'cause tonight, you is getting yerself an education!"

Description

Zeke took this moment to precision-spit a wad of chewing tobacco into a nearby brass spittoon. He pulled a grimy plug of it from the depths of his coat and bit into it. I waited for a moment, understanding it for what it was, a time-wasting gesture while he thought. Finally, Zeke plunged into his story, the hypnotic, soothing drawl flowing past my ears.

"Now, what a seawolf mostly is, ye see, is mean. They're meaner than a barracuda with a tooth-ache, which, as ye can guess, is plenty mean. You get a book and you put the word mean in it, and you can put a picture of them seawolves in it, 'cause that's all it needs to say..."

"I take it they aren't very nice people?" I couldn't help myself. Zeke gave me a severe look.

"So sharp ye'll cut yerself." He went back to his story. "Now, you see, a seawolf is a, whatchamacallit, a lie-can-trope. Read about them once, out o' a book by some Mordentish fella."

"You? *Read*? Only thing you read is '*Dead Travel Fast*.'" Helmut's voice was scornful.

"*A Romance from Beyond the Grave*. Best book ever writ by man or beast," Zeke declaimed, a note of certainty in his voice. Helmut's raised eyebrow wouldn't have looked out of place on a Richemulese grand dame.

"Anyhow, this means a seawolf's got three shapes. Most o' the time, they look like fellers like Fritz here. Except they're usually handsomer than Fritzzy."

"Funny, old man..."

"Sometimes ye can tell a seawolf 'cause they've got big, broad hands and lots of muscles on the arms, 'cause o' using them as flippers half the time, I suppose. 'Course, they're usually sailors, so that don't help too much, I don't reckon."

"Then there's the 'hybrid form', as that Mordentish feller was talking about." Zeke was obviously warming to his theme. "Fact o' the matter is, they look like wer-ee-wolves. Half-man, half-wolf, all trouble. 'Course, you don't get many wer-ee-wolves aboard a ship, so you can usually tell that it's a seawolf. If you can't, there's two ways to tell. Seawolves, they're almost always this dark grey in color, and they got these little flaps o' skin between the fingers, helps them swim real fast-like. But other than that, seawolves in hybrid form looks like a wer-ee-wolf in hybrid form."

"Animal form though, they look sorta like seals. Most o' them like those little harbor seals, like you see out on the rocks hereabouts, but some o' them is big, like them leopard seals out off of Lamordia. They're sleek, fast, and got a bite like a steel trap. They've also got a sorta wolf-like head. You know how seals look a little like these cute little

Seawolf Appearance

In human form, seawolves might be distinguished by particularly broad hands, very well-muscled upper arms, or unusually sharp teeth and elongated canines. Their kind need fewer vitamins than humans, so seldom succumb to scurvy, unlike human sailors. Occasionally, seawolves will sport small, decidedly pointed ears.

Unlike many lycanthropes, seawolves aren't particularly hairy in their human form, but premature graying is extremely common in natural seawolves and many infected ones. Most seawolves' hair turns gray sometime in their thirties, progressively assuming the dark gray mottling of their other forms' coats, then remaining that way well into their sixties. As such, it can be tricky to tell a seawolf's age. Baldness is virtually unheard of.

A seawolf's hybrid form resembles that of a werewolf, either a common werewolf or a mountain loup-garou for the greater variety. Dark, mottled gray pelts are extremely common among their kind, but albino, brindle, or black individuals aren't unprecedented. Brown, tan, or reddish pelts are unknown among them, unlike terrestrial werewolves. The hybrid forms of seawolves always possess webbed fingers and toes, and a sizeable minority (25%) lack tails as hybrids.

In animal form, standard seawolves' bodies look like those of harbor seals, while the greater variety resemble leopard seals. As in hybrid form, dark, mottled gray pelage is ubiquitous among them. The feature that sets them apart from ordinary seals is a clearly lupine head, with a longer, more prominent muzzle than true seals; their stubby wolf-ears protrude upward, not backward as in mundane sea lions. Their teeth are firmly canine, and seawolves can't sieve krill from the water like many true seals; however, they share seals' ability to seal their nostrils when diving, and their eyes possess the same protective membranes to assist underwater vision.

Some 65% of the seawolf population exhibit red eyes in their hybrid and animal forms, although this does doesn't extend to the human form.

doggies? Well, seawolves are like wolves. Long, snarling muzzles, teeth fit to rip and tear, and they've got red eyes that *burn*, jest like them there coals in the fire-pit. They're almost always this dark grey color on the backs, lighter on the stomach. Sometimes they got these real small spots ye can see if yer close, but you don't *never* want to be that close to a seawolf. Not what you'd call a healthy proposition, not hardly."

I nodded at this. I'd heard of werewolves of course, who hasn't, but only second-hand. Things like that didn't happen in Port-a-Lucine, or back home in Lamordia. A rural problem, I'd believed. And a nautical one, it seems.

"Met seawolf on voyage from Egertus to Liffe." Helmut smiled a bit, reminiscent. "Was young, stupid creature. I and other sailor were on watch. Was night, maybe day or two out of Egertus. Seawolf swims to us and climbs up anchor chain as man-wolf. Sneaks over and kills other sailor. Rips throat out with claws. Makes mistake, lets him make sound. Stupid creature.

"I hear weak gurgle, I know sound. Creature comes towards my side of ship. I ready, I waiting on rigging, have chain. I loop chain around creature's neck and pull. Soon, dead seawolf. Was stupid creature." Looking at Helmut's powerful arms, I believed his claim.

Habitat

“So where do they live?” I had taken out a notebook and was writing down notes. Helmut cast a strange glance at my writing implements, but after a moment, he just shrugged. Zeke took up the thread of the tale again.

“Eh, just about anywhere they want to live. Like that joke, whose gonna say no to a seawolf? Once upon a time, you only found them in the Sea of Sorrows, up around the Finger near Lamordia. They’ve spread to the Nocturnal Sea and the Mirror Lake these days. They don’t do too well in the Murky Sea outside o’ Souragne, too hot for them. Same with Saragoss, plus there’s not enough food for them there. Poison Sea’s poison, heh...”

“You kill me with laughter, old man.”

“Thank ye kindly Fritz. See, all a seawolf really wants is people to chow down on, a place to rest, and water that ain’t too hot. First and foremost, seawolves are predators, and they’re favorite prey is humans. Sure, most o’ them will eat fish or dolphins or regular seals, but they love the taste o’ humans. Or maybe they just like how humans scream in terror.

“Secondly, seawolves like their water all chilly, and the colder the better. That’s why they loves the water around Lamordia ... nice an’ cold for them. You’ll never see a seawolf off the coast of Markovia, or in the Murky Sea, it’s just too bloody hot there.

“Lastly, seawolves, they’re not fishies. They can swim and hold their breath, but they need a dry place to lie up, else they’ll drown. So most seawolves don’t go too far from the shore, or at least some dry rocks they can

sleep on. ‘Sides, there’s nasty things out in the deep water, some o’ which are even nastier than seawolves. Some of ‘em live in warehouses on the docks or other such places, while others find caves to live in. Depends on what pack the seawolf is from, really.”

“They sound rather dangerous.” I continued scribbling notes as quickly as I could. What a treasure trove of information! I could barely restrain my glee at the stories, which I suppose is what kept Zeke talking.

“Oooooooh, yeah, they’re real dangerous.” Zeke spat some chewing tobacco as he continued to talk. “See, they’ve *got* to be. Lots o’ mean stuff out in the waters, reavers and sea spawn and ghost ships and heavens knows what else. And most ships, they’re a *lot* tougher to take on than some silly farm village. Sailors are a tough bunch.”

I looked around at Helmut, with those hawser-like arms, and “Richie”, who bristled with knives, and decided the old man had an extremely good point. We’d acquired quite an audience by then, about a dozen people or so: sailors who’d pulled up chairs closer to listen to Zeke talk. I didn’t mind, although I suspected this was some sort of initiation ritual, where they filled the poor newcomer with tales. They all leaned in eagerly.

The old mariner paused, as if struck by some disturbing thought, then leaned toward me, eyes narrow and suspicious. His gravelly voice was alarmed:

“Ye ain’t gonna *tell* nobody what I been tellin’ ye, are ye? Not that it was *me*, what told ye ‘bout all this? Iffen any o’ the folk who knew ye was *comin’* here – anyone who knows how ye been goin’ round, *askin’ questions* – is in

cahoots with the local pack ... be worth an ol' man's life, to tell ye all this!"

Taken aback by his concern, I hastened to reassure the seaman that I had no intention of naming him in my treatise, if he did not wish me to; that, moreover, my research was unlikely to attract notice outside my immediate academic circle, and that no word of my visit to the Crying Seagull had reached other ears. These assurances of confidentiality seemed to cool the old salt's distress enormously, and he resumed his account at once.

Society

"See, now the thing about seawolves is that how they live, how they hunt, all that fun stuff, it all comes down to pack. Now, almost all seawolves live in packs. That's just the way it is. Seawolves is social folk, like wolves is and like seals is too, so you get packs o' seawolves. And on the surface o' things, all seawolf packs look sort of alike.

"You've got your Alpha, or Chief or King, or whatever they tag their head-feller. Lot o' packs call 'em Captain, 'cause most seawolves is sailors. Anyways, the captain is always the most dangerous seawolf, and always a natural-born lie-can-trope, bred to the hunt. He's the one who sets up the plans, decides who to raid, and generally rules over the seawolves. They don't like it, he pounds 'em, but good.

"I say 'he' for good cause, by the way: *female* sailors is rare as squids' fur, in most parts o' the world, and female seawolves is rarer still. Maybe ye get one or two of 'em in a whole pack – a couple more'n that, iffen it's a big one – an' she-wolves *never* lead a pack, 'cause the menfolk plumb won't take 'em serious. Jest the way it is.

"Then there's the Betas, or Officers. Them there's a couple o' seawolves who've got in good with the Captain, and they're his enforcers and goons. They're *usually* natural seawolves, and usually the captain's men from way back when. 'Course, if a captain croaks, it'll be an officer who takes over the job. Usually one or two officers to a pack, more if it's big enough to need that many, an' shipboard ranks come along with the job if the pack has itself a vessel. Anybody who can cast a spell is automatically a Beta, just 'cause magic is so blasted useful.

"Then there's the bulk o' the seawolves. They don't got no fancy name, they're just the Captain's hearty crew." Zeke grinned, showing his tobacco-blackened teeth. "Anywhere from a half a dozen to a couple dozen o' these buckos, and they can be natural-born wolves or afflicted fellers who learnt how to change shape. 'Course, just because they're all one group don't mean they're all nice and lovey-dovey 'bout it. Every seawolf has a spot and he better stick to it, if he don't want to get thrashed by his shipmates.

"Last, you got your Omegas, them poor sorry suckers at the bottom o' the heap. They're afflicted types that ain't learned how to change when they need to, or naturals who are either real young or have messed up real bad. Omegas generally don't stay that way long: they either prove their mettle and become full shipmates, or they die, or they run off on their own, and get killed by someone they meant to have for dinner, like as not ... or et up by somethin' bigger'n them, out on the open sea.

"An' I probably ought to mention mutinies. See, sometimes a seawolf captain, just like a human one, is a little too stingy with the loot and the grog, and

a little too free with the whip and the curse. Now, seawolves is tough, but they don't like bein' treated rotten any more than regular folk, so they mutiny. Generally, some ambitious young buck gets an idea, and gets a posse of his shipmates to help out. They bribe or kill the officers, and then they rip the captain up into lots of pieces. An' anyone who doesn't like can either die alongside the old captain or go find another pack to sail with."

I scribbled all these notes down. Fascinating, simply fascinating. A society modeled on both the pack structure of wolves *and* the nautical hierarchy observed aboard ships: this would flesh out my thesis tremendously. "Please, please, continue!"

Zeke smiled again, an amused look in his eye. "Weeell.... ye gets two kinds o' seawolf groups. I suppose you can call 'em Ferals and Civils. Short for civilized, since no seawolf I ever heard tell of could be reckoned as 'civil'; still, their habits is pretty different, 'tween the two. Plus, there's the sorry blokes who can't find a pack or got kicked out of their old one ... Lone Wolves, you'd call them, I suppose. I'll get to them more in a minute, I guess.

"O' course, there's more creatures than just seawolves out and about the ocean blue." Zeke bit off another plug of tobacco, and chewed it thoughtfully. "But most times, seawolf packs don't have any dealings with other swimmers, with sahuagin an' finfolk an' such. Seawolves live by the coasts and near the surface, and even Ferals spend a fair amount of time posing as humans. An' most o' them creatures avoid seawolves, just as much, 'cause a full pack of berserk lie-can-tropes is a thing no critter this side of a kraken wants to mess with."

Ferals

"Now then, where was I...?" Zeke spat out the plug of noxious chewing tobacco and took a sip of ale, rubbing his chin in a parody of forgetfulness. "Something important, I reckon, else I'd be a mite less sober..."

"You were about to talk about the different kinds of seawolf packs," I interjected, trying to get the old sailor

Greater Seawolves

The overwhelming majority of seawolves are of what may be termed the 'lesser' variety, that is lycanthropes patterned upon regular seals. A very small number, usually less than 1% of the general population, is instead patterned upon the much larger and much more deadly Leopard Seal.

Greater seawolves are a mutation in the breeding lines of natural seawolf lineages, seawolves of spectacular size and strength. Greater seawolves are always natural lycanthropes, by definition. Most seawolves, and most people, for that matter, don't consider greater seawolves anything more than particularly large and dangerous lycanthropes, though a few scholars familiar with both lycanthropes and marine biology (such as Vjorn Horstmann) have noticed that they are in fact a different phenotype. Greater seawolves rarely breed true, either naturally or through infection, and due to their size and strength often become officers if not captains in their pack.

From a gaming perspective, greater seawolves exist to provide the DM with an upgraded template for a 'boss' encounter or to use seawolves in a campaign that would be normally too high level for them.

back on track, difficult though that was proving to be.

"Oh yea... Now I recall. Just let me wet the old whistle again, been a while since I've done this much talking." The boatswain, or whatever he was, gulped down more of his cheap ale, then launched into his tale again.

"Ferals are them seawolves that live out in the deep water, and they're the ones that give seawolves all o' that bad press, ye know, killing whole crews in berserk rampages... Yer run-o'-the-mill Feral is strong as an ox and about as bright. They're the lie-can-tropes of the deeps, the ones who're proud to say they're not human. Ferals don't like humans, don't like their company, and if he was ever human, a feral does his dang best to forget about the fact.

"How should I explain this a mite better..." Zeke turned, looking me straight in the eye. "You ever gone camping, boy?"

"Er, yes, a few times." I replied, a little put off by this non sequitur.

"And ye lit up a campfire, I reckon, and put up a tent, and gathered wood for the fire, and probably did a bit o' hunting, that right?" The old sailor continued.

"Yes, I did that." I replied.

"Well, ye see, that's just the thing." Zeke took a draught of ale and continued. "*That's* what the Ferals hate. Every blasted part of the world that ain't sea has been touched by humans. You can't get away from it. Every corner of the Core, from way up in Lamordia clear down to Arbora, you've got humans or elves or dwarves or some other kind o' people living there, hunting an' farming an' building. Every place in the world, folk come in with guns and torches, axes

and shovels, and even if they don't *live* there, they're gonna put a mark on it.

"Oh, I reckon there's some spots, up in the tippy-tops of the Balinoks or maybe deep in the Amber Wastes, that's never had any humans come by... but even then, I wouldn't bet nothing I wasn't prepared to lose on it.

"But not out to sea. Out on the wild waves, people are visitors. They can't live there, so they have to build ships, and even ships have to hug the coasts, or the currents and trade winds. The sea's the last place in the world where someone who doesn't like humans can go, and never see another man for all his born days.

"And that's what the Ferals want. Now, most lycanthropes on land, they haven't got the choice. They can choose 'tween humans and more humans, and that's about it. Oh, sure, maybe some wer-ee-wolves out in deep, dark Verbrek *claim* to be more wolf than human, but even then, they're acting off of humans' ways, with their dancin' and chantin' and worshipin', like men with a mite more hair. But not the Ferals: they head out into the deep water, and they try to forget all about humans and civilization, and jest swim an' prowl an' be predators. Plenty of Ferals don't change to human but once or twice a year, iffen that."

Zeke paused in his story, and grinned suddenly.

"Of course, it's all a pack o' lies, 'cause *they're* still thinkin' like people, too, deep down. But they think like humans *who think like predators* ... and, believe me, there's nothing like that little touch of humanity to make a predator right nasty.

"Mostly, the Ferals just live out in the deep water, stay in seawolf or hybrid

form, eat fish and regular seals, and sleep on rocks. Sometimes they pull in a whale, tearing into it with claws and teeth till it bleeds to death. They live wild, and breed wild too, which is how ye gets packs o' Ferals: they avoid humans too much to recruit new lie-cantropes by bitin' someone, so most of the Ferals in a pack will be born to it, 'cept maybe the eldest pair what bred the rest.

"Sooner or later, though, they'll bump up against humans. Maybe something bigger and nastier pushed them out of the deep water, like a sea spawn master or a pack o' jolly rogers, or somethin' else ugly an' mean. Or maybe the trade winds changed a bit, and ships start cruising by in waters what used to be lonely an' quiet. Or maybe a pack's bred up till it's too big for its territory, and so it's spreading out. Sooner or later, people and Ferals come head to head, like it or not, and the Ferals fight back.

"Now, lots o' animals are territorial, but Ferals, they is territorial and *mean* about it. They fight like a bunch o' screamin' rabid crazies, and unlike regular wild beasts, they haven't figured out the whole 'retreat' thing too well. When something pushes them, or just wanders by lookin' vulnerable, they'll attack it all-out – no fear, no quarter, no gods-damned brains in their heads – and they'll kill it if they can.

"The Ferals aren't long on subtlety. They'll swim up to a human ship, clamber aboard, an' start killing everything in sight. Or maybe do wors'n that, if they decide to have some fun and there's some hot pincers or hot tar or cat-o'-nine-tails lyin' around on deck. Like I said: territorial, but mean about it.

"Occasionally, o' course, they'll whip up something clever. Sometimes, Ferals will put a shipwreck or derelict

out where anyone coming into their territory can see it, and wait for people to come over and check it out. Then they kill the folks what came over to look. If they've got a smart chief, they'll do for the scouting party all quiet-like, in hopes the captain of whatever sorry ship it is will send some more men over, to see what's takin' the first lot so long. That way, they can kill the next batch, too. Then they go and kill everybody left on board the ship, 'cause half the poor fools are already dead.

"Anyway, that's Ferals. Nasty blokes, but they're a tad simple, I reckon, an' they don't know or care squat about life outside their home waters. They just try and rip your face off."

Civils

"Now, lot of seawolves ain't so touchy about not having been born with fur," Zeke added after a moment. "'Civils', they're called, though no seawolf is what you call mighty civil.

"Some of 'em ... the Civils, that is ... like humans fine, and not just for eating. They like beds to sleep in, liquor to drink, dice to play; an' they really like them accommodating 'women o' easy virtue', what you find 'round the docks in any port." The boatswain waggled his scraggly eyebrows suggestively at this; a fairly comical sight, if truth be told.

"Now, living among humans means they can't always do as they like. Seawolves may be ornery critters, but they wouldn't hold out so long against a hundred or so angry sailors. So the Civils have learned to be a lil' bit more sneaky-like. Fact is, Mistuh, ye could be in a room with a whole pack o' Civils, an' never know they weren't jest an ship's ordinary crew.

"O' course, the worst part is that, while Ferals only eat people when they think their turf's been invaded, Civils chow down on human folk, every chance they get." Zeke grinned evilly, and I wondered just how often the man had told this story. The firelight glinted off the old sailor's tobacco-stained teeth. "Civils eat fish, sure, same as other seawolves, but they – what do you fancy types call it? – 'supplement their diet' a good bit, too."

"But wouldn't the sailors notice people going missing, if such a large band of seawolves was in port?" I asked him

Zeke burst out in a loud, hearty laugh at that, and I could hear a few snickers from our audience. After a few moments, he calmed down, looking almost pensive. "You haven't stayed in port for a long spell, have you?" he asked. I shook my head.

"In my homeland, there are many ports, so that people may sail from island to island," the Rokuma cut in. Zeke seemed to sniff at this interruption, but he said nothing. "But you must understand: ports are always changing. Every day, ship leaves, takes sailors with it; ship arrives, people travel inland. Or sailors get drunk, forget to be back when ship sails. Every time captain arrives at port, he loses some sailors, hires some new ones. If sailor does not come back, does captain think sailor eaten by thing with many teeth? No, captain think sailor found young woman, found old wine; think sailor is drunk, is found other work, is in jail for being bother to someone.

"And so, no one notices. Sea wolves not only ones who do this, but they do it best."

"They can get away with such things so easily?" I asked, slightly unnerved. I

had known about the transient habits of sailors, of course, but it was disturbing to consider just how vast and unguarded a source of prey a city's docks could afford, for the various predators of the night.

"Yes," Richie nodded. "Seawolves, they are one large pack together, and packmate helps packmate. Once seawolf pack claims a port for their own, they take control of many things. They become like *yakuza*." I wrinkled my brow at the unfamiliar word, and Richie sought the right words to explain it. "They are like... bandits? Bands of criminals, but even law fears them, for they are many and strong. Sometimes, they keep docks safe; it is *their* docks, their territory, so not let others do harm there. But they do as they please, and law does not apply to them."

"Like Talons," Helmut grumbled from the side. I nodded, grasping the gist of what Richie was saying.

"The Civils, they can get reeeeeeal fussy about guardin' their favorite stomping grounds," Zeke chuckled. "You see more than one pack move into town, you're in for a fight, cause if one pack's got something good, the other'll want to take it, see? Packs'll tear each other apart rather than share. Other critters, too, for that matter: I heard tell of a whole nest o' dockyard wer-ee-rats, got hounded out of their lairs and 'et up by seawolves, jealous of their hunting turf.

"And once a pack of seawolves gets settled, they start branching out, see? They're like a criminal gang. 'Cept that criminals don't generally turn into ravening wolf-men an' rip yer face off.

"Well, outside o' Kartakass they don't." Zeke amended after a moment's thought.

"Certainly the local police would notice this eventually," I exclaimed, but Zeke just shook his head, a slightly amused look on his face.

"Warlords of Rokushima Taiyoo care not what happens in port, long as they get what they want from it," Richie explained. "Harbormasters are easy to buy with gold, or other things. Those who cannot be bought are silenced other ways." There was an unpleasant look in the Rokuma's eyes as he said this.

"Hmph," Helmut grunted. "Lawmen can come. What they do? Swim into water and arrest seals?"

I admitted I hadn't considered that, and Zeke chuckled again.

"True, Civils may prefer being human, but they ain't stupid," he said. "No, sirree. They *can* turn into seals iffen they want, and they ain't gonna let that knack go to waste! Often-times, you'll find 'em out on pirate ships, pickin' off merchants and stealin' cargo. Somethin' goes bad, they jest go all seal-y and swim off."

"You mean to tell me that 'Civils' engage in piracy?" I asked.

"Sure, it's common enough. There's hardly any risk for *them*, so why not?" Zeke paused for a moment, stroking his beard thoughtfully, before adding, "They ain't all that much different from human pirates, most the time, same as they're not all that much different-like from your run-o'-the-mill crook. But there's a few tricks seawolf corsairs got that normal ones ain't, and tricks that don't work so well on dry land. So most Civils, they pirate a bit."

"Tricks, such as...?" I asked, frantically writing. Academic grant committees were not, I had found, entirely comfortable with lycanthropy as a research topic, but *piracy* was a threat

even my countrymen in Lamordia would take seriously! Fellowships danced before my eyes.

"Well, for one, seawolves can swim like champions, an' can slip from ship to shore and back again as easy as you might step out to the corner shop. Some of 'em like having a nice ship under their feet, but others prefer to bed down in port. So, what you get is seawolves swimming out to a ship, climbing aboard, and killing all the sorry sailors they can get their clawed hands on. Then they sail off to some other port, sell the ship and cargo, and gamble away the proceeds 'till they run out o' cash. Then, they pick some other ship an' do it again."

"For two, seawolves is big, nasty critters, and they see real good in the dark. So, they can sail around at night, no problem, or wait till nightfall to attack, when the crew they're lookin' to surprise is sleeping and can't see their hands afore o' their faces. So even packs that has got a ship and want to keep it have an advantage over reg'lar sailors." Zeke grinned.

"Course, unlike human corsairs, seawolves don't have but one use for prisoners, so they usually eat the whole lot. You don't want to be caught by a seawolf ship, Mistuh, and '*specially* not one that's been voyaging for long days or weeks on end: the whole crew'll be powerful sick o' fish for dinner, if ye catch my meanin'."

He went to take a swig from his mug, peering at it balefully when he found it empty, and I dutifully offered to pay for another round of drinks.

"But if too many seawolves get chopped up or blown to bits, or if they find someone real useful-like ... well,

Seawolf Diet

Like all lycanthropes, seawolves are carnivores of the first order, and require approximately twenty-five pounds of raw meat daily, or fifty pounds for greater seawolves. Most of the time, seawolves eat fish, regardless of regional or cultural variations.

However, seawolves cannot subsist on fish indefinitely. At least once every month, seawolves need to eat double their usual allotment (50 lbs or 100 lbs, respectively) of red meat, otherwise they begin to weaken due to a lack of vital nutrients. In other words, they need to eat a moderately sized mammal once a month. Both cultural groupings prefer humans as their meal of choice, but are can and will sate their hunger on marine mammals such as dolphins or regular seals.

As a side note, the above represent minimums. All seawolves prefer red meat to fish, and will prey as heavily on the local mammalian populations as is possible without hurting their own prospects (either by killing off all the dolphins or by causing too much of a stir amongst law enforcement).

then a crew of Civils might jest take ‘em on board.

“Now, if they get someone who don’t want to join up, but is real handy, like a doctor or a carpenter, they *don’t* want to make ‘em a seawolf,” Zeke added, “‘cause then they can just jump overboard an’ swim for it, and ye can say ‘bon voyage-y’ to the Doc! But if they get some sailors who volunteer to join the crew, then they’ll make ‘em a part of the pack.”

“People *volunteer* to become seawolves?” I interrupted, incredulous.

“See a reason not to?” Zeke laughed. “Sailing’s a rough, nasty life, and you’ll lose a few hands every trip, often as not. But if yer a pirate, then ye got a chance to retire rich, and if yer a seawolf as well, you got a real good chance of surviving ‘til then.” His eyes glinted in the firelight as he raised his mug to his lips. “Not a bad deal, for some people.”

Lone Wolves

“Mmm, seems like that’s about all there is to say ‘bout that,” Zeke said, after taking a deep swig.

“But what was it you were saying before, about seawolves that don’t have a pack?” I quickly asked, unwilling to let him end the conversation just yet.

“Ah, the ‘lone wolves’,” Zeke replied, recalling the pun with a chuckle. “Hard to say that much about them – they’re all different, see – but that lot do have a few points o’ what the toffs call ‘convergence’.

“Now, a ‘lone wolf’ is a seawolf that ain’t got a pack for some reason or another. Most o’ the time, it’s because he messed up big, I mean *real* big, and the pack kicked him out. Sometimes, it’s ‘cause he used to have a pack, but somethin’ real bad happened, and the whole lot got wiped out, ‘cept for the one. And sometimes, it’s cause they got a real nasty streak in ‘em; maybe they don’t like taking orders from anyone, or maybe they just don’t like other seawolves.”

“In Six Islands, sometimes sailors, or even *samurai* – warriors – are bitten by seawolves,” Richie added. “They cannot turn to their lords; they are a risk to their *daimyo* and will be forced to commit *seppuku*, and peasants will tear them apart if they are discovered. They flee into the waves when the change comes,

with no one to help them.” I wrinkled my brow at the unfamiliar terms, but before I could ask Richie to explain, Zeke began speaking again.

“Ooh, yeah, and sometimes some poor bloke jest won’t admit he’s got the bug. Fellow’ll wander around, causing havoc when he transforms, pretendin’ it didn’t happen rest of the time. Any which way you look at it, a lone wolf is a pretty sad, desperate feller, and that makes ‘em dangerous. They ain’t got as much to lose.

“Now, a lone wolf wants one thing, come the changing,” Zeke explained, “and that’s to eat. Seawolves, they got a powerful hunger, and without a pack, a lone wolf’s gotta fill its belly on its own. Eatin’ fish jest don’t cut it, not when it’s got the hunger bad. But a lone wolf ain’t got anyone to help ‘em out, and one seawolf ain’t no match for a band of sailors. So most times, the sorry creatures gotta scavenge what they can, however they can get it. Most lone wolves are half-starved, all the time. If one gets bold or desperate enough, it’ll pop on up to a ship and kill itself a sentry to eat. ‘Course, it don’t want to get caught, so it’ll try and haul the body overboard with it, but sometimes it’s famished enough to just chow down, right then an’ there.

“But a lone wolf doesn’t want to eat scraps for the rest of its life, so the other thing they want is money. They can’t operate as pirates, like the Civils do – not all by their lonesome – so mostly they do the same thing on a smaller scale. They find someone they can bully, or a place they can steal stuff from, and make a nice, cozy little niche for themselves there. Sometimes they go out diving for shipwrecks; humans can’t dredge up sunken cargo, but a seawolf

don’t have that problem. They’re like human treasure divers, always hoping they’ll find a sunken treasure galleon or somethin’ to make ‘em rich.

“Those are the usual ways that lone wolves hit upon, to keep body and hide together. But sometimes, you get a lone wolf that’s more creative, more ambitious, than that ... an’ *those* are the ones you got to watch out for,” Zeke said, his voice growing suddenly serious.

“How do you mean?” I asked, pausing in my writing.

“Sometimes, a lone wolf ain’t satisfied with jest picking off sailors, one by one. It up and decides it wants the whole shipfull for itself,” Zeke elaborated.

“But I thought you said a single seawolf was no match for an entire ship’s complement,” I said, unable to quite take his meaning. Or perhaps I merely hoped I’d guessed wrongly, where this was going. Alas, my suspicions weren’t wrong.

“No match, if he just runs up and attacks,” Zeke agreed. “That’s why it’s the *clever* ones, who are the real threat. These cunning blokes’ll climb aboard at night, kill the helmsman, and run the ship straight into some rocks. Or if they’re *really* sneaky, they’ll sign on with the crew as a navigator, plot a course to some nameless flyspeck of an island, and run the ship aground. Then they can feast for weeks, nabbing stranded men off the isle one by one, knowing the poor fools in their larder can’t possibly escape.”

“Very strong seawolf can break rudders, if wind is low and ship not travel fast,” Richie added.

Seawolves with Classes

The vast majority of seawolves are Experts, with skills and feat choices appropriate for a normal sailor (Stormwrack). Seawolves who adopt adventuring classes are most often fighters or rogues, subject to regional and cultural variations. Scouts (Complete Adventurer) are also fairly common, if used, and usually possess the Swim-by Attack feat (Stormwrack).

Cultural Classes

Ferals: Ferals are unusual in that many NPC-classed Ferals are warriors, rather than experts. Ferals with adventuring classes are more often barbarians rather than fighters, or barbarian/fighter multiclassed; rangers are also fairly common, with seal animal companions being popular among them. The very rare Feral spellcasters are usually druids.

Civils: Civils have a strong rogue tradition, and many seawolves with PHB classes are pure or multiclassed rogues. Many seawolf leaders are bards, in the tradition of tavern story-tellers, while others advance into the assassin prestige class as soon as possible.

Lone Wolves: Lone wolves follow no guidelines; any class is possible among them, even unusual ones, although seawolf monks cannot advance further and paladins soon lose their abilities. Lone wolves of the stealthier classes tend to survive longer, so rogues and rogue/assassins are common. Among seawolves, both wizards and sorcerers will usually be packless loners.

Regional Classes

Rokuma: Seawolves from Rokushima Taiyoo tend to be much more organized and hierarchal than their kin elsewhere, and to follow the customs of the land more closely. As such, samurai, shugenja, ninja, and wu jen from the Complete series are all present, though none but the ninja are common. Fallen monks are also present in many packs, and there are fewer outright rogues and more fighters than in gaijin seawolf packs.

Sea of Sorrows: Sea of Sorrows seawolves are the most sophisticated and long-established of all the packs, and their membership tends to be higher-level and more plentiful than other seawolves, with more than a few members advancing into prestige classes. Uniquely, clerics of the Wolf God are found in many of the larger packs, both Feral and Civil, often serving in an advisory role to the pack leader.

Nocturnal Sea: The Nocturnal Sea's seawolf society is highly fragmented by distance and by the cultural differences between islands. Its packs are younger and smaller, and individual seawolves must be more self-sufficient. As such, multi-classed seawolves are common there. Likewise, the prevalence of dark magic and esoteric forces in the region means that spellcasting seawolves are more abundant here, either as lone wolves or leaders of small packs of afflicted underlings. Such seawolf spellcasters are usually warlocks (Complete Arcane), sorcerers, or necromancers. A few seawolves in the region are actually former experiments of either Meredoth or Easan, released or escaped into the wild; likewise, a handful are actually lycanthropy-afflicted selkies (see *The Ocean's Feryymen, Dread Selkies of the Nocturnal Sea* article), combining the powers of two shapechanging monsters in a single creature.

"I hear story once," Helmut rumbled from his chair. "Seawolf have strong light it puts out on foggy days. Ships mistake it for lighthouse, run aground on sharp rocks."

"There's a lot o' things that can befall a ship at sea," Zeke finished. "Most o' the time, the ship goes down with all hands, so there's no witnesses, right? And even if someone knows it was a seawolf that did it, there ain't nothin' they can do about it. You could scour the seas for the rest o' your life, and never again cross paths with the one yer looking for."

Regional Variations

This brought a short lull to the conversation, as I mulled over this elaborate social make-up of what was, in truth, a pack of lycanthropic criminals. 'Ferals' and 'civils' and 'lone wolves' and who knew what else ... astounding! Yet, as it turned out, Zeke's encyclopedic knowledge of seawolves was not yet exhausted.

"Now, o' course, there's more to seawolves than jest the kind o' culture they've built up among themselves," Zeke observed in his odd, unplaceable accent. "There's a world o' difference between a navy man and a merchant's mate, but there's *also* a whole heap o' differences 'tween a Rokuma navy man and a Vaasi navy man. Seawolves ain't no different."

"These things have nations, as well?" I knew that my eyes lit up with interest. Forget my thesis, forget even fellowships; I'd be able to write a *book* on this subject.

"Not exactly-like ... but see, a seawolf isn't just a seawolf: most o' them blokes, they was reg'lar people

before they become seawolves. The ones what get born a seawolf are few and far between. But because o' that, plenty of them think a bit differently. A seawolf over off the coast o' Egertus ain't quite the same as a bloke up in Martira Bay.

"First, ye got yerself the fellers in the Sea of Sorrows: the oldest, the most established, and the most numerous o' the bunch. They think they're the *best* of the bunch as well, and they won't hesitate to tell you so. They likes to brag on themselves so much, some'll even sit an' talk a spell with ye, sooner than rip yer throat out. Ye'll still get *et*, when the yammering's done, mind, but ye'll die with curiosity satisfied, I suppose." There was a twinkle in Zeke's eye as he said this, and a low snicker circulated around the audience. I wondered about that, a bit; it wasn't *that* funny a joke.

"Sea o' Sorrows seawolves have got age an' experience going for them, and theirs are the biggest packs. A pack that's staked out a good-sized city like Port-a-Lucine or Martira Bay for its territory might have twenty, even thirty members. That don't happen elsewhere; most places, if they got a dozen crew an' two or three officers, they're doin' right well.

"The Sorrows packs are the biggest seawolf crews around, an' they have the most history. Way *I* hear tell, the Mordentshire pack's been a goin' concern for, oh, it must be two or three hundred years now. This means those packs have got themselves connections, lots of 'em, and maybe even allies where you'd least expect it. Not just the Civils, either; the Ferals may not have much love for human-types, but there's other critters in the Sea of Sorrows besides plain normal folks.

"Sea of Sorrows packs are real good at what they do, 'cause they've been

Seawolf Alignment

Like all lycanthropes, seawolves may begin with any alignment prior to infection. By and by large, however, they eventually come to rest at the Neutral Evil alignment. Most seawolves were sailors prior to infection, and seawolf packs retain a certain rough and ready hierarchy, a mix of unquestioning obedience and violent individualism.

Rokuma seawolves, with their tendency to adopt the stricter hierarchy of their homeland, tend towards Lawful Evil, though sizeable portions remain Neutral Evil. Nocturnal Sea seawolves, on the other hand, tend to be more chaotic due to the fragmented nature of packs in that area, with many being Chaotic Evil instead of Neutral Evil. Ferals tend to be more Chaotic, while Civils tend to be more Lawful. Lone Wolves, of course, run the gamut of alignments.

doing it for a while. And also, maybe, 'cause they've had more of a *need*: there's much more law an' order in the west than the east, and a lot more nosy hero-types snoopin' into everything. So the seawolves have had to learn to hide what they get up to, pretty good, or at least pass it off as somethin' else: press gangs nabbin' strong backs for their ships, smugglers killin' witnesses, whatever works.

"Lastly, they've had more time to get something of an organized society going. So some seawolf packs start looking like guilds, usually, or merchants' associations, or even just a higher class o' crook than the usual buccaneer rabble. Plus, they might have their own police-type folk, to keep the pack going the right way, and I hear tell that some o'

them even have chaplains from Verbrek."

Zeke paused, and Richie quickly picked up the thread of the narrative. I was fast growing used to his curious Rokuman accent. "Seawolves in my homeland, they are not so many as they are in Sea of the Sorrows, but they are good at working together, for they have discipline and organization of *yakuza*. They are like *samurai* of the people; they take, but they give protection as well, from depredations of the warlords."

"In exchange for depredations of the seawolves." Helmut commented, with a deep-seated Falkovnian cynicism. Richie shot him a disdainful glare, then continued.

"Seawolves of Great Mirror Lake, they listen to their master, and there is a strict... what is term... hierarchy. At top you have *Oyabun*, who is like Alpha in Core, but also respected elder. You have *Wakagashira*, the first Beta, and *Shateigashira*, second Beta. They serve the *Oyabun*, life and soul. Then there are the *kyodai*, the elder wolves, and the *shatei*, the younger wolves. All serve one above, and fight beside each other, in fashion of true nobles."

"Or at least, that's the idea. Don' reckon it always works out *quite* as it should." Zeke drawled, giving Richie a friendly wink. "Rokuma seawolves are just as sneaky and backstabbing sons of snakes as the rest o' them, they is just more coy about it.

"Now the *real* odd ones out, o' course, are the Nocturnal Sea seawolves. Nocturnal Sea is a strange place: lots o' magic, lots o' strange sights an' sounds on the waves. Things go bump in the night there, and slither about, deep down in the water, that even a seawolf don't

relish thinkin' about. There's *magic* in them dark, dark waves, you ask me.

"So, most o' the packs out in the Nocturnal Sea, they're smaller than here in the west, and oft-times they're commanded by some kind o' sea-witch, not a proper captain. Well, *they* call 'em captains or Alphas or whatever, but they're likelier to be some dried-up ol' stick of a geezer who twists your insides with a word than a big strappin' fellow like Fritz, here."

"Name is Helmut...", the Falkovnian grumbled, with a long-suffering sigh of resignation.

"Any which way you want it, *Fritz*," Zeke retorted, and winked at me. "Course, witches and warlocks not being what you educated types might call 'conducive to peaceful coexistence', they an' their packs don't play so well together. Nocturnal Sea packs, Ferals and Civils both, tend to fall apart if their leaders get killed, and the lone wolves, they is *real* paranoid out there."

Pursuit

"But how do you *stop* these things?" I asked. It was turning out, so far, to be a grim tale indeed, and I wanted some reassurance that not all was so bleak in the world. "They're organized, intelligent, stronger and more powerful than humans, and they can't be caught. How do you *stop* seawolves?"

"Well, mostly, you don't." The old sailor cackled, his voice grown coarse from liquor and chewing tobacco. Amused by my expression, Zeke grinned at me with those stained, but sturdy teeth, and continued. "Most times, your best bet against 'em is just to roll over and die, 'cause *those* sea scum are tough."

This was not what I desired to hear. Sensing my discomfort, Zeke went on, chuckling to himself. (A little inappropriately, I thought.)

"Eh, first rule you gotta learn, if you don't want to get et up by some overgrown, web-footed wer-ee-wolves, is that you always gotta carry some whale-bone on ye. With lie-can-tropes, ye can't hurt 'em more'n a little, less ye have something special to hurt 'em with,

Seawolf Vulnerabilities

Seawolves are vulnerable to weapons made of whale's bone, specifically the bones of 'Toothed Whales' such as Orca or Sperm Whales. Despite its specific origins, whale's bone functions identically to regular bone weapons presented in the VRA. It should be noted that 'Whalebone' is technically Baleen, which is entirely too soft to make a weapon out of, something a seawolf hunter may learn to their sorrow.

Amaranth is a family of some sixty-odd herbs that are variously considered ornamental flowers, grains, leaf vegetables, or simply weeds. Amaranth is sometimes called 'Pigweed' by those less poetically inclined. All amaranth is deathly poisonous to seawolves, functioning as an ingested poison requiring a DC 20 save or 1d6/2d6 Con damage.

Necropolitan amaranth is equally poisonous to seawolves as its less arcane brethren, but has the additionally property that a seawolf slain by Necropolitan amaranth will not decay, though of course vermin or scavengers may do with the body what they wish. Such a deceased seawolf is also immune to any spell or effect that would seek to turn it into an undead.

and for seawolves, it's bone from whales. See, there's a kind of whale out there, that eats seals – what the whaling-ship crews call 'killer whales' – so there's some kinda mystic connection between them whales killing seals, an' their bones killin' seawolves. *You* carryin' any whale-bone, boy?"

"Er... no?" I replied, caught off-guard by yet another non-sequitur.

"Now, that *is* a shame." Zeke shook his head in mock sadness. "Iffen ol' *Fritz* over there was a seawolf, you couldn't even hurt him. Not like ye could hurt him much, anyways, but that's not the point o' the matter. Most sailors carry a bit of whale's bone around, but it don't hold an edge too well and it's mighty brittle stuff, though you can stab some bloke with it fine."

"Second rule ye gotta keep in mind is to carry some amaranth on ye. It's this grain what blooms real pretty, you find in lots o' places; its flowers don't never fade, or so say the ole poets. 'Course, you need to somehow get the seawolf to *eat* it if it's to work, but it's poison to the critter if it does, jest like wolfsbane to a wer-ee-wolf. Ye wouldn't have any o' that with ye either, would ye, lad? No? Pity.

"Third rule, and the most important, mind ye, is to never, ever, *ever* fight a seawolf in the water. They swim like fishies, and they can hold their breath for a *long* time." Zeke continued, taking yet another swig of the ale. Had the ale not been weak as water, the man would have surely fallen under the table by then, I imagine. "In water, the seawolf is bound to be a lot faster and more agile-like than ye are.

"So what ye need to do, if ye can, is get the seawolves to come out onto land. Lure 'em from their natural element,

like. I hear free whiskey works well." The old man gave a slightly drunken chuckle. "If ye can get a seawolf up on land, it's not much more than a wer-ee-wolf with wet fur. 'Course, even a wer-ee-wolf is a right nasty critter ... but still.

"Sometimes, ye meet up with seawolves way out on the open sea, so ye can't lure 'em up on dry land, 'cause there ain't no land around, to lure 'em up onto! Inside a ship can work jest as well, though, iffen you can get them down below deck where they can't just hop overboard an' hightail it away into the deep.

"Fourth is this. Don't ever let too many seawolves come at ye, at once. We hunt in packs, and if ye let a half-dozen big, brawny seawolves get around ye ... well, ye can kiss yer sweet self goodbye, 'cause the only other fight ye'll ever be a part of, is when the six of 'em argue over the tastiest bits o' ye. Instead, it's smartest to lure a few seawolves away at a time, an' to fight 'em in a bottleneck or somethin', where they can't slip back an' surround ye. A doorway on a ship is a good place, assumin' the seawolf doesn't just decide to rip itself a new door in the bulkhead. Big ones can do that, ye know.

"That's about it. Fightin' seawolves ain't all that different from fightin' their land-walker cousins, really, 'cept for the whole 'don' get caught in the water' thing."

Conclusion

"My word... thank you, thank you so very much." I rubbed my eyes. Heavens, it must have been well past midnight, at least! I had to return to the hostel. And then... something caught my attention, far too late. "Er... 'We hunt'?"

Zeke cackled again, his demeanor abruptly far less intoxicated than I'd thought him. A low, ominous chuckle spread throughout the audience – a crowd of figures whose presence, and attentiveness, had suddenly turned far more ominous – and the hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up.

“There's a fifth rule, boy. Seawolves, even when they're human, don't look like most lie-can-tropes ... and sometimes, they fancy a late-night snack what nobody'll miss. Ye understand me, boy?”

And he grinned. And I saw the fangs. And I understood.

There are many things, Laurie, that are odd and strange in the world. I was attempting a séance a few days ago for Mrs. Bellamy in Mordentshire, regarding the provisions of her late husband's will, and instead found myself in contact with another spirit. Knowing your interest in all kinds of mysteries, I thought that you and Gennifer might find something useful in this.

- Cousin Michael

Leopard Seal

CR 4

Always N Large animal

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4; low-light vision, scent

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 12
(+3 Dex, +3 natural, -1 size)

hp 45 (6 HD)

Fort +8, **Ref** +8, **Will** +2

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), swim 60 ft.

Melee bite +9 (2d6+9)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +14

Atk Options improved grab, thrash

Abilities Str 23, Dex 17, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 10

SQ hold breath

Feats Alertness, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Run

Skills Hide +5 (+9 in the water), Listen +4, Spot +4, Swim +17

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, the leopard seal must hit with a bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can thrash. Leopard seals take no penalty to their swim speed when grappling a single creature of a smaller size category than themselves.

Thrash (Ex) A leopard seal that establishes a hold on a foe of a smaller size category than itself can thrash its victim about, using its powerful neck muscles to beat the prey violently against the water's surface. This is a standard action which can be performed only at the surface. Thrashing deals bludgeoning damage equal to 1½ the leopard seal's bite attack, and any creature being thrashed must make a Fort save (DC 19) or be *sickened* by pain and disorientation. The save DC is Strength-based.

Hold Breath (Ex): A leopard seal can hold its breath for a number of rounds equal to 6 × its Constitution score before it risks drowning. For a typical leopard seal, this is 102 rounds, or just over 10 minutes.

Skills: A leopard seal has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform a special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a

straight line. Leopard seals receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide checks when in the water.

The leopard seal is a fearsome marine predator, which roams the icy waters off Lamordia and the Finger. It is the only species of seal known to attack human beings without any provocation, although its usual prey are seabirds, fish, sea otters, and smaller breeds of seal.

Strategies and Tactics

If excited or inclined to attack, a leopard seal is capable of dragging human-size victims deep beneath the icy waters, or of brutally thrashing opponents against the sea's surface until the very skin is torn from the hapless captive's body. Their jaws are immensely powerful, and even a non-aggressive leopard seal may be quick to bare its teeth at potential threats, as an intimidation display.

Ecology

Leopard seals are the largest of seals, up to twelve feet in length and weighing as much as 1300 pounds, with a dark grey-brown back and lighter stomach with the spots that are one of the reasons for its name. The other reason is their ferocity; unlike any other seal or sea lion, sometimes they will attack human or humanoid explorers that draw too close to them, although other times they may merely inspect intruders curiously, then lose interest.

They do not hesitate to fight in defense of their pups, their food, or their access to precious breathing-holes in the ice. Crafty hunters, they lurk under the shadowy bulks of icebergs or alongside sea stacks, ready to ambush lesser seals or diving birds as their unsuspecting quarry set out to fish.

Seawolf, Dread

cr3

This natural seawolf's base creature is a 1st level human warrior with the following ability scores: Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Humanoid Form

Usually CE Medium humanoid (shapechanger)

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +2, Spot +2; low-light vision, scent.

Languages One humanoid language of choice

OR 0

AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12
(+0 Dex, +2 natural)

hp 20 (3 HD); **DR** 10/whalebone

Fort +5, **Ref** +4, **Will** +4

Weaknesses chemical bane (amaranth),
The Hunger (25 lbs)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee cutlass +3 (1d6+1/19-20)

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3

Special Actions alternate form, seawolf's empathy

Abilities Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 10,
Wis 11, Cha 8

SQ hold breath, seawolf's empathy

Feats Alertness^B, Control Shape^B, Iron Will^B

Skills Climb +3, Listen +2, Profession
(Sailor) +4, Spot +2, Swim +13, Use
Rope +2

Alternate Form (Su): A sea wolf can assume a bipedal hybrid form similar to that of a werewolf, or the form of a seal with a wolf-like head. A hybrid-form sea wolf is distinguishable from a regular werewolf by its webbed hands and feet.

Curse of Lycanthropy (Su): Any humanoid or giant hit by a sea wolf's

bite attack in its animal or hybrid form must succeed on a DC 18 Fortitude save or contract lycanthropy.

Sea Wolf Empathy (Ex): A seawolf can communicate and empathize with normal or dire wolves or seals. This gives it a +4 racial bonus on Charisma-based checks when influencing such animals' attitudes, and allows the communication of simple concepts and (if the animal is friendly) commands.

Hold Breath (Ex): A sea wolf can hold its breath for a number of rounds equal to 6× its Constitution score before it risks drowning. For a typical sea wolf, this is 96 rounds, or just over 9 minutes.

Skills: A sea wolf has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform a special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Hybrid Form

As per humanoid form, modified as follows:

Init +2

OR 6

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15
(+2 Dex, +5 natural)

Fort +7, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 20 ft.

Melee 2 claws +4 (1d6+2) and bite +2 (1d8+1)

Grp +4

Atk Options Curse of Lycanthropy (DC 18)

Abilities Str 15, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8

Feats Alertness^B, Control Shape^B, Iron Will^B, Multiattack, Weapon Focus (bite)^B

Skills Climb +4, Listen +2, Profession (sailor) +4, Spot +2, Swim +14, Use Rope +4

Animal Form

As per hybrid form, further modified as follows:

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 40 ft.

Melee bite +4 (1d8+3)

Feats Alertness^B, Control Shape^B, Iron Will^B, Weapon Focus (bite)^B

Skills Listen +2, Spot +2, Swim +14

Greater Sea Wolf **CR 5**

Usually CE Medium/Large Humanoid (Shapechanger)

Init [Humanoids form] +0; **Init** [Hybrid & Animal form] +3; **Senses** Low-Light Vision, Scent. Spot +2, Listen +2

Languages [Domain language of choice]

AC [Humanoid form] 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12

(+0 Dex, +2 natural [racial])

AC [Hybrid & Animal form] 16, touch 11, flat-footed 14

(-1 size, +2 Dex, +5 natural [racial])

hp 56 (7 HD); **DR** 10/Whalebone

[Humanoid form] Fort +8, **Ref** +5, **Will** +4

[Hybrid & Animal form] Fort +11, **Ref** +8, **Will** +4

Speed [Humanoid form] 30 ft. (6 squares)

Speed [Hybrid form] 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 20 ft (4 squares)

Speed [Animal form] 10 ft. (2 squares), swim 60 ft (12 squares)

Melee [Humanoid form] cutlass +6 (1d6+6/19-20x2)

Melee [Hybrid form] 2 claws +11 (1d6+7 each) and bite +9 (1d8+3)

Melee [Animal form] bite +11 (1d8+10)

Space [Humanoid form] 5 ft. **Space** [Hybrid & Animal form] 10 ft. **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +5; **Grp** [Humanoid form] +6
Grp [Hybrid & Animal form] +16

Attack Options Curse of Lycanthropy (DC 18), Improved Grab

Special Options Thrash

Abilities [Humanoid form] Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8

Abilities [Hybrid & Animal form] Str 25, Dex 17, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8

SQ Hold Breath, Alternate Form, Sea Wolf Empathy, Chemical Bane (Amaranth), The Hunger (25 lbs)

Feats Improved Natural Attack (Bite)^B, Iron Will^B, Alertness^B, Run^B, Multiattack

Skills [Humanoid form] Profession (Sailor) +6, Use Rope +2, Climb +3, Hide +0(+4 in the water), Swim +11, Spot +2, Listen +2

Skills [Hybrid & Animal form] Profession (Sailor) +6, Use Rope +5, Climb +9, Hide -1(+3 in the water), Swim +22, Spot +2, Listen +2

Advancement by character class

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the greater sea wolf must hit with a bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check it establishes a hold and can thrash. Provided it is in the water, greater sea wolves receive no penalty to their movement speed due to grappling and can move their full movement speed upon winning an opposed grapple check.

Thrash (Ex): A greater sea wolf that establishes a hold on a foe can thrash it about using its powerful neck muscles to

beat the foe against the surface of the water until its very skin peels off. This is a standard action and can only be done while on the surface of the water. Thrashing deals damage equal to 1½ the greater sea wolf's bite attack and any creature being thrashed is sickened by the pain.

Alternate Form (Su): A greater sea wolf can assume a bipedal hybrid form similar to that of a mountain loup-garou, or that of a giant seal with a wolf-like head. A hybrid-form greater sea wolf is distinguishable from a regular werewolf by its webbed hands and feet.

Curse of Lycanthropy (Su): Any humanoid or giant hit by a sea wolf's bite attack in animal or hybrid form must succeed on a DC 18 Fortitude save or contract lycanthropy.

Sea Wolf Empathy (Ex): Communicate with wolves or seals, and +4 racial bonus on Charisma-based checks against wolves and seals.

Hold Breath (Ex): A greater sea wolf can hold its breath for a number of rounds equal to 6 × its Constitution score before it risks drowning. For a typical greater sea wolf, this is 108 rounds, or just under 11 minutes.

Skills: A greater sea wolf has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform a special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line. Greater sea wolves receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide checks whilst in the water.

[Based on a 1st level Human Warrior and Natural Greater Sea Wolf, with the following ability scores: Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8]

The Pumpkin Sword

A Halloween Story

By Kadarin

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*A bitter heart that bides its time and
bites.*

— Robert Browning, Caliban Upon
Setebos, 1864, v. 167

That ugly brute – you do not even know what it is, that’s something for sages, priests, and wizards to figure out – has shattered your beloved blade with his crude club. You are a renowned fighter, known throughout the lands, exploring this ancient building and relieving it of its treasures; and now you have not only lost your weapon but are about to be killed by a...

Wait.... As you dived down to avoid the last blow your hand touched something metallic. Something like the hilt of a sword. For a bizarre moment, you have the sensation of being in another place. You are in some kind of a field, surrounded by big, round vegetables. The moment is gone and you’re face to face with that ugly thing, but this time with sword in hand. You stab that dirty beast and you feel good. As soon as you are outside, you look at the full moon. It seems somewhat

strange, as if it had taken on another color.

Under the light of the rising sun, you examine the blade you found. It seems to be a perfectly normal sword – well-balanced, with no decoration. It is made of a kind of dull steel. Something is unusual; the dull grey color doesn’t really fit. Still, this is stuff for sages, priests, and wizards. You decide not to worry and to forget about it. It’s only a sword.

That night, you do not sleep very well. Maybe it’s because of the full moon. It looks different from the moon you remember. As a child, you wondered about the serene face of the moon. Now it looks evil, with a toothy grin. It is definitely the wrong color. You cannot now remember what would be the right color – was it grey? silver? green? Again, these are affairs of sages, priests, and wizards.

Maybe the blade is magical, but, well, it is a good blade. Not very effective against undead but very deadly

for all kinds of living creatures, especially at night, and more so under a full moon.

You haven't slept well in the last three months, since you first laid your hand on the sword. And the moon still looks wrong. And the sword not only looks wrong, but feels wrong, as if it was something different – and alive.

You are getting more and more anxious. And twitchy. And angry. A week before, you killed three city guards for getting in your way. And the moon still has the wrong color.

Poor Jack. You don't know when, or why, you have started to call the moon "Jack". No, you remember all too well; you just do not want to remember.

It was on a beautiful summer day, when you killed your old friend Jack because he had a laugh at you. It was something completely harmless, just a harmless joke. And you killed him. And at dawn, the full moon rose, in its strange color and with its toothy grin. And you called him Jack. And laughed.

Of course, you had to leave the group. They did not want a madman like you in their ranks. Idiots. But a sword for hire is always wanted, so you earn your copper, and silver, and sometimes gold. You're still not sleeping very well. And you feel strange when the sun sinks behind the horizon, especially when the full moon rises. Maybe you shouldn't have renamed the moon. That sounds more like something that sages do. Or priests. Or wizards. Whatever.

Kasper. That was the name of that rascal. You do not know why you didn't kill that guy. You're sure wanted to do it. Instead, you just watched him die. Slowly. And you enjoyed it. That is, you enjoyed it until the sun went down, and

that strange-colored moon came out. Then you ran away. Hell, you aren't really sure that the guy is dead. What's happening to you?

You've been busy killing. Sort of. More often than not, you've let your victims bleed to death, rather than killing them outright. But now you know it's your turn. As far as you can tell, this is the same ugly brute that came upon you on the last first full moon of autumn. Yes, it's been almost exactly a year since. You handled it easily before, but the monster is dead now and you know your sword is not good against such creatures.

Now, after the moon has changed, even your sword looks different. It always had that orange shine under the full moon, but now the blade is orange and the hilt is a poisonous green. The pommel is orange, too, in the shape of a familiar face with evil, shining eyes.

Suddenly the sword is gone. You just catch the sight of a field full of large, round vegetables, all grinning toothy smiles, all with those evil yellow eyes. The ugly brute raises his club. He grins at you just like the moon, just like those semi-faces. Then he hits you right in the face. Now it gets dark. And now ... you're dead.

The Pumpkin Sword

Powers and Use

The Pumpkin Sword is a highly intelligent weapon. It can shapechange so it looks very much like an ordinary sword. It can also release a lightning bolt 1x/day, but only of its own will. The blade can teleport without error to anywhere within Ravenloft. The sword may be capable of taking its wielder

beyond the mists, though the blade and its wielder invariably return to the Demiplane of Dread.

The Pumpkin Sword grants a maximum bonus of +4 to attack and damage rolls. However, the willful artifact may change its bonuses to penalties at will. The sword may impose a penalty as high as -4 to attack and damage rolls. Alternately, it might even mix bonuses and penalties, for example granting a +3 attack bonus and -2 penalty to damage. The blade makes these changes only according to its own caprices and without influence from its wielder.

When used against the Undead, the Created, and other unliving creatures (at discretion of the DM), the Pumpkin Sword has only a bonus of +1 to hit and +0 damage. The blade despises Mind Flayers and all their ilk. When the blade is used against illithids, their kin, their creations (such as brain golems), and even undead forms of illithids, the blade grants a +4 bonus to hit and damage.

Curses

The Pumpkin Sword carries three curses: First, the wielder of the Pumpkin Sword will refuse to use any other weapon and never let go of the blade willingly. Second, the wielder becomes cruel and regardless of their alignment the wielder is compelled to let people suffer rather than perform a clean, swift kill. The third curse affects the perception of the wielder. They see the moon as an orange orb with an evil, toothy grin. As time passes, they begin to see their enemies,

neutrals, or even friends as wearing faces like that of a Jack o' Lantern.

The Pumpkin Sword can only be found by a warrior in dire need of a weapon on the first full moon of autumn. On the next first full moon of autumn the blade will vanish, leaving its wielder unarmed, preferably in a situation as dire as when the wielder first found the sword.

Origins and Legends

Few sages or loremasters know about the sword, but there are many stories about its origins. Most scholars agree that it was forged by a woman who once ruled on the moon. Her name is unknown, but it is agreed that it begins with a "Y". Some say that by speaking the name of this swordsmith a wielder may master this artifact and release its full powers. It is said that a wielder has but one chance to speak this name of power; should they use the wrong name, the sword disappears.

A different legend attached to the blade is the story of Linus, a master thief and master smith. It is said that he forged the blade from an orange and green metal that he stole from the gods.

Destruction

The only way to destroy the Pumpkin Sword is to carry it – without ever using it – to a pumpkin patch and bury it there up to the hilt. The buried blade will lose its powers on the next first full moon of Fall, so it must be guarded until that time.

Silent Partners

Intelligent Magical Items

By Jim "Jinsolo" Stearns

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"We found the sword in the wizard's cache, and it seemed like a perfect fit for Kortho. It was big and ugly, just like him. And I have to admit, it's a pretty amazing piece of equipment. I mean, I'm not going to wield a sword that clunky and savage, but for him, it just adds to that nail-eating-barbarian look he cultivates, and I'm all in favor of anything which makes people want to attack him over me. And when we fought those doppelgangers last week, they screamed like they'd been burned even when Kortho just nicked them with it.

"At first I made fun of Kortho when we found the sword. I mean, his outlander superstitions are one thing, but these stories about angels are another level of silliness entirely. That was before he started talking in his sleep. When he wakes in the morning, he speaks of a radiant woman clothed in moonlight who comes to him in his dreams. I just dismissed it, at the time. If he was having dreams about 'moonlight clad' blondes, then who was I to crush his fun?

"Then we ambushed those Falkovnian scouts yesterday. We outnumbered them, so it wasn't a very difficult fight, but afterwards, while we're looting the dead, Kortho turns to me and holds out a packet of papers. Next morning he tells me that they're the Falkovnians' orders, that the scouts were supposed to find a path to transport soldiers through. I've finished reading them, and he's right.

"The thing is...Kortho can't read."
--diary of Jean-Robart Mileur, leader of the Crimson Pikes mercenary group

Magical items have a long and storied history in the game. From the Sword of Kas to Crenshinibon, there has always been a fascinating array of magical items with thoughts, feelings, and opinions of their own. The rules for intelligent items present a large range of possibilities, and yet we rarely see these items in games.

The advantages these items bring are manifold. The first and most obvious advantage is the advantage it gives your players in the form of the magic item itself. Everyone loves magical

equipment. Intelligent items also offer the ability to influence your players' behavior. It isn't unreasonable to have a sentient magic item in control of its own special abilities, which would mean that the PC would have to appease the item before some of its powers would function. Last but not least, the item gives you a voice in your own game, which can be a great tool when the PCs need a nudge in the right direction or have missed a critical clue.

So why do these items turn up rarely, if ever? Well, their uniqueness can't be ignored. By book, they are pretty jealous entities, and don't work with one another. A PC can be up to his eyeballs in vorpal swords, but he can still only use one intelligent item. But more to the point, intelligent items can become a detriment, usually when their personalities become an impediment to role-playing. One item that can speak is a curiosity. A whole party full of them rapidly becomes a cacophony of conflicting personalities, and can threaten to turn your game into nothing more than a showcase of item NPCs.

The easiest solution to this is to have your items play the part of the silent partner. The 'semi-empathy' result on the intelligent item generation table is often overlooked for the more flashy speaking or even telepathic items. However, items that do not speak aloud are in many ways better than talking items. It allows you to forge a more one-on-one relationship between the item and the PC, and with a little creativity, you can devise some truly inventive forms of communication for your items to use.

Here are 7 intelligent items, each designed to be a thinking, feeling companion for their user, without

becoming a distraction or a conflict to the rest of the party.

Cruagh

+1 flaming rapier. Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 14; AL CN, Ego 8; grants wielder Blindfight, Combat Reflexes. Caster Level: 13th; Market Price: 42,320 gp; Weight: 3 lb.

Cruagh was originally designed to fight a war against elves from deep beneath the earth in an outlander world long ago. Part of a matched set of fencing weapons, it was used by a human who led a party of heroes to victory against many of the monsters that surfaced during that war. Cruagh still derives a particular joy from killing deep-dwelling monsters.

It appears as a basket-hilt rapier made from a silvery metal. The hand guard is made from an intricate basket of tiny gold wire wrapped in delicate knot patterns. This hand guard is Cruagh's only form of communication. It can reshape the guard to form pictures in the knotted wire. Although it can form quite complex images, it is incapable of writing words for some reason. If it is trying to convey the command word to activate its flaming ability (something it cannot normally do for itself) then it might show a picture of an elf and a picture of a flame, or of an elf speaking, and a torch. (The command word is the elven word for 'fire.')

Cruagh is very bloodthirsty, as well as foolhardy, and if consulted will often counsel swashbuckling bravado in any situation. Although it has yet to encounter any drow (its most hated foe) since its arrival in the Demiplane of Dread, Cruagh has run into the occasional duergar, and if its owner does not immediately attack such creatures,

Cruagh will force an Ego check to try and compel its wielder to action. In all other situations, however, the rapier simply accepts its owner's decisions. Cruagh is secretive, however, and will not reveal its intelligence around anyone but its owner. If Cruagh's wielder specifically tells the blade that certain people are trustworthy, then the sword might also communicate in their presence.

Although Cruagh is a +1 flaming rapier, if paired with the dagger that it was originally made with, a non-intelligent +1 defending dagger, then the bonuses of both weapons rise to +3, and Cruagh's ego rises to 14. Cruagh can read and speak Darkonese and Elven.

The Madonna Blade

+3 holy greatsword. Int 18, Wis 17, Cha 17; AL LG, Ego 17; allows wielder to see normally, even in magical darkness, grants Uncanny Dodge (as a 5th level barbarian). Caster Level: 15th; Market Price: 60,350 gp; Weight: 15 lb.

Hallamariel was a powerful celestial once. Although she butted heads with the more chaotic celestials, her favorite activity was crusading against evil. Unlike many of her kind, she felt it was her responsibility to spend nearly all of her time helping rid the mortal world of the supernatural terrors that plagued it. Her sense of duty was stronger than any other facet of her personality.

When she heard that the chaotic celestials had allowed one of their own into the forbidden plane, she found it intolerable that the denizens of Celestia had not done likewise. She lobbied, cajoled, and pleaded with her superiors to allow one of their number to go into the plane that none returned from, but each time she was denied. Finally,

Hallamariel did what she would once have considered unthinkable: she disobeyed.

Considering her duty to mortals higher than her duty to her superiors, the celestial went to a trustworthy mage, renowned for both his purity as well as his abilities. After giving the wizard strict instructions, Hallamariel allowed herself to be transformed. The wizard tore her essence from her and used it to fuel an enchanted weapon, a greatsword that would bear her remaining energy as well as her personality. Then, utilizing a ritual that the angel had given to him, he cast the blade into the Mists.

Hallamariel appears as a two handed sword with an especially broad blade, which sports regular notches up the lower third of the weapon. An inscription in Celestial runs around the entirety of the base of the blade, and reads 'I am a light to all those who dwell in darkness.' If read aloud, the blade sheds light within 30' until it is sheathed.

The sword is incapable of communicating while its wielder is awake. While they are asleep, however, Hallamariel can appear to them in their dreams. Usually she appears as a lovely woman of whatever race her wielder belongs to, garbed in rich, simple clothes of shining silver. She always emits a soft glow, as though she were emitting moonlight. In this fashion, Hallamariel can offer advice and counsel to those that she travels with. Although it isn't a very powerful ability, Hallamariel does remain aware even when her wielder is asleep, and is capable of rousing her owner to full wakefulness with no need for a Fortitude save.

Hallamariel is noble and just, and always advises righteous behavior, courage, and the duty of the strong to protect the weak. Although she always

counsels honesty, temperance, and charity, she understands that mortals are not always able to live up to her lofty ideals. In dream form, she is kind and friendly, although cryptic. She never acknowledges that she is the animating force of the sword directly. She will work with any wielder who can behave in a fashion that she finds acceptable. However, if she were to find herself in the Carnival, she would recognize Isolde for what she is, and kindly but firmly insist that her wielder move on. While she may respect Isolde, the two are worlds apart in their views on how good should be applied, and Hallamariel is smart enough to realize that they would work best apart from one another.

Hallamariel never reveals her real name. She refers to the sword which she inhabits as either 'the Madonna Blade,' or 'the Prime of Swords.' The second title she only uses with Vistani or half-Vistani. She speaks and reads Balok, Celestial, Darkonese, Mordentish, and Vaasi. She is capable of reading any document in her owner's possession.

Roselynn's Cameo

Int 20, Wis 15, Cha 12; AL N, Ego 10; Caster Level: 9th; Market Price: 24,800 gp; Weight: --.

Mystery surrounds this item. A rarity among sentient items, the Cameo is not actually a weapon. Instead, the Cameo appears as a delicate gold chain, sporting a tiny tarnished locket engraved with detailed roses and the name Roselynn. In the hands of a non-spellcaster, the Cameo is merely a piece of valuable, if plain, jewelry. Those who do not cast spells that have been prepared ahead of time cannot even open the locket, in fact, nor can those who can

use it if they attempt to do so more than once per day.

For those who meet the item's requirements, it is a great boon, if a little disturbing. While preparing their spells for the day, the caster may open the locket to look inside. The left half shows a tiny cameo of a beautiful half-elven woman. It isn't known whether this is the item's creator, the original owner, the mysterious Roselynn, or if this person ever existed at all. The right side shows a tiny (thumbnail sized) oil portrait, faded and cracked with age. Close inspection reveals that the portrait shows the image of the one gazing upon it! Instead of reflecting them as they are, the locket shows the owner dead or in torment, usually in connection with whatever suggestion it is making. Whenever the portrait is examined, the Cameo will make a single suggested change to the user's daily spell list. They are not required to take the locket's advice, however, the item seems to be gifted with some form of oracular ability, and the suggestions it makes often prove to be eerily useful, almost as if the item knew what the day was bringing.

Roselynn's Cameo first surfaced in Sithicus, although it was old even then. The oldest known owner found the Cameo while cleaning out her deceased mother's jewelry in 721. No record exists how the woman came to possess the necklace. Since then, it has changed hands many times. Most users find it very disturbing to see themselves killed and mutilated on a daily basis, despite the obvious usefulness the item comes with. And of course, despite the item's ability to predict what spell a user might need, it does nothing to tell them when they might need it.

The changing portrait is the item's only method of communication. The only time its Ego comes into conflict with someone holding it is when someone attempts to force the locket open. Roselynn's Cameo has never indicated any goals or desires, and if it has any, they remain a secret. If it can speak, read, or understand speech, then these abilities are likewise a mystery.

Ivicane

+4 defending shortspear; Int 10, Wis 17, Cha 18; AL NG, Ego 18; 1/day--calm animals, summon nature's ally III, tree shape, all as a 5th level druid. Caster Level: 15th; Market Price: 65,302 gp; Weight: 4 lb.

Ivicane was created to be a defender of the woodlands. A group of elven refugees, some outlanders and some native to Ravenloft, wandered across the demiplane looking for a place to settle. While they never did find a homeland for themselves, they did live for a time in Barovia, where they fell in love with the rugged beauty of the forests among the Balinoks. Desiring to plant themselves among the rugged woodlands permanently, the elves laid down a number of powerful enchantments around their new home, in addition to crafting a number of magic items to assist them in the defense of their new home. Although the elves were eventually driven out, many of the items they made still survive.

It isn't known if the enchanted spear known as Ivicane was taken from a fallen elven combatant when the Barovian forces drove them away, or if the weapon instead stayed with the group for a while longer. The elven refugees were next spotted in Kartakass, however, while the next reported

sighting of Ivicane was in Richemulot, so it seems likely the item was separated from the elves at or around the time of their departure from Barovia. If the spear is upset at its removal from the elves, it has never shown it.

Unusual among spears, Ivicane has no metal in its construction. From butt to tip, it is formed from magically hardened wood, and covered in curling, knotted designs of twisting ivy. Many users have believed that the leaves shift over time, but if that is the case, then the effect is either so slow or so subtle that no one has been able to prove it. Users do report that the spear feels unnaturally light and balanced, and many feel compelled to twirl the spear around in intricate patterns. Users attempting Perform checks receive a +2 bonus if the performance involves acrobatic flourishing of the spear.

Ivicane cannot speak, but it can make its wishes known by taking control of local animals. At will, the spear is capable of taking control of any local wildlife as the spell dominate animal. The spear is restricted, however, to controlling a single animal at a time, with a limit of only a single hit die. Many users believe this impromptu animal companion to be a function of the spear, and never realize it is an attempt on Ivicane's part to communicate. These animals will often attempt to guide the user in the direction Ivicane feels they should go, or try to point out things the wielder has missed. (Ivicane can apply the spell to vermin of 1/2 hit die or less if no animal presents itself, and will even use bugs if it must.) This form of communication allows the user to benefit from a +2 to all skills that are based on Wisdom. While Ivicane is capable of directing these animals in combat, it does so only to save the wielder's life. If

the spear feels that the wielder is in no imminent danger from combat, it will often release animals it is dominating to allow them time to escape. If Ivicane sees a sylvan creature (including wilderness-dwelling elves or halflings) in mortal danger it will signal the attack by directing any dominated animal into the combat. If its wielder does not follow suit, Ivicane attempts a personality conflict to force them to fight.

Ivicane serves any user that does not act in an evil or malicious fashion. Users that slaughter animals for no reason, or rapaciously harm the woodlands will also meet the item's disapproval. Once the spear has decided it will no longer serve a character, its special abilities and bonuses no longer function, and it is simply a +4 shortspear. Every day a user tries to force Ivicane to serve her, she must contend with a personality conflict. If Ivicane achieves dominance, then any attack the user attempts instead twists in her hand and strikes herself!

Ivicane is capable of reading and understanding Mordentish, Sylvan, and Elven. It isn't capable of speech, even when dominating animals that are.

Grentang

+2 corrosive heavy crossbow. Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 9. AL N, Ego 12. Grants user 10 ranks in appraise, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge (as a 5th level barbarian); at will--detect secret doors. Caster Level: 9th; Market Price: 33,350 gp; Weight: 9 lb.

Grentang hails from Vorostokov, in the Frozen Reaches. Details of its creation are sparse, but since it was in the possession of a single family of dwarven mercenaries for much of its

history, it is likely that it was commissioned by the dwarves themselves. The dwarven mercenaries that owned the crossbow initially have not been seen since 741, although the crossbow has turned up a few times, first in the hands of a dwarven adventurer in Darkon, and most recently in the hands of a hired killer in the slums of Neufurchtenburg.

The weapon itself is a masterpiece of craftsmanship. The rich, warm wood of the stock has been well oiled, and lovingly engraved with pictures of fabulous treasures. The butt of the weapon has been reinforced with a brass plate which allows anyone holding it to use it as a melee weapon in addition to its normal function as a crossbow. (Treat as a non-magical club.) The weapon can be cocked via a lever on the bottom rather than a winch, although this does not reduce the time required to load. The metal of the weapon appears to be bronze, although it is almost certainly some manner of dwarven alloy.

Grentang is not an exceptionally picky magical item. So long as either it or its abilities see regular use, it's happy. Grentang was created for a specific purpose, but that purpose was to help its creator amass as large a fortune as possible, so it is rarely used in any other way. The item does not begrudge its owner spending or even giving treasure away, and it would take a great deal of excessive poverty to make the item seek a new owner. Under the rare circumstance that it found itself in a situation where it was being wielded by an owner who lived in complete self-imposed poverty, Grentang would most likely force a personality conflict, and if successful, would compel its owner to give it away, an action that such a

selfless individual would likely not even find that out of character for themselves.

The crossbow communicates via sensory input. It is capable of manipulating the senses of anyone holding it. Valuable treasure might seem brighter, or have a small glow around it. A secret door might glow red. (It is worth noting that Grentang's abilities do not require the item to be in hand, only on the character's person.) It isn't able to generate new stimuli (no illusory hands, for example) but it can alter existing ones, like adding a halo around a person or object.

Primarily, Grentang communicates through smell or taste, which it can dramatically alter. Users report tasting blood or smoke when the crossbow is trying to warn them of danger, and the crossbow is capable of altering stimuli or enhancing the senses to the point of making a user hyper-alert to the danger around them. Grentang expresses its displeasure by creating a sour taste in the wielder's mouth, and its happiness with a sweet one. It is capable of answering yes-or-no questions in this fashion, although it does not remember anything prior to the dwarves using it in Vorostokov. Grentang will always seek to advise, in its limited capacity, on how its wielder can acquire more money and more valuable treasure.

Grentang understands and can read dwarven, Darkonese, Voros, and gnomish.

The Wisdom of Otei

+3 small shield. Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 15; AL NG, Ego 15. Grants Will save re-rolls and immunity to Tasha's hideous laughter. Caster Level: 9th; Market Price: 9,159 gp; Weight: 9 lb.

Appearing first in the hands of a wandering holy warrior, the Wisdom of Otei has been a boon to the poor and the downtrodden since its arrival in Ravenloft. Crafted long ago in a land called Zhun, the Wisdom of Otei was brought to Ravenloft by a travelling holy warrior who arrived through the Mists in Nova Vaasa. Before his death in 697, the warrior gave his shield to an idealistic would-be hero. Unlike many magical items, the Wisdom of Otei has relatively few periods of inactivity in its history. A nearly unbroken chain of users connects it back to its arrival in Ravenloft.

The shield appears as a small, round shield made from primitive bronze. A pair of leather straps attach it to the wielder's arm, although it has a handle for added stability. The entirety of the front of the shield is taken up with an image of a rotund bald man in a meditating position. An inhumanly large grin graces the man's face. Although relatively few speak or read the strange outlander language, the pedestal the man rests on bears an inscription in Zhunese which reads 'blessings of Otei on you.' The back of the shield has a small panel, no larger than an arrowhead, which can be slid to one side, although it will always close itself afterwards. This panel is the shield's only method of communication.

Once per day, the wielder of the Wisdom of Otei can open this panel to find a tiny scroll inside. The inscriptions on these scrolls are always short, often humorous, and usually poignant pieces of advice. At the DM's discretion, they may also be mildly prophetic, although the consciousness of the shield itself is not. Immediately after reading their fortune for the day, the user receives a +1 luck bonus to attack rolls, weapon

damage rolls, saves, skill checks, and ability checks for ten minutes. If the user asks the shield a direct question, then the item can give a direct answer, so long as it is no longer than a sentence or two, although it prefers not to do this for more than a day or two, and may begin teasing someone who uses it in this fashion. Direct answers do not give the user any luck bonus.

Otei is a friendly item, who does not particularly care with whom it travels. It has been in the service of both mercenaries and paladins in its day, and has been wielded by everyone from law enforcement authorities in Dementlieu to rebels against the crown in Borca. So long as its user appears to be acting in the best interests of others, the shield is happy to serve. It was created as a protector of the masses, and it takes a fairly broad view of that mandate.

In addition to the luck bonus provided by the fortunes, the shield protects its user from the spell Tasha's hideous laughter completely, and provides a modicum of protection against other mental attacks. Any failed Will save may be re-rolled, although the user must accept the result of the second roll, even if it is worse than the first.

Should the Wisdom of Otei feel that it is no longer needed, or that someone else needs it more, it will inform its user of this the next time they seek a fortune. Should the user not comply with the shield's desire to be passed on, it will force a personality conflict and compel the wielder to give it away. The Wisdom of Otei reads and understands Vaasi and Darkonese, although the fortunes it gives out appear in the owner's native language.

Orchestratto

+2 keen longsword. Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 18; AL NE, Ego 17; grants user Improved Initiative; 1/day--cure light wounds on wielder (1d8+5); Caster Level: 9th; Market Price: 28,315 gp; Weight: 4 lb.

Orchestratto is another outlander weapon, and although it is almost certainly not the case, it believes itself to be the oldest intelligent item in Ravenloft. Unlike many magic items, its arrival in Ravenloft is a matter of official (if secretive) record.

In 536, a group of outlanders were drawn into the Mists to Castle Ravenloft. Like others before them, they attempted to assault the castle. Unfortunately, also like others before them, they perished. The ledgers in Strahd's counting room list the sword as one of the items taken from the adventurers. Although Strahd himself gave the sword a chance, he found the special qualities of the sword to be fundamentally annoying. It's not clear how the sword managed to get out of the castle, but it has been spotted from Kartakass to Avonleigh.

The weapon appears as a longsword of unremarkable design. The only notable feature it has is the musical bar etched along its fuller. If played, the music sounds stilted and odd. This is because it isn't actually a song, but rather the name of the smith's niece spelled out in musical notes.

Orchestratto has a rather unusual method of communication. Whoever possesses the blade hears music playing. The sword has complete control over this, and only the wielder can hear the sounds. It can replicate any song it's heard, creating the musical equivalent of any number of players, using any

number of instruments. It can replicate vocalizations, but not actual words. Some wielders speculate that the sword is incapable of creating its own music, that it just possesses a vast repertoire from which to draw. Others believe that the blade can compose its own tunes in addition to duplicating those it has heard. When questioned, Orchestratto seems to indicate that it is indeed capable of original creation, although it is far from the most trustworthy source.

This musical ability gives the wielder a +1 morale bonus to all attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, skill checks, and saves. It comes at the cost of a -4 to all Listen checks, and a 15% arcane spell failure chance. The sword has another drawback, which is its bloodthirsty nature. Sometimes, in the heat of battle the sword forgets who it is supposed to be helping. On any critical failure while attacking with Orchestratto, the wielder should roll another attack against the nearest living creature within reach. It's just fine if this is a different enemy. If

no other living creature presents itself, the wielder should resolve the attack against herself! If questioned, Orchestratto will feign innocence, and act as though the attack was a result of the user's own butterfingers.

Orchestratto, despite its evil alignment, will happily allow itself to be wielded by a good user. Its only desire is to kill living beings, and so long as it's doing that, it doesn't care how or why it's being used. If a personality conflict occurs, Orchestratto can turn nasty. Should a wielder seek to destroy the weapon, or refuse to spill blood with it, the sword will attempt to gain dominance. If it does so, it possesses the wielder and attempts to get them killed, preferably at the hands of someone more likely to wield the sword. While Orchestratto normally refrains from bestowing negative levels on good wielders, it is capable of doing so normally if it wishes.

Orchestratto can read and understand Balok and Vaasi.

The Ocean's Ferryman

Dread Selkies of the Nocturnal Sea

By Eleanor "Isabella" Ferren

rinatheelf@gmail.com

*Our skin-sewed Fin-boats lightly swim,
Over the sea like wind they skim.*

*Our ships are built without a nail;
Few ships like ours can row or sail.*

-Heimskringla

February 24th, 760

*Greetings to the Sisters Weathermay-
Foxgrove, fare you well?*

It has been some time since we last spoke, I apologize. I have been hearing news of your deeds ever since I left Mordentshire, and word recently reached me of your newest undertaking. I wish to assist you in this. I am residing on Graben Island as of now, so please send any inquiries I might be able to assist with via Toret Severin. I recall entertaining you both one evening with tales of the lebendtod, and my former home will be a point of interest for you.

I have another tale for you now. Heard you, perhaps, of selkies? They are not well known on your side of the Core, although I have heard tell that the Ballade of the Sorrowing Selkie is now popular in Kartakass.

I had the fortune of meeting one myself, many years ago. Before I gained my current affiliations, I and my companions found a derelict ship off the southern coast of Liffe, infested with the walking dead. Even with the precautions we took, the battle nearly destroyed us. The undead had no reason to fear the water, and their touch sucked the very heat from our bodies as we fought them. As we felled the last of them, their rotting ship crumbled and sank into the ocean. I went with it. I knew at that moment my end was on me. I was pulled down by the weight of my armor, and I was too numb to swim, or do anything to save myself. I was resigned to my fate, my final visions those of sinking wood and dark shapes swimming towards me.

When I awoke sometime later, I was still underwater, but I could breathe as if on land, and floating next to me was a beautiful woman wrapped in sealskin. I was convinced I was either dreaming or dead, and would have made a fool of myself if I could have spoken. My strength returned eventually, and the strange woman helped pull me from my armor and to shore. As I was staggering

to firm ground, the woman dived back into the sea.

Now I write to you, to warn you of the creature that saved my life. Seem I ungrateful? I feel that I am. Yet there is another tale you must hear. I am sending you a journal. It was given to me by my younger sister, Freya, who asked only in return that it be taken care of. I know that I can trust you in that regard. And when you have finished with it, please, send it back to her.

With regards,

Johann Haydyl

Folklore

From the personal journal of Mr. Elgin Gilthros:

Graben-town, October 7th, 755

There is a story in my family about my grandfather. I remember my grandmother telling it to me in my youth as we sat by the fire, sorrow in her eyes.

She told me how my grandfather had traveled the realms in his youth, and how once, on a distant island, he had tried his hand at sealing. But his quarry was a charming creature, all curiosity and play, and he found he did not have the heart to kill it. So he returned home empty-handed. The next morning, as he walked along the beach, he found a handsome stranger waiting for him. The stranger held out his hands, overflowing with pearls.

"They are not so precious as my life, but I bid you take them for sparing it," the stranger said. My grandfather expressed amazement at the wealth offered, to which the stranger replied,

"There are many finer jewels in my home of Finfoykaheem."

With the pearls given to him, Grandfather took up a kinder trade, and grew successful. He fell in love with a noblewoman – my grandmother – but her family would have none of a common woodcarver. By chance, he encountered the handsome stranger again that night, to whom he told all his troubles. The stranger replied, "There are many finer women in my home of Finfoykaheem." But grandfather, being a young man in love, would hear none of it. So the stranger went up to the nobleman's house; it is not known what he did or said there, but before the week was out my grandfather was wed.

That should have been the end of it, and for a time, the two were happy. But as life took its toll on my grandfather, he grew more and more distant. The shadow of Finfoykaheem never left his mind, and he rarely smiled save for the times that his mysterious friend came to visit him. On the day that his darling daughter died of consumption, he sought his friend for solace. He never came home.

I had not thought of that tale for a long time, until I visited Graben Island on business. The matter was scarcely worth pursuing, but Father had insisted upon it, and I could hardly refuse without appearing like an ingrate. As the vessel approached the rocky shore, I peered over the gunwale to watch the waves' dance. Something stared back; for a second, I met the gaze of a sleek gray seal, which looked up at me with human eyes. I could not help but feel that I was being examined by this strange creature. Yet the moment passed quickly, and the dark form vanished beneath the waves below.

That is when I found my thoughts drifting back to Grandmother's old tale. I asked the helmsman, a wiry, dark-haired Richemuloise named Chevalier, about the animal. He informed me that the creatures were known as "selkies". They must be native to these waters; at least, I had never seen their like in the Sea of Sorrows.

Description

Kirchenheim, October 24th, 755

The weather has taken a turn for the worse. Miss Haydyl was kind enough to provide me with a sealskin coat to ward off the cold, as well as extra blankets for my sleeping-cubby in her parents' home. I dislike accepting charity, but I must allow she is correct about my improper wardrobe for this climate! I will endeavor to reimburse her family at the first opportunity.

Trade negotiations with the village assembly are long and drawn out, leaving me with periods of little to do. I find myself spending much of my time on the rocky beaches south of the settlement, gazing out towards the sea. The view is too foggy to be beautiful and the weather too windy to be pleasant, but I persist in these walks nonetheless, as a welcome break from the drabness of rural politics.

It was on one of these many long walks that I encountered an unusual sight: six of those great gray seals, lying among the rocks and regarding me with an almost-human curiosity. Undoubtedly the natives would scoff at my amazement; indeed, Miss Haydyl was unimpressed when I told her later. But I, a city man with little opportunity to view any beast more novel than a horse, found them fascinating.

I did not approach the creatures, for fear of startling them, and perhaps in some minor fear for my own safety. Seals they may have been, but they were much larger than I was! I had no way of accurately measuring the creatures, but I estimated them to be eight or nine feet in length, far larger than I'd believed a seal could grow. Nor could I quite ignore the many sharp teeth the creatures possessed. Likely they were suited to seizing slippery fish, but even I know that wild animals can become ferocious if agitated, and I had no desire to see those massive jaws turned upon myself.

The seals were a handsome dark gray in color, with lighter gray underbellies. I saw that they had no fur, as one might expect for cold-water swimmers, but smooth, taut hide like a dolphin's. Their bodies were quite streamlined, with no ears to detract from their sleek forms. I was quite amazed by the size of their mouths. By the look of it, their jaws took up half of their heads! When one of them yawned, I found myself amazed and repulsed by how widely it could gape. Their heads were blunt and powerful-looking; they were neither as attractive nor as dog-like as the seals off Martira Bay or Armeikos.

Indeed, the longer I looked, the more differences I noted between these and ordinary seals. Their fore and hind flippers appeared to be prehensile! They resembled human hands and feet that had been elongated and heavily webbed. On occasion I would see one cup a rock or a seashell in its "hand", and regard it with a curiosity that rivaled a human child's. Their eyes were solid black, and held a glint of intelligence within them. Whenever one looked at me, I could not banish the fanciful notion that it had human eyes.

Miss Haydyl claimed to know little of the seals, but she warned me away from them, so I have kept my distance for now. I shall have to ask the other natives about them should the opportunity arise.

October 25th, 755

The Islanders were strangely reluctant to speak to me of the seals. All of them claimed ignorance on the subject, merely repeating Miss Haydyl's warning to stay away. The audacity! They can hardly expect me to believe that no one on this forsaken isle knows anything of such extraordinary animals, nor that they would choose to warn me without some reason to do so. It was fortunate for my reputation that I happened upon Mr. Chevalier before I let my ire get the best of me. The helmsman seems quite knowledgeable about the Nocturnal Sea, and was far more forthcoming than the taciturn natives.

It was Chevalier who said what none of the villagers would tell me: he mentioned that the seals – rather, “selkies” – would often don their human forms and frequent the town. Human forms! I believe I spoke too loudly in my excitement, as the barkeep of the Horn and Hoof gave us an exceedingly dark look and we were forced to adjourn to a more private locale. So this is the secret the natives conspired to keep from me!

Certainly, it explains the seals' abnormal appearance and behavior. To think that an entirely new race of thinking creature, unknown to all the scholars of Darkon, could be found on this desolate isle!

Alas, Chevalier had only a few stray myths and bardsongs to relate to me, for the Grabenites were unwilling to impart information on this subject to him as

well. He told me that the human “selkies” were always described as heart-achingly beautiful. They were well-built men and women, as pale of skin as the natives, but never so weather-worn or towering of stature as they. While their hair could be either raven-hued or whitish-blond, their eyes were always jet black, and their beauty snared hearts at a glimpse. I told him that it sounded more like a story to entertain lonely sailors than truth, and he laughingly agreed. But my mind kept casting back to my grandfather. Seals that could turn into men... but surely such accounts are myth, and nothing more?

As I headed back to my lodgings, I gazed down from the upper village to the rocky outcrops that gird the Island, and thought I spotted a standing figure on a high, jagged prominence protruding from the water. Yet when I drew nearer, the stone spire was vacant, save a few gray seals paddling round its base.

Habitat

October 30th, 755

I pried myself away from meaningless meetings with droning assemblymen to meet once more with Chevalier. He confirmed that “selkies” were not uncommon around Graben Island, but had come to frequent many other Nocturnal Sea isles of late, and even the coast of Darkon on occasion! Strange, that I had never seen one before now.

Selkies are amphibious, but prefer to stay close to the water, for they are slow and unwieldy on the land. As they require air to breathe, they can often be found resting on shore, as I can attest myself. The windy pebble beaches and jagged rock-spurs of Graben Island pose

Dread Possibility:

The Chimera of Vechor

Selkies rarely venture near Vechor, as the waters are too warm for their liking. Still, the curiosity of the finfolk could not be contained forever, and when the Nocturnal Sea coalesced, a small group of seal-kind eventually migrated to the tropical island. They lived in comfort for a time, dining in Vechor's bountiful waters, until the day one of the selkies blundered into a fisherman's net. Bemused by the strange creature, the fisherman let it go, but word reached King Easan the Mad of the bizarre catch.

The next day, every selkie in the domain of Vechor vanished.

A horrific creature now prowls the coasts of Vechor. Known as the Chimera, it appears to be an unnatural amalgam of animal and human parts. Those who have seen it and survived claim that the Chimera rips its victims apart with its massive jaws, then drags choice portions back to its lair. These gruesome trophies are then stitched to the creature's skin and merged into the Chimera's form, thus increasing its power with everything it kills. Fortunately, the creature appears to be unique, though others of its kind may well exist in Easan's labs.

What no one witness has lived to tell is that the Chimera was created by Easan using a captive selkie as a starting point, and can therefore remove its own distorted skin. Although the creature stalks the seas in the form of a monster, it walks among the villagers of Vechor as a man.

little trouble for the creatures, and are a frequent gathering place for their kind, often alongside the isle's mundane seals.

The icy, choppy waters and freezing weather appear to cause no harm to the selkies; indeed, it seems they favor such conditions, as they vanish en masse from the beaches in summer. Their preference for the cold would explain their absence from Vechor, as the offshore waters there remain warm all year round.

Chevalier had been kind enough to commit what he remembered of myth and song to paper. The stories were certainly interesting, and provide some answers, however unlikely they may be, to the blanks in our knowledge of the creatures. Apparently, the selkies of legend would summer on moving islands, invisible to the human eye. Allegedly, these refuges were only temporary arrangements: the true home of the selkies is an underwater paradise of coral and pearls, a realm known as "Finfolkaheem".

Finfolkaheem! I cannot describe what I felt, on encountering that word again. I immediately told Chevalier the story of my grandfather, and his eyes lit up as he agreed that they must be the same sort of creature.

I will start my research tomorrow. Would that I could set about it instantly; this mystery fires my imagination so, I feel more alive than I have in years! Still, I must exercise caution. No one knows what became of my grandfather, and his fate may well have been a sinister one.

Habits

November 5th, 755

I have been tied up by more tedious meetings, but have been able to indulge in my research from time to time, due largely to Miss Haydyl's having vouched

for me with her friends and neighbors as a gentleman. (She truly is a saint, even if she is as cagey as other Kirchenheimers; then again, I took care not to inform her that I have persisted in my investigations.)

In a stroke of good luck, Chevalier appears to be staying in port for a spell while repairs are done to his ship. I was able to convince him to sail out on a rented dory with me, to observe the selkies. He was initially apprehensive about the prospect, but eventually, my promises of compensation were enough to sway him. No doubt he will need the money, with his normal means of employment in abeyance. The selkies frequent the seas off Kirchenheim regularly, so we rarely needed to sail far to view their doings.

We most commonly found the creatures resting in groups of five or six individuals, slipping back in or out of the surf as the mood took them. Though it was not unusual for us to spot a lone gray seal swimming by our vessel, they seemed adverse to being alone on land; knowing now what I do of their intelligence, it is likely that they do so for protection, being more vulnerable on land than they are in the water. We seldom saw groups of them on the open water. Despite this tendency to hunt alone, the selkies seemed quite sociable when together, communicating with small barks and growls, along with a mournful sound that I could only describe as singing. Chevailier joked that they seemed to be telling each other stories of how their day went, like garrulous men at a tavern, and the thought made us both laugh ... until we realized that they very well might be doing just that.

Unlike the majority of the seals around Graben Island, and indeed most

of the Nocturnal Sea's wildlife, the selkies seem wary of darkness. When nightfall quenches what passes for daylight here, the "pods" gather at their chosen resting spot; they sleep all in a heap on the beach, with one of their number remaining awake to keep watch. We sometimes happened upon several pods resting together, en masse, by night, yet these same groups kept their distance from one another by day. Perhaps the selkies preferred the security of greater numbers at night, or perhaps they all preferred that particular sleeping spot.

As the selkies, themselves, are active during the day, I believe their prey must be so also. It was difficult to observe the creatures hunting, given that pursuits took place underwater, but we were lucky enough to see one selkie snatch a huge, silvery fish that had strayed a little too close to the surface and a bit too far from its school. I presume that the great shoals of fish which fill Graben-town's new packhouse serve to support the selkies, as well. However, it would be remiss to say that fish make up all of the seals' diet. Indeed, they seemed willing to seize any sea-going quarry that does not put them to undue trouble. Common snacks included crabs and mussels, but the occasional scavenging gull or unwary puffin might meet an untimely end if it grows too bold, and once I spied a hapless fur seal being harried to exhaustion by a pair of them. I must admit I found that scene somewhat distressing.

The selkies seem to be the supreme predators of their coastal habitat, with only the most massive of sharks or deep-sea leviathans threatening to make a meal of the creatures. Still, I have heard of stranger predators than these in the Nocturnal Sea, and have no doubt there

is ample cause for the selkies' caution. I also noticed that many Grabenites possess sealskin coats, and many, including my own and Chevalier's, are gray in hue. Although Chevalier claimed there to be many grayish types of seal around Graben Island, he admits that many sealers would be quite willing to take a selkie, were they able. Apparently their hides are amazingly durable.

I decided not to ask Miss Haydyl what kind of seal my coat came from. If it was from a selkie, I could hardly feel comfortable wearing it, and would freeze to death without it in this dreary climate.

Abilities

November 12th, 755

I've hired a traveling performer named Xander, a fellow countryman who chanced to be passing through on his way home to Darkon. He proved to be quite effective at wheedling information out of the reticent Grabenites, although I suspect the success of his methods has less to do with the lager he buys them and more to do with the arcane arts. Still, his guile is proving invaluable to my research.

With Xander's help, we were able to gather a myriad of Graben Island's folktales concerning the selkies. (They are colloquially known around these parts as the "finfolk". "Selkie" is, I gather, a more archaic term that actually refers to any large seal, although the two terms appear to be interchangeable in the vernacular.) I had expected these legends to concern only their ability to assume human form, but it seems that the seals have quite a few unusual talents up their sleeves.

The most famous, of course, is their power of shapechanging. The Grabenites confirmed what Chevalier had told me before: that selkies in human form would invariably have black eyes, white skin, black or blond hair, and gloriously-attractive features. These traits are not as helpful as one might expect in identifying a selkie in its human form, given how common they are in the Core's human population ... indeed, Chevalier, Xander, and myself all match those very criteria! To judge by the accounts, selkies on Graben Island often pose as foreigners, perhaps adding to the

Skin Coats

A selkie that does not possess its skin-coat loses its Alternate Form ability and all spell-like abilities until the coat is recovered. If its skin-coat is destroyed, a selkie cannot replace it and is trapped in human form forever. Anyone possessing a selkie's skin-coat gains a +4 bonus to Intimidate checks against that selkie. Only the selkie may use its skin-coat to assume a seal's shape; it confers no magical powers to others.

Skin-coats are both exceptionally durable and immune to all non-magical means of destruction. A selkie's human form skin-coat is treated as Medium light armor by its wearer. It grants an armor bonus of +3, with a maximum Dex bonus of +6, an armor check penalty of 0, and 0% chance of arcane spell failure.

Only skin-coats taken from a selkie's human form grant the above bonus. Clothes made from the pelts of selkies slain in seal form confer no armor bonus. If leather or hide armor is crafted from selkie-hide, its hardness is 3.

Grabenites' distrust of strangers. Or perhaps they dislike selkies because they dislike anyone strange?

As in certain other shape-shifters, a selkie's human form is singular and fixed. It cannot imitate another person, save by mundane or spell-wrought disguise. Its appearance as a human mirrors that of its seal form; it will appear similarly youthful or aged, male or female, in both its shapes, and telltale scars or injuries inflicted upon one form will have their equivalents in the other.

When it wishes to change its form, a "seal" simply shrugs off its skin, which (I am told) shifts to resemble a sealskin coat. Once again, this is far from a telling clue on Graben Island, where sealskin overcoats are so common, but a selkie is completely unwilling to be parted from its skin-coat, even if removing the garment would be the sensible thing to do. Apparently, should a selkie lose its skin, it loses the ability to transform back to its seal form. Selkies find this prospect abhorrent, and

are thus extremely protective of their skin-coats.

A selkie which has lost its coat is willing to do quite a bit to get it back, and will rarely act against the person who holds their coat. Although the coat is difficult to destroy, the selkie seems unwilling to risk any harm coming to it, no matter how slight the chance. The most famous of selkie stories involve men who steal a selkie maid's coat and force her into marriage. Inevitably, she finds it and returns to the sea, leaving some to wonder why the foolish man left the skin-coat intact. But woe be unto the man who manages to destroy a selkie's skin-coat, but not the selkie itself! The selkie considers such a life not worth living, and will devote everything it has to utterly ruining and destroying the source of its torment.

Selkies are renowned for their sailing prowess: they are almost supernatural in their proficiency. The seal-creatures have no fear of sailing anywhere, on any kind of ship, through any weather. Of

Dread Possibility: Tharon's Children

The dread selkies are masters of the waves, able to sail anywhere in Ravenloft they wish, but some of the finfolk find the Core's paltry seas too small to suit them. These discontented creatures venture beyond the Misty border in an attempt to slake their wanderlust, and linger within the Mists' depths so long as to be embraced by those mysterious vapors. They gain the ability to navigate the far corners of the Land, but at a terrible price: they acquire the Mists subtype, and come to suffer the same vulnerabilities and transient, joyless existence as others who join the ranks of the Fugued.

Fugued selkies are marked by their transition: their seal-skin turns a misty off-white, and their eyes glow the color of lamplight in the darkness. These creatures can be found piloting their fin-boats through fog banks in lonely corners of the world, and can sometimes be bargained with to convey passengers to any port, isle, or coastline in the Land of Mists. As many discover too late, it isn't always money that they ask for as payment.

The Mists' call is irresistible to Fugued selkies, even in death. Three days after such a being dies, it rises from the grave as a mist ferryman, doomed to sail the endless Mists for all eternity.

course, they could simply dive overboard if their ship capsized, but that need seems never to arise, with a selkie at the tiller.

The selkies' vessel of choice is the fin-boat, a tiny, two-man vessel of stretched skin that lacks sails. They do not hesitate to pilot these tiny craft over the open sea, and can reputedly beat even massive knarrs and foreign galleons to their destination. (This has led many a boastful captain to lose a bet, if the legends are to be believed.) Supposedly, a selkie's fin-boat can be well on the horizon before a human can even finish untying his ship from the dock. I have no idea how selkies can achieve such speed, especially given that they use neither sails nor oars, but it is plainly a supernatural talent of theirs.

I was surprised to discover that selkies have a reputation as sorcerers, as well. It seems that they possess a natural talent for the arcane arts, and can be quite apt pupils should they get the chance to learn. All selkies, moreover, have inborn magics at their disposal. After our interviews with the natives, Xander pored over our transcripts as I suggested, picking through muddled descriptions to tentatively identify the selkies' abilities (and confirming my suspicions of him, as well).

Most evident from the accounts is the power to allow a human to breathe underwater. If a selkie wishes a human to accompany it below, or to save a drowning sailor, it can do so with a mere touch ... although the more lascivious of tales suggest that a kiss is the means of choice. There were also many mentions of selkies vanishing or appearing out of nowhere, which Xander suggests indicates they can magically cloak their presence. Xander and I disagreed on the nature of a selkie's capacity to charm: I

believe that the creatures likely have some way of magically beguiling people, while Xander interpreted it as the consequence of selkies' beauty in human form. I am convinced the effect is magical, not mundane, as no other interpretation could explain the amazingly irrational behavior demonstrated by men besotted over such creatures, in many of the tales.

Several stories left us quite at odds. One tale stood out to me, in that it attributed the power of illusions to the finfolk. It was notable in that no other tale mentioned such a thing, whereas this tale did on multiple occasions, citing illusionary leviathans and ogres that could be banished with a pinch of salt! (Xander assures me that the salt, at least, is poppycock.) The storyteller was adamant about it, but without a selkie willing to demonstrate such power or any other corroborating evidence, it seems unlikely at best. Perhaps a selkie studied in magic had given rise to this account, or perhaps it was some other kind of creature entirely.

More curious is the Grabenites' universal belief that selkies can cause storms: a power, which the Islanders normally attribute only to the mightiest and most dreadful of legendary threats! Yet not one of them could name an instance in which a selkie had verifiably done so. It seems almost as if the selkie has become the Grabenites' boogeyman. Whatever could have left them so convinced that the seal-folk wish them harm?

There is one additional power which I know these selkies to have, not from tales, but by personal experience. During my afternoon walk, in pausing to admire the graceful flight of an albatross, I espied a figure far ahead of me, standing among the gray seals upon the

Spell-Like Abilities

Dread selkies can use the spell-like ability Standing Wave (Spell Compendium) three times per day, Water Breathing twice per day, and Invisibility and Charm Person each once per day. Roughly one in ten selkies, known as greater selkies, can also use Major Image and Crushing Despair, also once per day.

beach. Approaching, I realized that it was no man at all – no human at all – but a young boy, barefoot and nearly naked despite the wind's chill. His complexion was milk-pale, his eyes jet black, and he wore a gray seal-skin draped about him.

Realizing what I must be seeing, I started towards him immediately, eager to speak with him: to ask the myriad questions which burned in my mind. I caught myself barely in time, remembering my grandfather's disappearance, and stopped short of the ring of seals – no, selkies, I could see their flipper-hands now – that encircled him, lazy yet watchful. The boy, deathly serious yet somehow still charming, offered his hand to me. "I can show you," was all he said, his voice calm and feather-soft.

I was sorely tempted to take it. But I just shook my head, unable to voice a denial to him. The boy seemed to accept this, and lowered his hand. As he did so, one of his escorts began a low, keening noise that I can only call a song.

I panicked at first, having heard the tales of sirens that lured men to their doom with their voices, but I felt no such compulsion. The song was deep and mournful, and its beauty stirred my soul to sorrow, such that as I heard it I could only think of the emptiness of my life: my meaningless business affairs, my invalid yet demanding father, my flighty

sister, my loveless, fruitless marriage. For a while all I could do was stand weeping and despair.

When at last I woke from melancholy, by the tide lapping at my boots, the beach was empty.

Life Cycle

November 15th, 755

Miss Haydyl has persuaded her parents to accept my extended presence as a lodger, and she fulfills my every request admirably; indeed, she has begun to include a setting for me at dinner, to spare me the Horn and Hoof's lamentable meals. Were I not already married... but I should not think such.

I have found myself at an impasse in my research. It seems we have gleaned as much information as we can from the old tales, yet gaping holes remain in my knowledge. I have been reduced to mere conjecture when it comes to the selkies' biology. I have tried to base my deductions on evidence, but it is all too easy to assume that they are like men.

Several of the stories mention "selkie pups" being spared by a kind hunter, and that hunter being saved later in return. I am told by Chevalier that the creatures have been seen with pups, so I can assume that the stories are correct in this regard. Chevalier and a few sealers I spoke to mentioned that pupping season was a little after summer, that time when many of the gray seals vanish inexplicably from the sea. Interesting ... perhaps the pregnant mothers move inland to safer areas, where they bring their young to term? If so, that would mean that pregnancy does not impair their ability to change shape. And where are they hiding? Their mysterious

invisible moving islands, perhaps? Surely they cannot all hide among the Grabenites, as any stranger's arrival – let alone, a pregnant one – rouses both talk and scorn in so insular and unreceptive a community.

The selkies seem to prefer to raise their young as seal pups ... or at least, if they ever raise their young as human children, no tales have ever spread of their doing so. If the boy I met on the beach is any indication, their offspring are able to transform at a very young age, and perhaps that is true of their other powers as well. The boy had been unclad, and his skin had resembled an uncut pelt rather than a tailored garment, so including such refinements as clothing in its transformation may come a bit later in a young selkie's life, through practice or education.

A selkie mother is evidently responsible for tending to the pups, staying with them on the beaches until they are grown enough to take to the sea. Some tales speak of lone she-selkies minding two pups of different ages; unlike normal seals, it would seem, they do not cease caring for one offspring when they birth another. The father, also unlike a true seal, contributes to his young, delivering fish to the mother in a habit not-unlike a human breadwinner. Unlike a human family, however, parents only stay together long enough for the young to learn to swim, hunt, and use their powers. Once the children are self-sufficient, all of the family go their separate ways. Imagine if humans behaved as such! It would certainly smooth over many youthful indiscretions.

One thing that the legends are very specific on is half-selkies. The selkie parent is most often the mother, taken hostage by theft of her seal-skin coat.

Half-Selkies

"Half-selkie" is a template that can be added to any non-aquatic humanoid. All statistics remain the same as the base creature, with the following exceptions:

Speed: Gains a swim speed equal to its base land speed, or half of that speed if its webbing was removed.

Special Qualities: Hold Breath, spell-like abilities

Abilities: A half-selkie's Charisma increases by +2. A half-selkie whose webbing was removed retains its Charisma bonus, but suffers a –4 decrease to its Dexterity.

Spell-Like Abilities: Water Breathing, 1/day. Caster level is based on HD. The DC is Charisma-based.

Hold Breath (Ex): A half-selkie can hold its breath for a number of rounds equal to four times its Constitution score before it risks drowning.

Skills: A half-selkie has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard in the water. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Half-selkies receive a +2 racial bonus to Spot and Profession (sailor) checks.

Level Adjustment: +1 with webbing, +0 without

Outcast Rating: +3 with webbing, +4 without

Apparently male selkies will sometimes take to seducing human women. I have heard it said that a woman who cries upon a lonely shore will sometimes

attract a selkie to comfort her, although precisely what this “comfort” entails varies between stories and with the sensibilities of teller and listeners.

I assume that male selkies might be held captive as a husband or that female selkies may seduce young men, but such reversals are not spoken of on Graben Island.

No matter which parent is the selkie, these creatures will always bring their half-breed children with them when they return to the sea. Male selkies tend to leave money behind in exchange – what they call a “nurse’s fee” – although it is

not always certain they will do this. (Otherwise, I have no doubt that some unscrupulous sort would seek to profit by it!) Female selkies leave no such condolences when they carry off their half-human heirs: understandably not, given their captivity.

A half-selkie child who somehow avoids being reclaimed, usually through the death of its selkie parent, does not face an easy life. It seems the selkies no longer consider such a child one of their own, and cut off all contact from it. Such a child is easily identified for what it is by its black eyes and webbed fingers and

Secret Society: The Black Pearl Divers

A guild of divers, treasure hunters, and explorers, the Black Pearl Divers make a good living off of pearl diving and reclaiming sunken cargo. Comprised primarily of half-selkies, but open to other water-touched creatures such as genasi, the society serves as a surrogate family to its members. It also serves as a front for reclaiming the seas’ lost artifacts and civilizations, with the intention of creating their own undersea paradise. Founded by a group of discontented half-selkies determined to rejoin their underwater brethren, the Black Pearl Divers originally intended to make contact with full-blooded selkies and learn the way to Finfolkaheem. When the founding members of the group vanished, those who remained decided to return to the sea on their own terms.

Their society has spread out over the Nocturnal Sea, but is based out of a nondescript fishing-supply shop in Graben-town. The guild provides small vessels and commissions to its members, as well as several safe houses for anything interesting dredged up on undersea expeditions. Rank is determined by merit: any major discovery or artifact recovered raises the status of the discoverer. The de facto guild head is Tobias Finnsen (male half-selkie Scout 5/Sor3, CN; for details on the scout class, see *Complete Adventurer*), who has an uncanny talent for sniffing out underwater ruins.

Major discoveries must be reported to the guild, with penalties for withholding information determined by the importance of the find. All mundane treasure is returned to the finder. Due to the many dangers of the Nocturnal Sea, Divers often work together, trading a larger share of treasure and glory for both safety and additional hands for recovery-work. Should a venture be low-profile enough, many Divers are not adverse to hiring outside help, rather than divvy up the prestige of their discovery.

Outsiders may be hired, but the guild itself consists solely of non-humans. Most Divers are disillusioned with surface-dwellers, believing that only sea creatures can be trusted. This belief may soon come back to haunt them: irritated by the half-selkies’ clumsy efforts to pierce the Nocturnal Sea’s mysteries, the sahuagin of the Drowning Deep have sent a covert agent, Lissobyrssa (LE female malenti Rog6/Clr5 [*The God Below*]), to pose as a sea elf and use that bias to lure these intrepid explorers to their deaths.

toes. Surgical removal of the webbing is possible, but it is excruciatingly painful for the half-selkie, and often to little avail: the scars on its hands are still a tell-tale sign, and such an operation causes the half-selkie's hands to lose much of their dexterity. Nonetheless, this is sometimes done at the request of the human parent, in hopes it will discourage the selkie parent from taking the child away. From what I have heard, the selkie is never deterred.

The Grabenites do not abandon these children, as some folk might, for the half-breeds are always exceptional sailors. However, they are distrusted by their human peers, and must go through life alone, haunted by thoughts of an underwater home and family that is lost to them. I have heard that many half-selkies become bitter and estranged, and spend their entire lives searching for Finfolkaheem; they have a habit of vanishing without a trace. Perhaps they have found what they were looking for.

Society

November 24th, 755

Business is piling up at home, but I cannot yet bring myself to leave Kirchenheim. Despite the dreary weather and standoffish natives, I feel relaxed here. Doubtless, Freya's hospitality is of help there, but when I sit by the fire, free from the burdens of my usual affairs, I can see why so many businessmen retreat to Mordentshire for a quiet holiday.

I was surprised to see that the selkies had not abandoned the beach near my lodgings. I was even more surprised, on my latest walk, to discover that some of them had assumed their human forms, and were watching me with interest. In

retrospect, I should not have been surprised that news of my research had reached their ears, nor that my curiosity about them should be answered in kind.

I approached them cautiously at first, unsure if they might take offense at my refusal of the boy's invitation, but they proved quite talkative and soon drew me into conversation. I probably revealed more of myself than was proper, talking of my discontented life more freely than I ever could with my business colleagues or relations; then again, the fact that their lives seemed so utterly different from my dull, land-bound existence was liberating, in a way. No need to guard my tongue, with them, against sentiment or impolitic remarks! I was able to turn the tables and gather a fair bit of information from them, as well.

All selkies hold fast to but a single moral creed: never to harm another of their brethren. I asked how transgressors of this law were punished, but the selkies seemed to find the concept of "punishment", or indeed of "law", to be alien. Nonetheless, I have no doubt that any selkie that crossed this boundary would be dealt with harshly indeed, by vigilante justice in lieu of formal jurisprudence.

No other edicts are enforced: not property-rights, not governance, not obligation! Although the selkies have a well-defined concept of property, they seem to believe anyone who allows something to be taken from them could not have cared enough about it to deserve it, in the first place. Selkies recognize no leaders, and have no means by which to exert authority over one another. To get a group of selkies to do something requires convincing the individual selkies, one by one. There is no overriding cause which they advocate, nor any organization dedicated

to mutual defense: each selkie is considered to be on its own, duty-bound to or answerable to none, once it is fully grown.

Despite this anarchy, selkies will frequently gather together, in their individual pods or in larger groups. Groups are highly fluid, forming and reforming as individuals come and go from wanderlust, or weary of one another's company. They claim to gather in large numbers on their moving islands, which they visit seasonally in the manner of a summer estate; a few selkies – the aged and ill especially – can

be found there year-round. The creatures did not seem at all concerned about revealing this to me, for they informed me that these islands are undetectable to the human eye (and as I discovered later, after a few clandestine probes by a hired wise woman, completely immune to detection and scrying magic).

It appears that the selkies have little or no interest in their fellow seaw dwellers, going out of their way to avoid them should one ever encounter the other. Even non-aggressive creatures seem to be ignored and shunned. I found this quite odd, but could get no

Dread Possibility: In the Service of the Master

The selkies' greed for silver runs deep, and no residents of Graben Island have more of this metal than the Graben family. Even before the isle's founding clan passed into undeath, finfolk hirelings had assisted in the Grabens' shadier business endeavors. A handful of selkies attended the funeral feast at which the clan was poisoned, and Meredoth, realizing what extraordinary beings he'd slain, kept their seal-carasses on ice while he devised a new variation of his lebendtod-animating procedure.

In addition to detaching their extremities when in human form, these rare selkie lebendtod have the power to animate their own skin-coats. An animated skin-coat is Medium size, has 1/2 the undead selkie's total hp, and moves and attacks like a cloaker. Unlike a normal skin-coat, it has sharp seals' teeth concealed in its lining, letting it inflict damage equal to the selkie's bite when using the Engulf extraordinary attack. If not disguised by the lebendtod veil of life, the skin-coat looks like an untanned, ragged animal pelt, and the undead selkie's body appears flayed. The skin-coat otherwise functions like other detached lebendtod appendages, as detailed in the Nocturnal Sea Survey's expanded lebendtod template.

While their default orders are to support the Grabens' body-smuggling operations, the lebendtod selkies also act as elite scouts for Nebligtode's darklord, using Invisibility and their innocuous seal forms to keep a discreet eye on travelers whom the sea-mage is planning to rob, or to "recruit" as his unliving minions. When bad weather or other problems delay shipments of essential supplies, Meredoth dispatches them to scuttle the nearest ships, steal their cargo, and retrieve the crews' bodies. They sometimes capture sailors alive for the darklord's laboratories, preserving them from drowning with their Water Breathing ability.

Living selkies, meanwhile, are still hired by the Grabens as smugglers and agents, particularly in Darkon where the lebendtod dare not risk Azalin's attention. Meredoth himself has no patience with such chatty, frivolous creatures, and living seal-folk keep their distance from Todstein, fearing both the necromancer's violent temper and the venomous white-fangs that frequent the Rock's icy waters.

satisfactory explanation from the selkies: they told me that they simply find other sea creatures dull. Selkies have no such reservations about land-dwellers, however ... which is ironic, as the Grabenites seem determined to shun selkies. Those with which I spoke seemed to enjoy conversing with me immensely, expressing great interest in humans' way of life.

It is unsurprising, given their talents, that a few selkies have managed to find a niche, even among the frosty Grabenites: shipping. While most Islanders would rather have nothing to do with the finfolk, as they have for generations, a few of the rising mercantile families have discovered that selkies can quickly deliver goods to or from any Nocturnal Sea port, with scant risk of losing the cargo. More importantly, selkies can easily outmaneuver other ports' watchmen, making them an ideal choice to handle shipments of contraband – native furs and scrimshaw, fine imported goods, and other valuables to be smuggled past the tariff-collectors – or other doings that must pass unnoticed by the authorities.

If a selkie cannot find enough of his brethren to form a ship's crew, he may instead take on passengers in his finboat, ferrying them across the ocean quicker and safer than should be possible in so small a craft.

I was surprised that selkies would perform such menial tasks, and even more so, that merchants would trust them with such sensitive cargo, but it appears that selkies' loyalty is easily bought. They seem to possess a compulsive greed for silver, and consider shipping to be easy money. Why they would value silver so highly is beyond me: wouldn't it be more prudent for them to hoard gold, which does not

tarnish in seawater? Still, it is interesting that they should crave it so, as it argues against any link between these curious beings and lycanthropes, which shun that very metal.

Nonetheless, much as the Grabenites claimed the selkies were usually trustworthy with passengers, so they are usually trustworthy with cargo ... provided one is intelligent enough to promise half-payment on delivery and not all up front. Despite their flighty natures, the selkies seem to consider losing a ship to be an insult to their sailing skills. It would take quite a storm, or quite a monster, to convince a selkie to abandon ship; still, accidents do happen, although most Grabenites seem to presume these "accidents" are nothing of the sort, and the finfolk purposefully lost or stole the cargo. The selkies just shrugged when I asked, and admitted that it was possible: they did not know, or care to speculate, what others of their kind may see fit to do.

I must remember to ask Chevalier when the repairs to his ship will be complete. I have little need to venture offshore anymore, now that the selkies have begun speaking to me openly, but I have come to appreciate his company on my little expeditions. This is as much his research as mine, and it would feel wrong to exclude him from it.

Threat

December 1st, 755

Chevalier is a selkie.

I suspect that Xander may be as well, although I have no evidence to prove it. It is almost funny now, remembering how I cited their resemblance to the descriptions we gathered. Freya accosted

Control Weather

Ten selkies, working together, can use the spell *Control Weather* as a spell-like ability once per day. None of the selkies who participate in the ritual may take part in a similar ritual for the next 24 hours.

us as we ate together – it appears she had taken a more active interest in my activities than I had thought – and quite forcibly removed me from our table at the Horn and Hoof. When Chevalier rose to intervene, she scattered a handful of silver beads upon the floor. To my amazement, my companion stopped in his tracks, and began chasing down the rolling beads one by one, as she dragged me from the scene. The entire affair came as a dreadful shock to me, but the incident did have one benefit: Freya was finally willing to reveal what she knew of selkies, and why her people are so antagonistic towards them.

Graben Island is heavily dependant on its fishing industry, and it seems that the selkies' mischief can cripple the means of a fisherman's livelihood. They often snap fishing lines, nets, or anchor-lines. This sounded like mere childish vandalism to me at first, but Freya informed me that it was quite serious to the fisherman: the Nocturnal Sea's storms are legion, and even minor damage to a fisherman's tools of trade may cause him to miss a precious window of opportunity, when the waves are calm enough to safely earn his keep. If a selkie is feeling particularly vicious, it may also hole a fishing boat, or even capsize the vessel outright, casting its occupants into waters that can freeze men to their marrow. Neither Freya nor myself have any inkling as to what causes this behavior: most of the time,

the selkies leave the fishermen well alone, so what would provoke them to act in such a way?

Freya also reiterated the belief that selkies also cause storms. There seems to be no evidence to corroborate this, but all of the Grabenites I have spoken to insist upon it. Could there be some inkling of truth to the tale, after all? If so, the selkies could easily be responsible for many shipwrecks and shipping delays. I have heard tales of how Kirchenheim was all but swallowed by a storm generations ago, before its seawall was constructed, and Freya's

Islands

The selkies' mobile islands, as well as Finfolkaheem (should it exist), are heavily warded against scrying. Any person being scryed upon in one of these locations is assumed to automatically succeed on their Will save, and may not voluntarily choose to fail the save.

The moving islands are also invisible to the human eye, although selkies always know where to find them. If a human looks through a "self-bored" stone (a stone with a naturally-eroded hole through the center) at sunrise or sunset, the islands become visible to that human for one day.

Some selkies are actually able to pilot their isles, much as they would a ship. Each island contains a large standing stone, carved with strange runes. A greater dread selkie need only stand atop the stone to guide the isle wherever it pleases. The selkies do not much care where the islands travel, although a selkie who endangers his kin by sailing a moving island into dangerous waters is swiftly and brutally dealt with.

father tells me their home was built after a similar gale ripped the roof from their old cottage. Small wonder, that they should fear creatures they deem capable of calling up such ferocity of weather!

It should not have been a wonder, nor wholly a surprise, when Freya told me that selkies spirit mortals away with them. My grandfather ... the half-selkies ... it had all been staring me in the face. But, in truth, I refused to believe any of it, until Freya presented me with such abounding evidence and testimonials that I could no longer close my mind to it.

The selkies refer to such abductions as "visiting Finfolkaheem"; they may be telling the truth, but the unfortunate fact is that any mortal taken away by a selkie is never seen again. Freya has heard a few tales in which powerful heroes gave chase, and retrieved their friend from the selkies, but all such rescues took place

while the kidnapped person was still en route: after three days, the victim passed beyond reach of help. Even powerful divinatory magics revealed no sign of them, and miracles that could wrest a man alive from the grave could not draw them back from the selkies' keeping. Few people have attempted to consult with the Vistani, as they rarely if ever grace Graben Island with their presence, but any answer given is too cryptic to decipher, if they choose to answer at all.

Once a man has set eyes on Finfolkaheem, it would seem, he can never return home.

The moving isles vary in size, but are never more than a few square miles in area. Like Graben Island, the selkies' islands have rocky shores, but their interiors are thick with lush grasses and flowers, that thrive without need for caretakers. The islands host many well-built homes of stone and coral; the

Selkies and the Vistani

Try as the DM might to prevent players from uncovering the selkies' secrets, players are bound to think of asking the Vistani about the fates of those taken by the finfolk. This could be awkward, as granting an answer will detract from the selkies' mystique, yet *not knowing* the answer could do much the same thing to the Vistani. Negotiating such an impasse can be tricky, but it's far from impossible.

Although the most powerful of Vistani seers likely knows the answer, it is important to remember that not all Vistani are equal in their ability. Answers given by inexperienced Tarokka readers may be cryptic and mired in symbolism, rendering them essentially useless. The gypsies are also very mysterious in their ways, and may refuse to speak at all of those taken by the selkies. Those less well-disposed to *giorgios* may simply lie about the captives' fates, or might take offense at being questioned about an abduction: a crime which the ignorant have been known to accuse the Vistani, themselves, of committing.

The players could be directed to a more powerful seer: one who is more likely to exact payment for her council. If the players are willing to make the trek all the way back to the mainland and search for a Vistani caravan, the DM may wish to reward them for their dedication. Then again, the hard-sought seer might turn them away without an answer.

In short, should the GM wish the Vistani to know the truth about the selkies, they do. If not, they don't.

selkies deny knowing who built them. Sea life tends to flourish around and underneath the drifting bulks of the selkie islands, but any fisherman who sails near in an effort to capitalize on this abundance is harassed by the finfolk until he departs.

Selkies seem to favor certain people over others for their attentions. They reach out to isolated and discontented individuals, offering their friendship to those who sorely need it. (How I blanched when Freya told me that!). Most commonly they approach the depressed or abused, becoming a source of comfort to beaten housewives or troubled children who have no one else to turn to. They also approach the bereaved, the homesick exile, or those who are merely lonely.

Whatever the reason, the selkie quickly becomes the chosen party's trusted confidant, even to the point of superseding the human's other friends. Freya seemed certain that the selkies took an active role in the alienation of the target from his fellow man, but I am not positive this is the case. It is difficult for mere mortals to stand against the charming, helpful selkies; lacking in other responsibilities, the creatures can be flagrantly selfless, offering or doing nearly anything they can to help their new-found friend. They are easy conversationalists and seem impossible to disappoint or offend.

In short, they offer everything a man could ever want in a friend, but nothing a man needs, such as a disapproving voice to check poor behavior. Still, it takes immense strength of character to pass up a friend willing to indulge one's every desire, and the cheerless folk whom selkies are wont to approach can hardly be expected to turn away any kindness. Once the selkie is considered a firm

friend, it offers to take the chosen human to Finfolkaheem. Most people go willingly, and are never seen again. The bardic tales, no doubt taken from the selkies' own blandishments, profess that this is because Finfolkaheem is too wonderful for anyone to wish to leave, but I can hardly accept that. Surely someone must have tried at some point?

Other victims face a far uglier turn of events: a selkie may opt simply to drag them off by force. I balked at believing such a thing, but the evidence Freya provided was irrefutable. Anyone who wanders the beaches alone or in a very small group runs a risk of being seized and pulled below the waves. Such victims are granted the ability to breathe water (as was confirmed by a man who had put up too much of a struggle for the selkie's taste, and was let go), but anyone dragged off in this manner is never heard from again, as surely as those who went willingly. Most commonly, selkies seize fishermen out of their boats, but inattentive people can be dragged right off the shore. The Grabenites invariably regard such forcibly-taken victims as dead ... yet if the selkie intends to kill the victim, why then would it preserve him from drowning?

Whether the victim was taken with their consent or without, the selkie involved often vanishes from Graben as well. I do not know whether it does this to avoid repercussions for its actions, or for some other reason, but it makes it impossible to interrogate the culprit about the whereabouts of its victims. Asking the other selkies would most likely be fruitless, as they have already avowed ignorance of one another's doings (and given what I have seen of their carefree habits, they likely are not lying). And given what I have learned,

would it even be safe to approach them again?

But even Freya admits that the selkies will often accept a friend's decision to remain behind. She grudgingly related a story to me of a sailor saved from drowning by a selkie, who offered to take him to Finfolkaheem; it accepted his refusal and left him in peace. And how many times had I stood alone by the gray seals on the beach, or set sail with only Chevalier to accompany me? Why would they take some by force, yet graciously leave others be?

I asked Freya why Grabenites did not warn foreigners more explicitly of these dangers. In reply, she looked ashamed, and told me her people reckoned that selkies bothering foreigners was preferable to selkies bothering Grabenites. I asked why she saw fit to warn me now, and she became... quite upset.

I cannot think anymore. My head hurts, and so does my heart. Just this morning I was a happy man, with good friends and peaceful lodgings. Now I find that my friends are a lie, and Freya... what does Freya matter anyway!

Pursuit

December 4th, 755

I have booked passage home. I must return and fix the mess I have managed to make of my business and my life. I still wonder how much of my behavior was controlled by the selkies, but it is irresponsible to blame them, alone, for my folly.

I also wonder how much of the information they provided to me was true. It was all backed up by evidence,

but why would they help me learn more about them?

I considered it prudent to learn how best to fight these creatures, if the need should arise, although what I have learned makes it seem unlikely: the creatures are too cautious to attack groups of people or anyone who threatens to put up too much of a fight. They will not fight on land at all unless forced, save when they choose to snatch a lone person off the beach; should they be attacked while ashore, they will simply vanish from sight and flee back to the shelter of the waves.

The water is a different story, for selkies can be quite deadly while they are in their element (and their victims, out of theirs). One must not forget, when looking at the gray seals, that they are as smart as a man, and they show due cunning when they choose to attack. They are quick to use the environment to their advantage, doing their best to sink boats and plunge their adversaries into the water. They can seize hold of human enemies and drag them down to drown, or just tear them apart with their massive jaws. A selkie is easily large enough to charge straight into a swimmer, leaving them reeling and off-balance. In coastal surf, a selkie's bulk prevents the waves from knocking it about, and it can huddle just beneath the foamy crests, like a lion in tall grass, as it lurks in ambush or hides from vengeful pursuers.

Still, however cunning, selkies are just seals, and a crew of men with nets and harpoons can make them bleed like any other. They are very strong creatures, but when one is outnumbered by men on a boat too large for the creature to capsize, it can be caught; indeed, one need worry more about catching up with it than killing it in such a situation, for selkies flee quickly when

they are outmatched. They rely heavily on the mobility that water gives them, so hemming them in with nets or binding them with spells can even the odds considerably. Ranged weapons such as bows or harpoons are preferable, as the selkie's strength should not be underestimated. If at all possible, the hunter should remain on land, and strike from shore; if not possible, then a substantial ship must be taken out to hunt. One must not get complacent just because of the size of one's vessel, however, as the selkies may swim beneath it and attempt to scuttle it.

I have heard tell of lycanthropes resembling massive seals, that plague the Sea of Sorrows, but I doubt if selkies are the source of these accounts. I could not be certain of this, as I had little desire to prod one of the massive creatures with a dagger to see if steel would harm it; but, even the Grabenites' worst allegations against the selkies fall short of calling them man-eaters, and no one I spoke to had ever heard of a selkie infecting humans with its condition.

Still, these creatures may yet be vulnerable to silver ... in the form of their obsessive greed. When I spotted two of the gray seals lounging on the seawall this morning, I took a coin from my pocket and flipped it into the surf. Both creatures immediately dove into the water and began racing each other towards it. I tried this trick again this afternoon, when I saw the creatures had reclaimed their perch, and was surprised to see them let the coin sink... until I noticed a large shark's fin, circling in the water. So, the craving for silver is not an unreasoning compulsion, but I suspect it may be used to lure the creatures into traps. Selkies have keen eyes, but might still be ambushed.

The biggest danger, or at least the one that I suspect is most common, is that a hunter's heart may soften towards the creature, and leave one compelled to let it go. One must keep a careful eye on one's companions, lest the same appealing demeanor which had blinded me to danger take hold of them, and set members of the hunting party who succumb at odds with those who manage to resist.

One legend I heard may be very helpful, if choosing to hunt down a selkie: although the moving islands that the selkies inhabit are invisible to the human eye, there is a way to find them. A human looking through a stone that naturally has a hole through it (grinding a hole through a rock is apparently insufficient) at either sunrise or sunset can spot the selkies' islands. It could be useful to know, should a selkie choose to bring one of its victims there before dragging them off forever.

Despite all this, the selkies seem to exist in an uneasy truce with the Grabenites. It seems rather bizarre, but the Grabenites can hardly purge every gray-hued seal that swims from their waters, and I have no doubt that the repercussions of such a plan would be severe. The selkies now seem content to accept any losses they incur, perhaps out of a sense of fair play, but their systematic destruction would no doubt spur them to action. If the creatures can indeed cause storms, and chose to cooperate, they could cripple the island's livelihood. Moreover, while the Grabenites profess to believe their stolen countrymen are long dead, the unspoken hope that the seal-creatures just *might* be keeping them alive – alive, contingent on the selkies' good graces – has doubtless stayed more than one aggrieved relation's hand.

Dread Possibility: Finfoykaheem

Magic can be found even in the lonely reaches of Graben Island, and there are few secrets that cannot be uncovered with the proper spell. On more than one occasion, a selkie has been magically interrogated by disciples of the arcane arts, seeking to prove the selkie's lies and hostile intent. What they found surprised them; no matter how they were enchanted, the selkies insist on the veracity of Finfoykaheem. Yet when they were probed as to the location of their race's fabled undersea homeland, or the fates of abducted humans, the selkies could not answer.

Perhaps Finfoykaheem moves along the ocean floor, much as the motile islands sail the surface, leaving the selkies forever unaware of its precise location. Maybe more powerful magic lies over Finfoykaheem, preventing its location from being spoken. Those selkies that frequent Graben Island might be exiled from their ancestral home, its location wiped from their memories. Or maybe Finfoykaheem is nothing more than a lie, and the selkies are protected from any magic that would force that truth from them.

As for the final fate of the selkie's victims, that decision rests with the DM. The selkies might truly be benevolent, sincerely trying to help their newfound friends by removing them from the world that treated them so harshly. The abducted humans may truly find Finfoykaheem too wonderful to leave. Then again, the selkies' good intentions need not mean that they do not accidentally cause their friends harm. The Finfoyk might play with and pamper their human friends (or pets?) while at home, yet leave them alone, trapped and bored, for most of the day, hoping that their frivolous caretakers don't forget about them and accidentally let them drown. Or Finfoykaheem may have a time differential, like the Shadow Rift, leaving the humans taken there unable to return home until everyone who knew them is long dead.

Or perhaps no one ever returns because the dread selkies possess the greatest secret of all: a way out of Ravenloft.

Then again, the selkies' captives may indeed meet a monstrous fate, even worse than the certain death the Grabenites assume. Perhaps the snatched mortals are consumed, body and soul, to fuel rituals that grant unborn selkies their human forms. Or maybe the selkies flay their victims alive, then meld their victims' hides and captive essence into their signature finboats. Perhaps the seal-creatures secure their own safety from the Nocturnal Sea's darker denizens by selling or sacrificing their human captives to the deep-sea terrors that lurk below.

Or could it be that the selkies, themselves, don't know what happens? As the human vanishes from the land above, so the selkie might disappear from the waters below. The selkie's fellows are left to ponder its mysterious fate, just as the humans do, until the time comes that they grow compelled to take a human with them, and vanish as well.

I encountered Chevalier one final time. He was perched on the village seawall, near the boat that would return me to Graben-town and my voyage home. My first impulse was to run, but I decided not to, in the end: I was surrounded by Kirchenheimers, and realized that *he* was in more danger than I. I know I should not have approached him; however, I grew curious as to what could have possessed him to come back, to sit in full view of unfriendly Grabenites who now knew his secret.

He struck up a conversation as if nothing had happened between us, and I could not hold onto my anger. We talked like old friends. He made no mention of Finfookaheem, and merely expressed a wish to say farewell. He handed me a small wrapped parcel as a farewell gift, and told me he would always be around if I needed him. Then he stepped backwards off the end of the seawall, falling into the surf below.

I returned to Freya's house and sat by the hearth to open the parcel, hoping my hosts would step in if it ensorcelled me in any way. I was surprised, and relieved, to see it contained nothing harmful, just a small wooden etching of Graben-town, finely engraved, upon a shard of salt-bleached driftwood.

The carving was plainly recent, depicting even the town's half-completed fourth dock, which was still under construction upon my arrival. But when I turned it over I was in for a shock: the maker's mark at the bottom was that of my grandfather!

Could he still be alive? Could the stories of Finfookaheem be the truth? Impossible! If they were, why could he not have sent a letter? Why have none of the vanished sent any sign of their existence back home? Could the carving be a cunning forgery?

I re-wrapped Chevalier's gift and packed it away. I have no more time to think of these things. I must not think of these things. I have *responsibilities*, responsibilities I have neglected too long!

That is how it ends. None can say what happened that night, save that Mr. Elgin Gilthros never caught his ship. His luggage sits unclaimed in Freya's room. His diary remained there as well, until I was given it and sent it on to you. I searched for the mentioned carving, but found nothing. Mr. Chevalier vanished as well, confirming Mr. Gilthros' fate. Perhaps he strayed too close to the water, but Freya is convinced he went willingly, despite knowing of the danger. A terrible kind of guilt haunts her, but there is more to her grief than just guilt. She feels his loss keenly.

That is the heart of the matter, the reason I have written to you. I have pledged my life to defending the innocent in secret, no matter what I must leave behind to walk that path. That is why I can never fight the selkies. I do not say this out of wavering resolve; you know me too well to think that. I do not say this because not all selkies are evil. This is true, my very life is proof of this, but the same is true of men, and I will fight all those who serve evil.

I say this because the selkies can never be faced alone. I write to you because it is you that can stand against the selkies, you, who hold a bond with each other far stronger than any newfound friends could undermine. Even someone who knows the danger is too easily swayed by the selkies' charm. Certainly, think you that someone like Freya, who has lost so much to the selkies, would never fall under their spell? I have seen her this very day,

sitting among dark-eyed strangers by the shore. Should she have instead turned to her wayward brother, who has not been home for seven years, and is barely accepted in his own homeland? Should she have turned to the rest of her family, who derides her sorrow over Mr. Gilthros, telling her sharply that the foreigner was not worth her concern? But when she was with the selkies, I saw her smile again.

I will stay in Kirchenheim. I will try to be the brother I never was. What else to do is there? Should I drive off the only creatures who offer her more than callous disregard and cruelty? Should I attack them for a crime that they only might commit? What do I do if I am called away to face some greater evil? Even now I fear that it is too late, and that one day we will find her room empty and her footprints on the sandy shore.

There is nothing else to say, save this, something Freya said to me the day she gave me the journal. Never leave anything important unsaid, no matter what the reason. For you will find that those you love can be ferried away in the blink of an eye, and your words will not be able to follow.

Fare ye well,

Johann Haydys

A Dread Selkie is a CR 1 monster (see 3rd edition Fiend Folio).

Dread Selkie, greater cr 5

(Humanoid Form)

Any Medium humanoid (selkie, shapechanger)

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +5, Spot +11, low-light vision, scent

Languages Selkie*, Grabenite, one other language (as per professed identity)

Outcast Rating 2

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

hp 52 (7 HD)

Fort +5, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee longsword +10 (d8+5)

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +10

Combat Gear longsword

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th):

3/day – *Standing Wave* [†] (DC 15)[[†] – *Spell Compendium*]

2/day – *Water Breathing* (DC 15)

1/day – *Charm Person* (DC 13), *Invisibility*

1/day – *Crushing Despair* (DC 14), *Major Image* (DC 15)

1/day (cooperative; requires 10 selkies) – *Control Weather*

Abilities Str 20, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 15

SQ alternate form, hold breath

Feats Alertness

Skills Listen +5, Perform (sing) +7, Profession (sailor) +9, Spot +11, Swim +18

Possessions combat gear plus skin-coat (+3 armor bonus)

Alternate Form (Su) As a standard action, a selkie may switch between its human and seal forms. To do so when in human form, it must be wearing its skin-coat. If a selkie is deprived of its skin-coat while in its human form, it loses its Alternate Form and spell-like abilities until the coat is recovered.

Hold Breath (Ex) A selkie can hold its breath for a number of rounds equal to eight times its Constitution score before it risks drowning.

Skills A selkie receives a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Selkies have excellent eyesight, good voices, and are superior boatmen. They receive a +4 racial bonus to Spot, Perform (sing), and Profession (sailor) checks.

(Seal Form)

A dread selkie's seal form is statistically identical to its human form, except as follows:

Any Large humanoid (selkie, shapechanger)

Languages Selkie*; understands but cannot speak human tongues as above

Outcast Rating 5

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+2 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), swim 80 ft.

Melee bite +11 (2d6+7)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +14

Atk Options Improved Grab

Special Actions Capsize

Combat Gear none

Feats Alertness, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Listen +5, Perform (sing) +7, Spot +11, Swim +18

Capsize (Ex) As a full-round action, a selkie in seal form may attempt to capsize a boat of up to Huge size with a

25% chance of success. Each additional selkie assisting increases this chance by 10%.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a selkie must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Typical Treasure

Dread selkies hide their wealth in underwater niches and beneath submerged rocks offshore. Their riches (standard) consist of silver coinage, plus pearls, exotic shells, and other natural rarities from the sea.

Advanced Selkies

While the Finfolk are not immortal, their lives can potentially span centuries. Elder sea-veterans of their kind do not grow significantly larger over the decades, but they become ever more formidable and tough, attaining up to 12 HD.

Selkie Characters

A dread selkie's favored class is sorcerer. Other character classes found among their kind include bards, rangers, druids and rogues. Even the most aggressive of selkies are far too mild-tempered and amiable to pursue the barbarian class, despite their Chaotic tendencies.

For more references on selkies and the Finfolk, visit:
<http://www.orkneyjar.com>

Children of the Night

Johann Haydys

By Eleanor "Isabella" Ferren

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Johann Haydys *cr 10*

Male human scout 3 ^{CA} / urban ranger 4 ^{UA} / Knight of the Shadows 3 ^{VRA}

[^{CA} – *Complete Adventurer*; ^{UA} – *Unearthed Arcana*; ^{VRA} – *Van Richten's Arsenal*]

CG Medium humanoid (human)

Init +4; **Senses** Listen +8, Spot +8

Languages Grabenite*, Darkonese, Mordentish, Vaasi

AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 18; uncanny dodge

(+3 Dex, +5 armor, +3 shield)

hp 71 (10 HD); Diehard

Fort +11, **Ref** +11, **Will** +8 (+12 vs. Fear saves)

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee +1 undead bane longsword +14/+9 (d8+5/19-20)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +13/+8 (d8+4/x3)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +11/+11/+6 (d8+4/x3) [w/ Rapid Shot]

Base Atk +9/+4; Grp +13

Atk Options Rapid Shot, skirmish (+2d6, +2 AC), favored enemy undead +4, favored enemy humanoids [human] +2

Combat Gear +1 undead bane longsword ("Hrimfaxi"), mwk composite longbow (+4 Str) w/ arrows

Usual Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 2nd, DC 13 + spell level):

1st – *Comprehend Languages*

Usual Knight Spells Prepared (CL 3rd, DC 13 + spell level):

2nd – *Invisibility*

1st – Hide From Undead, Protection From Evil

Abilities Str 18, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 10

SQ battle fortitude +1, fast movement +10', trackless step, trapfinding, wild empathy +2

Feats Courage, Dead Man Walking, Diehard, Endurance, Iron Will, Rapid Shot, Swift Hunter^{CS}, Urban Tracking [^{CS} – *Complete Scoundrel*]

Skills Balance +9, Climb +8, Diplomacy +2, Gather Information +15, Hide +17, Jump +14, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +8, Move Silently +12, Search +5, Sense

Motive +8, Spot +8, Swim +7, Tumble +14

Possessions *combat gear, +1 shadowed mithril chain shirt ("Folsvartr"), +1 heavy steel shield, silver circle brooch*

Favored Enemy (Ex): Johann gains a +4 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks to use these skills against undead. Likewise, he gets a +4 bonus on weapon damage rolls against undead. He gains a +2 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks to use these skills against humans, and a +2 bonus on weapon damage rolls against humans.

Urban Tracking: Johann may use Gather Information to track down a missing person, suspect, or other individual within a community.

Virtue Is Its Own Reward : Johann gets a +2 sacred bonus to Diplomacy and Gather Information checks when interacting with Good-aligned characters. This bonus drops to +1 when dealing with a mixed group where non-Good characters are present, but doubles when dealing exclusively with Innocents.

Guardian Of Innocence: Johann gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks when fighting to protect Good-aligned intelligent creatures from Evil-aligned foes. This bonus doubles when an Innocent is in danger.

Battle Fortitude: Johann gains a +1 competence bonus on Fortitude saves and initiative checks.

Swift Hunter: Johann's scout and ranger levels stack for purposes of determining his Favored Enemy and Skirmish bonuses. Furthermore, Johann may apply his skirmish damage when attacking a favored enemy, even if that enemy is normally immune to precision damage.

Hook *"Wait. I o'erheard what you said. I beli've you, even if they don't. Please, would you tell me what you saw?"*

A muscular, powerful-looking man in his late thirties, Johann Haydyl does not strike anyone as an easy person to miss. Originally hailing from Graben Island, he towers over most of the Core's other residents. Johann has the bleached white complexion shared by his Grabenite countrymen, and his eyes are so pale a blue that some have mistakenly thought him blind. His white-blond hair reaches down to his shoulder blades, and is usually pulled back into a thick braid. A few small scars mar his rugged features, and two huge ones crisscross over his heart; the latter still bother him on occasion.

Johann wears monochromatic clothing, which only heightens the impression that all of the color has been leeched out of him. He favors somber twill jackets that cover and hide his armor, and a heavy white cloak pinned with a circular brooch. He often pulls his cloak's hood over his head, shielding his face from strangers, and his eyes from the sunlight he still finds a bit intense for his liking.

Despite his hulking frame and strange appearance, Johann often vanishes from sight, a talent that confounds his friends and foes alike: he moves with a subtle grace and blends into the background with amazing ease. Among groups of people, he is content to remain silent and listen to others speak; at such times, many people forget the big Grabenite is even there. If addressed directly, Johann is surprisingly polite and amicable, sharing his thoughts and stories of his past adventures with anyone who cares to ask. He is always

Careful never to reveal too much, however, omitting names and locations that could lead the forces of darkness back to him, and only relating more personal tales to those whom he trusts.

Johann has a deep voice which he rarely raises; it takes him considerable effort to speak any louder than a conversational volume. He talks calmly on the few occasions when he volunteers information without being asked, but warmth and good humor shine through his speech when addressing anyone who seeks to strike up conversation with him. Perhaps because he keeps to himself so much, Johann has never entirely lost the heavy accent of his homeland. His voice is more conspicuous than he is: another reason he prefers to stay quiet.

Background

Johann Haydyl was born in Kirchenheim on somber Graben Island, the second of six children. An amazingly strong, hardy youth, Johann was also quite introspective, with a habit of thoughtful observation that did little to earn him friends. From an early age, Johann labored as a hunter and trapper under the supervision of his mentor, Erik Vegardsen, working hard to support his family. When Johann was sixteen, a tremendous storm assailed all Nebligtode, ripping many of Kirchenheim's cottages apart. Although the Haydyls emerged unscathed, Erik was later found to be missing. The loss of one of his few confidants was a heavy blow to Johann.

Over a month later, Erik returned to Kirchenheim, claiming to have been lost and sorely injured. The community celebrated his return, but Johann soon noticed that something was wrong with his mentor. Erik had rarely ventured far

from town before, yet he would now wander for days at a time, and where he once took joy in the Island's stark beauty, the senior trapper now went about his duties with a plodding disinterest. Some six months later, while out running traplines in the Zaubereiwald, the apprentice hunter learned the sinister reason for this dearth of passion: when he took his mentor's gloveless hand for help in climbing a steep bank, he found his friend's skin was as cold as the grave. Wrapped round Erik's wrist, Johann's fingers warned him that the older man no longer had a pulse. As the youth froze in horror, Erik calmly pulled out his skinning-knife and stabbed Johann in the chest.

The lebendtod had underestimated Johann's iron constitution, however. Although the blow should have killed him, Johann remained conscious, feigning death in the hopes that the creature would leave and allow him to escape. Instead, the lebendtod carefully lowered Johann to the ground and set its cold mouth over his own, inhaling deeply from the wounded teenager's lungs. Johann seized the opportunity to strike, pulling the knife from his chest and stabbing the creature that had once been his friend and teacher over and over again with a mad fury. Erik's body eventually lay still, but the frantic blows drained what little life was left in Johann, and he remembers nothing more than feebly trying to staunch his bleeding and collapsing in the woods.

When the young Grabenite woke, he was overwhelmed with feelings of revulsion: the very sight of the woods around him was agony, for every leaf and branch reminded him of Erik. Still half-delirious from blood loss, Johann fled the forest as fast as his weakened legs could bear him; reaching the dory

that he and Erik had sailed to the Zaubereiwald, he fumbled to raise the sail and let the winds carry him away from shore. Exhaustion and strain took hold as his tiny vessel drifted out to sea, and weariness claimed him before he could choose, let alone set, a steady course. Johann never knew it when the winds shifted, bearing his vessel away from his homeland and into the Mists.

Upon waking, the young Grabenite found his boat adrift off the shores of a strange country, as the unfamiliar rays of the sun beat down upon him. Spying other sails in the distance, he followed them to a bustling foreign harbor. He soon traded the boat for a back-alley healer's aid; left with no money and no means of getting home, Johann then parlayed his recovered strength into a stevedore's job.

Stranded in Armeikos, and knowing only a meager handful of phrases in the local languages, the young Grabenite began hanging around in taverns and taprooms, keenly listening to the patrons' speech and straining to understand. His attentiveness sparked the curiosity of a group of musicians known as the Redrock String Quartet: travelers from the Core, who assisted him in learning other tongues. Their efforts were rewarded when they discovered Johann's talent for gleaning information from people, so long as he could understand what was being spoken.

Johann himself soon discovered that the musicians were also adventurers. In hope of putting the horror of Erik's monstrosity and treachery behind him, he offered to join them in their hunts. The band lamented Johann's lack of musical talent, but accepted. Despite the danger, Johann soon found he took great satisfaction in fighting the

creatures of the night, for the simple pleasure of helping others. After a time, however, Johann left Armeikos for the Core, driven by a wary reluctance to bond too deeply with his musician-benefactors, and a strange compulsion to keep running.

For fifteen years, Johann wandered, listening to peoples' troubles and doing his best to fix them, but always leaving before he could grow close to anyone. He eventually found himself in Falkovnia and ran afoul of the Talons, from whom he fled into the wilderness. By a stroke of luck, he encountered the resistance movement against Drakov; once he heard the details of their cause, he volunteered to aid them as long as he was in the area. It was here that he met several members of the secret society known as the Circle, including Gondegal, renowned leader of their order. After several months spent fighting against Drakov's tyranny, Johann Haydyl was inducted into the Circle.

Through the Circle, Johann was introduced to Toret Severin of Borca, and hence, to foes of evil throughout the Core, the Weathermay-Foxgroves among them. Despite this introduction, he only recently found an opportunity to work with the twins extensively. Johann discovered the hard way why the Circle cloaked itself in secrecy, when a perturbed necromancer sent a skeletal horror to hunt him down. He was grievously wounded before he realized his opponent was a bone golem, not an undead creature, and was forced to flee for his life. Retreating to Mordentshire to recuperate, he found the Weathermay-Foxgrove sisters hard at work on one of their compilations. As his wounds healed, Johann exchanged information with them, learning much of Van

Richten's life and research. Fortified by their mentor's knowledge of the Created, Johann was better prepared for the golem next time it tracked him down, and the three of them successfully destroyed the abomination.

Current Sketch

Laurie and Gennifer deeply impressed Johann, both with their expertise and the strength that they drew from one another's support. Johann had always gone through life pushing away those who grew too close to him, both out of memory of Erik's betrayal and to avoid the sorrow of leaving friends behind him when he moved on. His experiences with the twins have caused him to make a conscious effort to avoid this habit. His correspondence with Toret Severin has introduced him to many fellow adventurers who are willing to take the same risks and make the same sacrifices as himself, which Johann greatly appreciates.

After he left Mordentshire, Johann returned home to check on his family – something he had not done in seven years – and also sought out the Redrock String Quartet once more. Old habits die hard, however: until recently, Johann had cut off all contact with the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins themselves, although he now seems to have reconsidered this course of action. The sisters are at a loss to explain his sudden change in behavior, as Johann had not cut off contact with any of his other new friends. Johann himself seems to be thinking heavily on something, but does not appear willing to explain his actions just yet.

Johann is not as young as he used to be, and lingering effects from old injuries sometimes trouble him, but he

remains amazingly strong of body and surprisingly observant. He is very sensitive to rumors, and always investigates anything he feels might prove dangerous if ignored. Johann is constantly on the move and notoriously difficult to find, but he always keeps a keen ear out for news about his friends, and returns quickly if he believes they need his help. Johann can be found wandering nearly anywhere in the Land of Mists, although he primarily keeps to the Core and the Nocturnal Sea. He has twice missed the Circle's annual gatherings in Avonleigh, being otherwise engaged on heroic missions that demanded his attention; so far, his fellow Knights have forgiven these absences, although a few of the more lawfully-inclined Circle members now consider him less than reliable.

Combat

When facing opponents alone, Johann favors his bow, sniping at foes from a distance and using cover and concealment he can to avoid counterattack. When others are in danger, or when confronting the undead, Johann switches to his sword and shield, using his stature and strength to block his enemies from reaching those he defends. In either case, Johann is in constant motion, dodging, weaving, and tumbling past his foes to position himself for skirmish attacks, with astonishing agility for a man of his size.

If Johann anticipates melee combat, he prepares spells that can obscure him from sight without obscuring his opponents. He uses the concealment bonus granted to him by his Knight of the Shadow spells to hide after striking, buying time to slip behind his foes and attack again. If increased mobility will

improve the odds, or when fighting at sea where falling overboard is a danger, Johann sets his shield aside and wields his longsword as a two-handed weapon.

Home

Johann has no permanent residence, renting lodgings wherever he happens to find himself. The closest thing he has to

a home is his parent's cottage on Graben Island. His parents rent out his room, the other villagers think him too "foreign" for their liking, and the forests around Kirchenheim still make him feel uncomfortable, so Johann is rarely found there.

Dread Possibility: to the Last Breath

The lebendtod spawn by inhaling the last breath of a dying person, and while Johann's amazing resilience kept him conscious, he was indeed dying when Erik attempted to "recruit" him. Johann survived, but the necromantic taint still lingers in his lungs. Every brush with death leaves him colder and paler, but no one has noticed the change due to his naturally-pallid complexion. Johann himself has noticed a cold twinge in his chest, but thinks it nothing more than old wounds flaring up. If the affliction continues undetected, Johann will rise again as a lebendtod after he dies: an unquestioning slave of the late Erik Vegardsen's unknown master, reborn with full awareness of that master's identity and orders.

If not averted or exposed in time, Johann's transformation will wreak havoc upon the Circle. The very powers that the Knights use to hide themselves from Evil would be turned against them, as Johann could disguise his new nature and remain within the Circle undetected. Even if Johann is caught, the greatest damage will already have been done: the identities and secrets of the Knights of the Shadows will have been delivered into the hands of the Grabenite Knight's new master.

The Jinks

Confederacy of Thieves

By Jim "Jimsolo" Stearns

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"Zelmie Schaal? He always had trouble understanding the way things worked in Kantora. He was always tryin' to stick his neck out for someone else, and never could figure out when to pick his battles. Never gave an inch to the gangs, or anyone who tried to pick on him or anyone else, for that matter. That's probably what I liked most about him.

"When the Jinks went into that gun shop of his and tried to shake him down for protection money, that's when he really stepped in it. He knocked out the bagman come to shake 'im down with one punch, and when the enforcer tried to tune him up, Zelmie pistol whipped the bastard into next week! After that, a couple of other people said 'no' to the Jinks, too. I even considered it myself.

"Of course, when they came back, that's when they gave him the card. Just laid it on 'is counter and left. Zelmie, he didn't know what it meant, brought it over to me with a laugh like it was some kind of joke. Had a picture of a skeleton man on a skeleton horse, in the middle of a graveyard. I told him I'd seen the Vistani use cards like that, when I was

younger. He took it down to the Horse Quarter, and told me later that it was like he was showin' a drawing of a dead baby, the way they reacted. Finally, one of them told him that the card was a bad omen, plain and simple. 'The rider is Woe,' she said, 'and he sits astride Havoc. And now they are yours.' He just laughed it off, of course, like he always did, but I dropped an extra coin in the temple box for him just the same.

"Not like it helped. It was only six days later when his powder horn exploded. He was walking down the street, and it must have caught an errant spark from a torch, but when the smoke cleared, the accident had blown his leg clean off. Of course, everyone knew about the card by then, and everyone knew about the Jinks' reputation. Zelmie had enough money to pay for a healer, and a good one, but he got infected and died just the same. Now nobody says 'no' to the Jinks. Not unless they want to end up like Zelmie."

--Igo Torinova, Kantoran innkeeper

Public Appearance

To the public eye, the Jinks are a well-connected street gang. They are known to engage in any form of crime that they think will be profitable, and while they are principally concerned with smuggling, they have not been shy about running protection rackets or prostitution rings, have been known to engage in strong arm robbery, and are making overtures into drug trafficking as well.

Ostensibly based in Lekar, Falkovnia, the Jinks have sent out satellite groups, and now have presences in Kantora, Rotwald, Neufurchtenburg, Sturben, and Martira Bay. However, since they are primarily smugglers, they can be found almost anywhere there is either a supply of, or demand for, a rare or controlled commodity.

Although they are a ruthless gang of criminals, they lack the numbers that a group of their influence would normally command. For example, despite the fact that the Sturben faction of the Jinks numbers less than a dozen members, they run a protection operation (and a gambling ring) that would normally take a gang three times their size. This anomaly is due largely to their reputation: anyone who defies the Jinks finds themselves the unfortunate victims of terrible misfortune, usually fatal.

The catastrophe doesn't fall instantly on anyone who runs afoul of the gang. Usually, the person to be made example of is someone who has been a thorn in the side of the Jinks for some time, or who has done something particularly egregious to the gang's interests. The victims of the Jinks' curse are always told ahead of time. A member of the gang will deliver a Tarokka card to the citizen that has offended them, usually

the Horseman, but other cards have been used if they would be more chilling to the target. At this point, the target is usually given a grace period to rectify whatever debt they have.

Within a few days, some terrible calamity will befall them. The strange part about these horrible accidents is that they always occur in such a way that it would seem to be impossible for the Jinks to be involved at all. The leader of the Neufurchtenburg faction of the gang has been arrested three times for murders believed to have been caused by the gang, but each time the schepmeista has failed to find any concrete evidence of foul play not just by the gang, but by anyone! Typically, these accidents occur in public places, frequently with an abundance of witnesses.

The other reason that the gang is so feared is their backing. For whatever reason, the gang members are well equipped, more so than is typical for street gangs. Even lowly bagmen for the gang can be seen sporting magical daggers, and the more experienced enforcers or lieutenants can carry enchanted items that would normally be well out of their price range. This has led some to surmise that the Jinks are a tool of a powerful wizard, such as Azalin Rex or Hazlik.

Adding evidence to that theory is the almost supernatural protection the gang seems to enjoy against infiltrators. While no cards are given out, anyone who has attempted to sneak into the organization under false pretenses, whether from a rival gang or a law enforcement source, has suffered an accident eerily akin to those who befall the card recipients. Even more chilling is the occasional infiltrator who has just disappeared one night, and never been seen again.

Whatever the truth of the situation, the Jinks have spread like a malignant infection from their home in Falkovnia to stretch across the Core. Whether they are selling narcotics to the workers in Neufurchtenburg, or guns to the rebels in Rotwald, they have become masters of seeing a need and filling it. Until someone is willing to brave the misfortune that the Jinks promise in order to take them down, they will continue to grow, and with the tales of their victims spreading faster than the gang itself, it becomes increasingly less likely that anyone will put their life on the line to stand up to these criminals.

Organization

While each faction of the gang is largely autonomous, they tend to follow the same pattern of organization, with a few small differences here and there.

Each arm of the gang is headed by a single boss. While they may have different titles, the heads of the factions each serve as the leader of the Jinks' activities in the region. Their word is absolute, and each of them is a hardened criminal, and even though some put on the appearance of a respectable citizen, they all have no small amount of blood on their hands, personally.

Below the leader, there are a number of lieutenants, between one and twelve, depending on the size of the gang presence. Each lieutenant is in charge of some specific aspect of the gang's activities in the area, be it smuggling, prostitution, slavery, or some other nefarious business.

Underneath the lieutenants are the enforcers and the bagmen, distinctions which are both roughly equal in the gang's hierarchy. At this level of organization, it is the individual's

experience and reputation which count, rather than what the other gang members call him. Bagmen are the more cerebral gang members. They are the conmen, the drug dealers, the pimps, and the extortionists. The enforcers, on the other hand, are the muscle. That isn't to say that the enforcers do not have their own business prospects on the side, only that their principle value to the gang comes in the form of violence, or the threat of it.

Beneath the enforcers and bagmen are the mice and the mules. Mice are younger or less experienced gang members, who may accompany enforcers or bagmen as extra (usually expendable) muscle. They may also be assigned trivial or high-risk, low-reward jobs that a full gang member would risk incarceration performing. Mice have the prospect of becoming fully fledged members of the gang someday, in contrast with mules, who are the beasts of burden for the gang until they die. Whether they are addicts or gamblers behind in their debts, or in some other fashion in the grip of the gang, mules are used by the gang for whatever the gang can get away with. No regard is given to the safety of mules, nor is there any precaution taken to keep them out of the grip of the law, since they aren't trusted with any sensitive information anyway.

Each faction also contains a number of specialists, although these gang members vary wildly between the different groups. Recruited personally by one of the faction heads, the skills of these men and women are as unique as they themselves are. The Kantoran faction, for instance, has a number of assassins in their ranks, while the Martira Bay arm of the gang has a number of spellcasters in their employ. The faction heads are all in contact with

the primary source of the gang, in Lekar, and if a problematic situation proves difficult to deal with, the gang leaders may send a specialist from one city to another. Only if the situation still cannot be resolved is the Hexer called in.

A mysterious figure, the Hexer is almost never described the same way twice. Varying in age, race, gender, and dress, the only constant is the results the Hexer gets. When he arrives in town, there is no overt display of power. Most gang members will only get a passing glimpse of him (or her), and even the lieutenants do not get a chance to associate with the strange professional. After the Hexer's arrival, it is almost certain that someone will be receiving a Tarokka card in the near future. Although the Hexer is never seen to do anything of consequence, beyond taking in the local culture, events seem to play out in the gang's favor within a matter of days. Enemies die mysteriously. Buildings burn down spontaneously. Problematic officials inexplicably change their minds about trade embargoes. And of course, all of this occurs without any apparent involvement from the Hexer whatsoever.

There are some who believe that the Hexer is secretly the leader of the Jinks. They point, in hushed whispers, to the leader of the Lekar faction, Jessamon Sheide, as evidence of this conclusion, since it is widely known that the boss of the Falkovnian arm of the gang is a wizard of trifling strength, who is largely interested in his alchemical research, and lacks the charisma or power to hold such a position without some supernatural backing. Still others believe that the Hexer does not exist at all, and is merely a guise that is handed back and forth between a group of trained specialists. Whatever the truth, the Hexer is feared

more by the gang members than they themselves are feared by the community at large.

The Jinks do not wear uniforms or sport gaudy gang colors. If they are preparing for a fight with a rival gang in the crowded streets of Kantora or Lekar, they may adopt a temporary badge such as a bandana or sash in order to discern friend from foe in the often chaotic melees of gang warfare. Such distinctions are based on whatever is convenient at the moment, and are discarded as soon as possible, and never intentionally used again.

When a member of the Jinks is going out in public, and wants to display his affiliation, he will tie a horseshoe to his belt on one side, with the ends pointed down. They don't tend to use such distinctions when hanging out amongst their own, however. The symbolic advertisement that they are the bearers of bad luck is something designed to intimidate the rabble, not identify one another.

While the vast majority of the Jinks are human, the gang does not exclude members based on race. The Martira Bay faction employs a large number of halflings, and the other groups will accept a nonhuman just as easily as they would anyone else. The primary concern for the Jinks is not what species a person is, but how valuable they are to the gang.

This pragmatism extends to all levels of the gang. Every gang member is expected to do something to feed money back into the gang's coffers. The organized criminal activities of the gang are their most lucrative business prospects, but almost every gang member has some additional enterprise going on their own, whether that be fencing, forging travel papers, or just

running a crooked dice game. A portion of all money made in these endeavors winds up being sent up the ladder, of course. The mice and the mules pay nearly everything they have to the enforcers and bagmen, who have a cut of their profits taken by their lieutenant. The lieutenant, in turn, makes sure that the majority of these profits make their way to the head of the local gang, who makes regular shipments back to Lekar. So long as no undue attention comes to the gang, then the higher-ups don't care what their underlings do. Of course, if a bagman were to reach too far and draw down the wrath of either another organized crime group, or that of law enforcement, then someone may have a Tarokka card in their future, and there's never a guarantee it won't be the bagman himself...

The most likely way that people will encounter the Jinks is in their role as smugglers. The gang prefers to accomplish this by bribing or muscling a regular shipping business into allowing them to send their goods hidden amongst the legitimate merchandise. In these cases, the gang will send between two and six gang members along, posing as caravan guards or sailors, depending on the venue. Less commonly, the gang sends out a caravan wholly comprised of gang members, usually transporting a large shipment of very valuable, or very illegal, merchandise.

The Jinks ship anything, from people to drugs to weapons to magical items. Like legitimate businessmen, they acquire items as cheaply as possible, and sell them where there is a much higher demand for them. They prefer to ship goods, but if the money is good enough, they will also deal in slaves, exotic animals, or people smuggling. In addition to the drugs, weapons, and

magical items already mentioned, the group has been known to traffic in stolen merchandise, particularly artwork or high end professional equipment.

When the Jinks establish themselves in a new area, they don't start trouble by trying to force another group out. Instead, they prefer to take advantage of opportunities to fill vacant markets or to provide absent commodities. Their broad degree of travel experience means that they can pick and choose the areas they will expand into. Initial conflicts are rare for them, and if a new city proves to be more difficult than expected, the group has no problem heading off for greener fields. Should the initial gang members meet with success, however, a trusted lieutenant from one of the other cities will be called in and given command of the Jinks' newest acquisition.

Rogue's Gallery

Enforcer

Male Human Ftr2/Rog1: CR 3; SZ M Humanoid; HD 2d10+1d6+6; hp 26; Init +5; Spd 30; AC 14 (touch 11, flat footed 13); Atk +5 melee (1d6+2, club) +4 melee (1d3+2, unarmed strike) or +3 ranged (1d8 light crossbow); SA Sneak attack +1d6; SQ Trapfinding; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +0; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +1, Gather Information +2, Hide +2, Intimidate +5, Move Silently +3, Sense Motive +1, Sleight of Hand +1, Spot +1; Improved Initiative, Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (club)

Languages: Any one.

Typical possessions: club, light crossbow, studded leather armor, ten (10) bolts, horseshoe, brass knuckles (allows unarmed strikes to inflict lethal damage, as a gauntlet).

Enforcers are the muscle of the Jinks. They are usually bulky and often scarred. They tend to dress in a manner that makes them look scary and roguish. They prefer to intimidate their victims into submission, but have no qualms about resorting to more physical measures if that becomes necessary.

Combat

Enforcers prefer to attack their opponents before their foes have time to react. If they only want to scare their target, they will typically grapple them to inflict subdual damage in a suitably painful and terrifying manner. If they have more lethal intent, they prefer to attack from surprise in groups of two to four. Enforcers with more class levels will typically display enchanted equipment, usually a +1 weapon or a ring of protection.

Bagman

Male Human Rog 3: CR 3; SZ M Humanoid; HD 3d6; hp 15; Init +6; Spd 30; AC 14 (touch 12, flat footed 12); Atk +2 melee (1d4, dagger) +4 ranged (1d8, light crossbow); SA Sneak attack +2d6; SQ Evasion, trapfinding +1; AL NE; SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +7, Bluff +7, Craft (any) +6, Diplomacy +5, Disable Device +6, Forgery +6, Gather Information +6, Hide +6, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (local) +6, Move Silently +6, Open Locks +6, Profession (any) +5,

Sense Motive +4, Sleight of Hand +8, Use Rope +4; Improved Initiative, Deft Hands, Persuasive

Languages: Mordentish, Falkovnian, Vaasi.

Typical possessions: dagger, light crossbow, leather armor, ten (10) bolts, horseshoe.

Bagmen are the rank and file moneymakers for the Jinks. They typically dress to impress; they have more money than the average citizen and want everyone to know it. They are social creatures, and their demeanor can go from silver-tongued conman to veiled threats without skipping a beat.

Combat

Bagmen do not, as a rule, fight. If they must fight, they try to escape, unless they have the advantage of numbers, or a few enforcers at their backs. Higher level bagmen are often armed with advanced equipment, such as enchanted weapons, tanglefoot bags, or a minor magical item like boots of striding and springing.

Adelain Correl, lieutenant

Male Human Rog 3/Ftr 4: CR 7; SZ M Humanoid; HD 3d6+4d10+14; hp 59; Init +6; Spd 30; AC 18 (touch 13, flat footed 16); Atk +9/+4 melee (1d6+4, +1 wounding handaxe) or +9/+4 ranged (1d8 masterwork pistol); SA Sneak Attack +2d6; SQ Evasion, Trapfinding +1; AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +7, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +7, Disable Device +6, Escape Artist +5 (+2 if ropes), Forgery +7, Gather

Information +10, Hide +5, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (local) +8, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Open Locks +6, Profession (sailor) +6, Search +7, Sense Motive +6, Sleight of Hand +6, Spot +5, Tumble +5, Use Rope +7; Arterial Strike, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Weapon Focus (handaxe), Power Attack, Weapon Specialization (handaxe).

Languages: Darkonese, Lamordian, Vaasi, Falkovnian

Possessions: +1 Wounding handaxe, masterwork flintlock pistol, +1 chain shirt, ring of protection +1, ten (10) bullets.

Adelain Correl represents a typical lieutenant, in as much as any of them can be said to represent the others, since they are so varied as a group. Adelain is in his late twenties, and dresses in expensive fashions bordering on the gaudy. He wears an eyepatch, although he has both his eyes, a holdover from his sailing days. Adelain spent several years working as an enforcer, guarding shipments of goods to and from Rokushima Taiyoo, before he was promoted to serving as a lieutenant in Martira Bay, overseeing all of the smuggling concerns there.

Combat

Adelain isn't shy about using his handaxe, a gift from the faction head in Martira Bay. He prefers to open combat by hitting his opponent a few times with the wounding weapon. If he catches his foe flat-footed, he will sacrifice one of his sneak attack dice with his Arterial Strike feat to cause an additional point of bleeding damage each round. Once his opponent has two to three bleeding wounds going, Adelain will switch

tactics and fight on the defensive, hoping to wear them down.

Against groups of enemies, he prefers to always fight on the defensive, switching targets so he can spread the bleeding wounds around to all of his opponents. If someone leaves themselves open to a sneak attack by taking an action that would leave them flat-footed, Adelain will happily risk an attack of opportunity to get to them, relying on his Dodge and Mobility feats to keep him safe.

Adelain is almost never alone, it should be noted. At least one enforcer is with him at all times, and usually more than that. Adelain's underlings know that if they were to flee and leave him in the lurch in a fight, he would surely track them down later, and put his axe to bloody use.

Feidorel Raingem, faction leader

Male Hale-Elf Rog 3/Ftr 2/Bbn 5: CR 10; SZ M Humanoid; HD 3d6+2d10+5d12+30; hp 107 (+20 in rage); Init +2; Spd 30; AC 18 (touch 12, flat footed 16); Atk +16/+11 melee (2d6+8, 17-20/x2, +2 greatsword) or +11 ranged (1d10 heavy crossbow); SA Sneak Attack +2d6; SQ Evasion, Fast Movement, Immune to sleep spells and effects, +2 on saves vs charm, Improved Uncanny Dodge (Dex to AC, can't be flanked), Low light vision, Rage 2/day, Trapfinding +1, Trap sense +1; AL NE; SV Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +6, Climb +5, Escape Artist +4, Gather Information +10, Hide +4, Intimidate +6, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +4, Search +7, Sense Motive +5, Spot +6, Survival +6, Tumble +6; Combat Expertise, Improved

Critical (greatsword), Improved Trip, Lightning Reflexes, Prone Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword).

Languages: Vaasi, Mordentish, Sithican

Possessions: +2 greatsword, +1 breastplate, Amulet of Health +2.

Feidorel Raingem is a good example of the power level and equipment typical among the faction leaders of the cities the Jinks have expanded into. Feidorel is the faction leader of the Jinks based out of Rotwald. He prefers to be referred to as 'boss,' although any suitably deferential title will do. He is a half-elf of average build. He is followed around by two enforcers at all times, and he enjoys allowing opponents to think that he actually needs them to defend himself. When not in his armor, he dresses in typical Valachan fashions.

Combat

Feidorel is an unsubtle combatant. He relies on the surprise factor of an elven barbarian to give him an edge in his fights. Even in rage, he prefers to trip his opponents rather than attacking them, since a prone opponent will be vulnerable to his sneak attack. Feidorel prefers to save his uses of the rage ability for when he is facing an opponent he isn't sure he can beat, or a crowd of multiple foes.

Thanks to a failed powers check, Feidorel receives a +2 natural armor bonus while in rage. However, during the duration of his rage, Feidorel weeps blood from his eyes. The latter has no game effect, it's just unsettling.

The Secret Truth

Those who whisper that Jessamon Sheide is a smokescreen, and that the Hexer leads the gang are right, in a sense. Of course, they're wrong as well. This is because Jessamon Sheide IS the Hexer.

Jessamon Sheide

aka the Hexer, leader of the Jinks.

Male Changeling Rog 3/Wiz 12: CR 15; SZ M Humanoid; HD 3d6+12d4+15; hp 66; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 13 (touch 13, flat footed 12); Atk +8/+3 melee touch (spell) or +10/+5 melee (1d6+2, +2 rapier) or +9/+4 ranged touch (spell); SA Sneak Attack +2d6; SQ At will--disguise self, detect thoughts, Evasion, Trapfinding +1, +2 on saves vs sleep and charm; AL NE; SV Fort +11, Ref +11, Will +14; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +9 (+2 if related to alchemy or traps), Bluff +10, Concentration +6 (+4 if casting defensively), Craft (alchemy) +10, Craft (trapmaking) +10, Diplomacy +14, Disable Device +11, Disguise +20, Escape Artist +6 (+2 if ropes involved), Forgery +9, Gather Information +11, Heal +5, Hide +6, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +9, Knowledge (geography) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +9, Listen +8, Move Silently +6, Open Locks +8, Search +9 (+2 if looking for secret doors or compartments), Sense Motive +10, Sleight of Hand +8, Spellcraft +11, Spot +8, Use Rope +6 (+2 to tie bindings); Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms & Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, Eschew Material Components,

Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Focus (Enchantment), Still Spell.

Wizard Spells Known
(4/5/5/5/4/3/2; save DC 14 + spell level):
0--all; 1st--charm person, comprehend languages, hold portal, obscuring mist, reduce person, silent image, unseen servant, ventriloquism; 2nd--alter self, arcane lock, fog cloud, gust of wind, invisibility, minor image, shatter, spider climb; 3rd--dispel magic, gaseous form, hold person, major image, ray of exhaustion, stinking cloud; 4th--confusion, hallucinatory terrain, greater invisibility, minor creation, phantasmal killer; 5th--dominate person, mirage arcana, magic jar, persistent image, telekinesis, teleport; 6th--disintegrate, geas/quest, permanent image.

Languages: Vaasi, Mordentish, Sithican, Falkovnian, Borcan, Lamordian

Possessions: Cloak of Resistance +3, Hat of Disguise, Portable Hole, +2 Rapier, Ring of Protection +3, masterwork thieves' tools, healer's kit, masterwork tools for trapmaking, rat familiar (Sitkowitz).

In his natural form, Jessamon looks like a slender humanoid with chalky-colored skin and no distinct features of any kind. His eyes are blank and his face is only vaguely formed. Since he is a changeling, however, he is rarely seen in this form. In his human guise, Jessamon appears as a skinny man in his late thirties. He rarely dresses like one of the Jinks, instead preferring the garb of a merchant. When at home in Lekar, he mimics the Falkovnian slave brand on his forehead.

When abroad, or posing as someone else, Jessamon can look like anyone. He

will use alter self if his innate shape shifting abilities aren't up to the task. When he is posing as the Hexer, he prefers to vary his appearance, to preserve as much mystery about his alter ego as possible. Most of the gang members, especially the more valuable specialists and the faction leaders, are acquainted with him in his Jessamon the wizard guise, and none of them know about his dual role as the Hexer.

Background

Jessamon learned wizardry in Darkon, apprenticed to a transmuter of middling skill. Jessamon's master was content with what little magic he knew and the modest living he made as a rather successful potion crafter. Jessamon, however, wanted more. When he had learned what he could from his master, he set out to try and discover more.

Jessamon had always wanted to pursue magical items as a way of generating income, but the draining effect caused by crafting them made such a career impossible. Jessamon, however, believed he had hit upon a way of using another creature's soul, rather than the caster's, as the power source for enchanting an item. He discovered early on that, while his theory was sound, doing so required the death of the person so used. Jessamon knew that taking the citizenry of Darkon one at a time would eventually result in his being discovered, and so he moved to a new home, one where life was cheap and the people all too willing to ignore a missing person.

From the slums of Lekar, Jessamon began to pursue his research with even greater intensity. The Jinks, when Jessamon discovered them, were nothing more than a local street gang, whose territory extended no more than a city

block in any direction. Jessamon infiltrated and commandeered the gang, initially as security for his workshop, and then later as couriers and smugglers for his wares.

In the beginning, the Jinks struggled against the other gangs for survival. Aggravated by these constant distractions, as well as the impact they had on the money his gang was making, Jessamon turned his eye to the problem with all the creativity he could muster. He created the persona of the Hexer, and began to spread the rumors that the mysterious figure could call down supernatural curses on those who plagued the gang. Using his illusion spells, Jessamon arranged for a handful of "freak accidents" to befall the gang's rivals, and from there the rumors spread like wildfire.

The gang's reputation for cursing those who get in their way is just that: a reputation. There is no supernatural curse behind it, no powerful hex that kills anyone who crosses the Jinks. Instead, it is Jessamon himself who arranges these 'accidents' for those who get in his way. His illusion magic, coupled with his trapmaking abilities, are all that he needs to ensure that his enemies die, often publicly, and always with no apparent involvement from Jessamon Scheide or his gang. If it would be impossible to eliminate a target publicly, Jessamon isn't above disintegrating the target in private, and then using his permanent image to disguise someone who really did die in an accident as the gang's target.

As Jessamon delved ever deeper into his twisted experiments, his callous disregard for human life attracted the inevitable attention of the Dark Powers. The most beneficial aspect of this attention came in the form of the ability

to detect thoughts at will, just like a doppelganger. With this newfound ability, Jessamon could determine which of his lieutenants were the most capable, as well as the most loyal, which enabled him to expand this influence of his gang to cities beyond Lekar. This ability is also responsible for keeping the gang free of infiltrators, since no one is promoted to lieutenant without first meeting with Jessamon, whether the gang member is aware of it or not.

In order to create even more magical items, Jessamon began teaching other wizards. At any given time he will have a number of apprentices serving under him in the Jinks, and it is largely these apprentices who provide the spellcasting for the magic items Jessamon creates and distributes to the gang.

The wizard has sent scouts to several other cities across the Core, as well as a few through the Mists to the clusters. Jessamon has yet to decide where the newest offshoot of his gang will take root, but the possibility of not expanding is one he wouldn't even consider.

Current Sketch

Jessamon is a man consumed by greed. His lust for magic, power, and most importantly, wealth, have become all consuming. The Dark Powers have turned this metaphorical hunger into a very literal one: Jessamon now needs to consume valuables as much as he needs to eat! The mage must devour 250 gp of material wealth per day or suffer the effects of starvation. This sustenance can come in the form of coins, valuable trade goods, or enchanted items, but he cannot gain any other positive effect from items consumed in this fashion, such as potions.

The relatively minor upside to this is that Jessamon can chew, swallow, and digest anything that he can fit in his mouth. This ability does not confer any combat advantage, although it does make him immune to ingested poisons. (In fact, any ingested poisons count as consumed valuables!)

Every acquisition that Jessamon makes just feeds his desires. He is always seeking a new way to increase his personal fortune, new magical items to create, or new spell to learn. He can never have enough, and it is only a matter of time before he tries to acquire something that belongs to a victim too strong for the wizard to contend with.

He has yet to run afoul of any of the Darklords, but it is likely that he would capitulate to the will of any of them who attempted to bring him to heel. Jessamon has no problem with following someone else, provided they are capable of leading him. Since he took his leave of his master, the wizard just hasn't run into anyone that competent yet.

In person, Jessamon is polite but reserved. He can be friendly and engaging, but only with those capable of discussing his intellectual pursuits on his level (which are few and far between). When he encounters other wizards, he is eager to work with them, and happily trades spells with any wizards so inclined. After all, if he lets another wizard copy a spell from his spellbook, he has lost nothing, but gained a new spell, which is just the sort of trade he relishes. When acting in capacity as the crime boss of the Lekar branch of the gang, he is cold and quiet, relying on the reputation of the gang and the imagination of his victims to do most of his intimidation for him.

When posing as the Hexer, Jessamon adopts a different character each time.

He might be a flirtatious and gregarious young woman on one occasion, and in the next city an old man with brusque speech and a scarred face. This variety keeps people from discerning the true identity of the Hexer.

Combat

Jessamon is cowardly and if there is a doubt in his mind of his ability to win, he has no qualms about using teleport to make an escape. He prefers to open with his most powerful spell, disintegrate.

If he's seeking to harm someone, he will usually bring several gang members to tilt the odds in his favor. He likes to use his magic to alter his opponent's perceptions before the gang attacks, although he is not averse to letting his underlings have a good old fashioned brawl if he feels that they already have the upper hand.

Lair

The gang hideout in Lekar is Scheide's primary base of operations. The building is a warehouse that not only serves to stockpile the gang's loot, but the gang as well, since the basement serves as a hangout for the Jinks of Lekar. The sub-basement is Scheide's residence, which contains the alchemy equipment he uses to brew up potions and alchemical supplies. Below the sub-basement is a concealed dungeon that Jessamon uses to conduct his dark magical experiments.

Jessamon has numerous other residences scattered throughout the Core, however. Most are out of the way rural houses that are almost never used, but he keeps at least one house in every city the gang has a spur in. All of his houses are accessible via teleport.

The Thompson Museum

Monument of the Past

By Stephen "ScS" Sutton

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Visitors to Bleakstone will find that the city's charms wear thin. Too quickly does one tire of dreary soirees in the High Hills and the concerts of musicians who have survived their own fame. Daring visitors might partake of seedy vaudeville acts, pub crawls in Spivey Point, and crooked card games in basement social clubs. Those who are too proud or too squeamish for base entertainments will instead stroll up Beacher Street and make their way to the Thompson Museum.

The Thompson Museum is an aging Georgian mansion in the center of a grassy park bordered by a high stone wall. When the building was new, the proud lines of the structure projected wealth, power, and sophistication. The years have been unkind to the manor. The tasteful brown paint has been weathered to a dreary black and the eaves of the tall windows droop like the lids of sleepy eyes. The foundation has shifted slightly, skewing the building at a slight angle.

Visitors to the museum follow the driveway from Beacher Street, through

the column of tall twisted trees, and up to the portico at the main entrance. The grounds of the Museum are well kept, and are a popular place to linger when the cherry trees are in blossom.

History

The Thompson museum is named for Roy Thompson, a successful trader and smuggler in the early 1800's. Thompson built his home close to the ruins of the original Bleakstone site and was an active leader in the community of Elderslot. As his fortune increased, Thompson became an avid collector of antiques, books, and works of art. As the years passed Thompson withdrew from the community at large. Those few visitors who called upon him said that his interests had turned to strange channels. Before his death in 1821, Thompson became a social pariah surrounded by the most fantastic rumors and conjecture.



The Thompson heirs enriched themselves by selling acre after acre to the neighboring communities. In time, the mansion would become a junk-filled derelict and all that would remain of the estate was a stone wall and the last few survivors of what once was a cherry orchard.

In 1872 the neighboring communities amalgamated into the City of Bleakstone. The new city felt that they needed a cultural and historical icon to provide a veneer of sophistication and continuity with the past. The Thompson family negotiated tax exemption for their extensive properties in and around the city in exchange for exhibiting the house and its extensive collection of antiques. Since its foundation, the museum has been a mixed success. The Thompson family prefers to forget that the museum exists, except when they use it to host a social function.

The Museum

Beyond the portico and the great walnut doors of the entrance is a receiving area and cloak rooms. Past the admissions desk are the halls to the east and west wings and the stairs to the second and third floors. In the rear of the building is a tradesman's entrance where once there was a kitchen. Owing to the need for space, all of the offices and record stores are located on the third floor of the Museum.

Museum of Antiquities

The West wing of the building is the historical section of the museum. This Museum of Antiquities is a ring of interconnected chambers looped around a large central exhibition hall. The curator has organized the artifacts of the

collection so that each of the rooms is focused upon a given theme and period, with each theme supposedly advancing through history. Many of the artifacts were obtained by Roy Thompson, though his family members have contributed their own diverse bric-a-bracs too unsightly or weird to house in their own homes.

The first room is devoted to supposedly primitive cultures. Artifacts from unrelated cultures separated by thousands of miles and thousands of years are jumbled together. A row of Kalahari spears hang above a rock featuring Australian aboriginal hand paintings, just to the left of Amazonian wood carvings and Maori jade, while across the room ancient Hawaiian stone idols stare blankly at an Inuit kayak. Amidst the knickknacks is an ancient map of Africa drawn on a buffalo hide. Hopelessly inaccurate, the map bears no resemblance to modern maps of the continent and even describes the source of the White Nile River and a "Hidden Kingdom".

Next is the Dawn of History exhibit, a great chamber containing the relics of Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations. Owing to the massive popularity of Egyptian artifacts, almost all of Roy Thompson's original collection was either sold or appropriated by his heirs. Only a few gold-painted statues and some dusty papyrus scrolls remain. The Mesopotamian relics are more impressive and feature a stone Sphinx from Akad and a copper bust from Babylon. Off to the side of the room is a scale model of a Sumerian ziggurat. Careful observers may notice that the ancient temple bears a striking resemblance to a local Bleakstone landmark, Empire Hospital.

Further along the ring is the Classical Civilizations room. The chamber is divided by a colonnade of fake pillars. The room features a number of Greek and Roman artifacts, although they are poorly organized. Several gold necklaces on display were unearthed by the famous Heinrich Schliemann from one of the cities that he believed to be fabled Troy.

The next chamber hosts the Oriental exhibit, another mare's nest of ancient artifacts from wildly different cultures and time periods roughly jammed together into one room. The armor of a samurai stands watch over an open Quran, clay tablets from Persia sit beside scrolls from China's Warring State's period, while stone Hindu idols dance around a brass Buddha from Siam. A recent addition to the Oriental collection is a stone statuette donated by a retired British officer who found it during Elphinstone's disastrous retreat from Afghanistan. The statue depicts a warrior figure with a cherubic face, curly locks, wearing at its chest a medallion of an eye within a triangle. The item was nearly misplaced in the Classical section since it bears such a strange resemblance to depictions of Alexander the Great.

Beyond is the Western Civilization exhibit, where thousands of years of distinct peoples, languages, and cultures are summarized in a single chamber. Much of this collection was donated by the Collingwood family of Cold Island and most of the items are early modern English or Scottish. The windows of the European room are made from stained glass taken from a church that was burned in the War of the Roses.

On a pedestal beneath the stained glass window is an innocuous leather book with a silver cross embossed upon the cover. Were visitors allowed to handle the book, they might notice that

while the cross appears to be right-side-up, the book is in fact upside-down and backwards. Even still, few would suspect that the book is the bible of the infamous Gilles de Rais. The book was found at Chapel Hall, as part of the collection of the late millionaire Franz Michelet. The recluse collector Michelet bought the de Rais Bible from the impoverished relatives of the vile Marquis de Sade, after the Marquis' death in an insane asylum.

The sixth chamber houses the history of early American peoples. Mayan, Incan, and Aztec relics are intermixed across the room. Some of the items are truly ancient, while others are others were manufactured for sale to tourists. The room features an impressive collection of photographs taken of all of the major American native tribes from all across the North American continent. In the center of the room is a curious piece of art; a stick adorned with a bear skull, feathers, and beads. The item was recovered from a place called "The Grave Mound" only a few miles away in the community of Kellona Bluffs.

The final chamber is the Americana collection. The collection includes the buckskin clothing of a colonial woodsman, a Brown Bess musket from the American Revolution, broadsheets from the War of 1812, a flag from a US navy frigate, and a collection of photographs of Bleakstone area. In the center of the room sits a cannon cast during the civil war. The piece was cast by the community of Spivey Point to guard the city from confederate raiders. Though the confederates never sent a ship against the city, the Spivey Brass was fired several times and sank three friendly merchants who had failed to give a safety signal.

The main hall loops around the special exhibition room, a great circular chamber used to display temporary exhibits. Along the wall stands a guard of silent sentinels, manikins dressed in costume from the other exhibits. These silent sentinels include an African tribesman with a zebra-skin shield, an Egyptian warrior with a khopesh sword, a Roman centurion, a knight in plate armor, a Sioux warrior in a feathered bonnet, and a civil war confederate cavalryman.

The current visiting exhibit is a fantastic Mongolian sarcophagus of creamy green jade, inlaid with ivory, and studded with malachite and red jasper. The marvelous relic was discovered by a team of prospectors who found it in a frozen crag in the Khangai Mountains. The grave site was littered with ancient skeletons, as if the people who carried the sarcophagus were massacred at the site. The museum is reluctant to discuss how it is that they received the coffin.

The sarcophagus is flattened cylinder and intricately carved with a pattern of looping curves. Along one side of the curve flows a narrative of pictograms, along the other is a stream of symbols from an unknown alphabet. The curator has taken a rubbing of the pictures and symbols and compiled them onto one great banner hanging in the exhibit hall. The interior of the sarcophagus is a mystery, as the lid is held fast by four locking devices made of agate and white gold.

Museum of Natural History

Along with obscure artifacts, Roy Thompson collected a number of specimens of plants and animals from around the globe. To his collection, the Thompson family added their own

curiosities obtained on safaris and hunting expeditions around the world. These elements of "Natural History" are exhibited in the east wing of the building. The natural History wing is in a state of organized disarray, like a philosopher's cabinet of curiosities. The specimens stand and hang in neat arrangements for the guests to view but are gathered without regard to any scientific categorization.

Close to the main entrance is a dreary windowless chamber containing the Botanical Section where leaves and flowers are displayed in jars or under glass. Just opposite is the collection of preserved insects, spiders, and worms. Next down the hall is the Ichthyology room displaying mounted fishes, octopi, jellyfish in formaldehyde, and a dolphin skeleton hanging above the room. Across the hall are the reptiles and amphibians stored in a cluttered mess of snake skins, turtle shells, and frogs in jars. In the center of the reptile room is a stuffed alligator, though careful observers will notice that the body is in fact from a crocodile.

Further down is the Aviary, a chamber of stuffed birds and preserved eggs. Framed against a wall is a very special specimen; a red and gold feather that would appear to have been from an eagle or condor, except that it is two feet long. Found in the Andes, the catalogue lists the mammoth feather as the remains of a deformed freakish animal. Such a bird would surely have died quickly, since to have flown with such a feather, its wingspan would have to be more than forty feet across and the creature large enough to prey on men.

The mammalian section is larger and comprised of three interconnected rooms. Most of the specimens are examples of local wildlife, with a few

exotic creatures donated by hunters who tired of their old trophies. One wall is a veritable phalanx of trophies, including horns of bulls, bison, antelope, bighorn rams, deer antlers, a rhino's nose spike, tusks from elephants and walruses, and even the unicorn-like tooth of a narwhale.

The finest animal specimen is a mighty Kodiak bear just outside the Library. Visitors cannot help but shudder at the great yellow jaws still stretched in a roar. The fearsome beast was dispatched by celebrated big game hunter Wallace Thompson. Local hunting enthusiasts know the tale of how the ursine brute absorbed every bullet fired into it and proceeded to stalk Wallace through miles of Yukon wilderness. Out of ammunition, Wallace loaded his silver class ring into a shotgun and finally smote the monster, but not before it mauled him. Deeply affected by the experience, on the anniversary of the kill Wallace retreats to a solitary cabin on the eastern shore of Lake Wanapitei. No one knows for sure what he does in that lonely den, but that area and that season are known for vicious attacks by bears. Wallace's friends suspect that he relives the fateful battle with the man-eater, year after year.

In one corner of the East Wing, just beside the Library, is the Geological Collection. Most of the specimens were obtained from the mines in the Starbury valley. The collection includes crystals, lumps of precious and semiprecious minerals, and a nugget of unidentified metal that resists blows and scratches with the strength of a diamond. The pride of the small collection is a massive glittering geode, shown just opposite a window so that the sunlight glitters upon the prismatic surface. In an unlighted corner sits a large worn rock that is

reminiscent of the stone heads found on Easter Island. The head was found at Point Portage in limestone strata more than a million years old. If asked, the Curator explains that similarities of the rock to the Moai of the Pacific are merely coincidental, since the idea that any civilization existed so long in the past is plainly ridiculous.

Gallery of Fine Arts

The museum boasts an extensive gallery of art collected by the Thompson family. Most of the items were once decorations in homes or businesses, and donated as soon as the objects were no longer trendy. The gallery also plays host to a number of amateurish works made by various Thompson family members when they dabbled in artistic expression. Amidst the clutter are a few works of quality, including renaissance sculptures from little-known masters and colonial period portraiture.

The gallery is a succession of halls and chambers on the second floor of the museum. Visitors are greeted at the landing by a massive landscape of the original Bleakstone settlement, painted from sketches made before the settlement was burned. The burgundy red walls are covered by countless paintings of a vast variety of styles and subjects. Some chambers are centered about great sculptures or statues and others house glass cases displaying wood carvings or fine metalwork. Hallways are spanned by colonnades of pedestals holding antique vases or busts of bronze. The gallery meanders along dead ends, dog-leg corridors, and passages that loop back to the room from which they led. Visitors often lose their way and wander in circles, inadvertently creating the

illusion that the gallery is filled with people.

The gallery is pervaded by a stifling stillness. The worn black carpet muffles footsteps and the winding halls absorb sound. Thin white curtains filter the natural light and hooded lamps burn in the interior rooms, so that one cannot fathom the time of day from inside the gallery. The walls loom closely, as if the hanging portraits are eavesdropping on the whispers of the visitors.

The complicated layout of the Gallery creates a number of hidden nooks where people might linger unseen and unheard. Some of the young ladies and gentlemen of Bleakstone have discovered these secret sanctuaries and use them for clandestine rendezvous. The museum turned a blind eye to the practice, until a year ago when a young woman was strangled in one such concealed chamber. The murder trial of her paramour caused a sensation in Bleakstone, laying disgrace on the museum and inadvertently encouraging more salacious behavior in the gallery. The Museum Manager Winnifred Jackson routinely patrols the gallery and ruthlessly ensures proper decorum, both out of moral indignation and to prevent more crimes of violence.

In the center of the gallery is a corridor obscured by a full length mirror, leading to a poorly lit room surrounded by dark and disturbing artworks. In the gloomy chamber are watercolors of misty black vortices, paintings of monstrosities made with photographic realism, and impressionist fantasies conveying terror and dread. Chief among the grotesqueries is a portrait of a lean, blonde man in act of painting. A viewer cannot help but shudder at the gloating expression of his thin lips and the manic vitality in his ice blue eyes. With brush

in hand, the artist regards the opposite side of the canvas, as if he was painting the viewer. This image is the self-portrait of Elliot West, a local artist shrouded in mystery and madness.

Elliot West was the unacknowledged son of Mina Thompson and an unknown father. From a studio in Elderslot he perpetrated shocking outrages, eclipsed only by his depraved paintings. West disappeared and in his absence his mother insists that the museum exhibit his works. The Curator constructed the hidden gallery to shield the public and to absorb the startled cries of those unfortunate visitors who stumble upon the hideous works.

Library

In addition to strange artworks, the Thompson family collects rare books and manuscripts. Roy Thompson accumulated a hoard of medieval texts, incunabula, and papyrus scrolls predating the Roman republic. The pride of the library is an assembly of Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets, kept in a glass display case. Roy Thompson's heirs added an extensive catalogue of early American documents, including the journals and correspondence of historical figures. Any scholar interested in the early history of Bleakstone is inevitably drawn to the Library. The museum does not lend documents, though it does permit scholars to read the books in the library.

The Library is a tower-like chamber in the east wing of the building. A single great walnut bookcase surrounds the circular room and soars to a crown of tall windows. A rolling ladder built into the wall allows visitors to scale the two story bookcase. Arranged on the floor are tables, glass cases, and a mahogany

cabinet containing the card catalogue. Overlooking the library is a small balcony, accessed from the museum's second floor. The library is a popular room for public exhibitions and the Thompson Family frequently uses the large chamber to host cocktail parties and fundraising events.

The library is unsupervised, though the Curator has considered hiring a librarian or guard in the wake of a recent outrage. An excitable young man was recently ejected for vandalizing the library. Arthur Delany had tried to borrow a rare 16th century manuscript, and when denied, Delany used the book to perform a bizarre ritual inside the library. Delany was later arrested and committed to Ether House, the local insane asylum.

Basement and Storage

The basement is a low-ceilinged hall branching off to rectangular storage chambers. Cold and dry, the musty odor of age clings to every brick of the structure. Cobwebs and dust cling to every surface so that everything is coated in a greasy layer of grime. Rusted lanterns hang along the hall, all having fused to the hooks in the wall. The basement is jammed with chairs, cabinets, and haphazardly stacked furniture. At one end of the passage is a ramp leading to an exterior cellar door, at the other is a rotten wooden stairway leading up into what once was a kitchen. The kitchen stairway is in a terrible state of disrepair and will likely collapse if used.

The storage rooms are rectangular chambers with vaulted ceilings, packed with boxes, crates, and random bric-a-bracs. One of the vaults is filled with barrels of wine, rum, and other spirits -

left over from the basement's original purpose as wine cellar. Another vault is outfitted with numerous oil lamps and modern work benches, all covered in a layer of dust. This room was intended to be a laboratory to restore aged artifacts and artworks to showroom quality.

Most of the vaults are open but two are barred by solid oak doors banded in iron. The first is nearest to the cellar door and is painted with the message, "No Open Flame" in large faded letters. This chamber houses a quantity of gunpowder purchased in 1859 and since forgotten. Only the curator knows that it is there and he cannot be bothered to move it out. The other barred door is located closest to the kitchen stairs and is secured by a large lock of recent make. That vault houses the special collection.

Special Collections Vault

A collection as large and as old as the Thompson's inevitably includes treasures unfit for public exhibition. Some items are too provocative for proper society, some were acquired through crime, and still others are too likely to cause public outrage should their existence be known. These items are kept in the Special Collections Vault. There is no known catalogue of the Special Collection, as the Thompson family prefers not to have a written account of its contents.

The Special Collections Vault is a wide chamber with niches cut in regular intervals all along the brick walls. The room is broken by two rows of arched columns, around which a number of items and artworks are stacked. Fresh candles stand in sconces arranged around the room though even when lit they provide only the barest flickering illumination.

On rare occasions the Thompson family allows an individual to examine some item in the collection. Such a visitor is accompanied by the curator and is sworn to silence regarding the vault's contents. Over the decades, a number of rumors have filtered through the veil of secrecy. There are the usual stories of stolen artworks, heathen idols, and demonic grimoires bound in human flesh. Yet there are still stranger stories regarding the contents of the vault.

One art expert claimed to have thumbed through a folio of sketches from the greatest master artists of history, etchings that depicted the most shocking depravities and blasphemies. A Professor from New York claimed to have glimpsed a statue of Venus that seems to move on its own accord. It is said that floor is marked by a crimson stain emanating from an iron maiden in the corner. In an alcove in the wall is an obsidian dagger that, according to rumor, constantly radiates the most peculiar vibrations. It is even whispered that there is a complete skeleton of a creature whose very existence challenges mankind's place in the cosmic scheme of creation.

The Staff

Professor Aaron Mazzuchin

The curator of the Thompson Museum is Professor Aaron Mazzuchin, a tall man in his early fifties with a bushy brown beard. He is often dressed in a frayed jacket two decades out of fashion and thick spectacles with steel bows. The friendly academic is talkative, almost to the point of babbling. Those who spend much time with Mazzuchin will notice that he cannot concentrate on any topic

for very long before veering off on some unrelated tangent.

Before becoming curator Professor Mazzuchin bounced from one college to another, lecturing for whatever subject no one else wished to teach. As a result, he is an expert on a vast scope of history, ethnology, and archeology. Mazzuchin made a habit of writing research papers and allowing other scholars take credit for completing his work. The Professor's employers have even less respect for him, rarely reading his letters and only speaking to him when they hijack the museum to host a social function.

Even after five years as curator Aaron has not yet fully catalogued the Thompson Collection. Most of the collection has yet to see the light of day. The Professor's saving grace is his talent for securing exciting exhibits. Aaron bribes friends in the shipping industry to divert artifacts destined for other, better funded museums. Mazzuchin usually exhibits the artifacts for a week or two before finally returning the item to its rightful owners. His precautions have maintained his museum's good reputation, for the time being at least.

The Professor's predations have gone too far. A friendly ship captain diverted to Mazzuchin a fabulous Mongolian sarcophagus encrusted with jade. After a successful showing the Professor tried to find the proper owners of the coffin, only to come up empty handed. Aaron's contact has vanished, along with any record of the coffin's original destination. Mazzuchin fears to call the police, but he is becoming nervous. The Professor has noticed a few strange looking men lingering around the museum, asking questions about the sarcophagus.

Winnifred Jackson

Winnifred Jackson is a lean, white-haired spinster in her early fifties. She is identified by her sober clothing, her pointed nose, and her perpetually pinched mouth. Winnifred glares at everyone as if scrutinizing an insect. As the manager of the museum, Jackson can be found stalking through the halls in an unending search for imperfection.

Jackson grew up in the richest quarter of Elderslot, known as the Green Meadow. Her once-wealthy family fell into poverty, and the entire neighborhood became incorporated into the Italian community known as Etrusca. Winnifred is especially bitter having watched her home be inundated by outsiders, or as she calls them collectively, "the crawling chaos." Winnifred dislikes young people, hates tourists, and despises journalists. Painfully formal, she insists on being addressed as "Miss Jackson." Winnifred has a wicked tongue, a large vocabulary, and the will to use them both with terrier-like tenacity. The staff still tells stories about the fate of one unfortunate visitor who had the temerity to call her "Winny".

Jackson despises the more exotic exhibits that the curator displays, denouncing it all as foreign garbage or heathen nonsense. She has a similar aversion to the decadent artworks in the gallery since such gaudy exhibits attract noisy tourists. Winnifred's passion is genealogy. She makes a habit of questioning everyone she meets on their ancestry and she has a soft spot for people who know their own roots. Knowing that Professor Mazzuchin does not take proper records, Winnifred keeps her own meticulous catalogue of the collection. She has noticed that several

items have gone missing and hopes to discover who took them.

Winnifred spends much of her free time working with the Elderslot Preservationist Society, a group dedicated to preserving the history and traditions of the decaying community. Her community group recently tried to purchase the derelict Methodist Church but was outbid by a strange sect called the Esoteric Order of Poseidon. Jackson cannot stand the idea of some upstart outsiders defiling a local landmark with their foreign ways. She has been considering hiring some investigators to dig up dirt on the sect and expose their heathen secrets.

Andries Roodman

On the rare occasions when the museum is busy a dashing man may be seen hobnobbing with the crowd. Impeccably dressed, he is distinguished by his short blond hair, delicate features, and his slight Dutch accent. With rapier wit and a carefree attitude he dazzles nearly everyone around him. Idly chatting with guests, he causally reveals that he is Andries Roodman, the assistant curator to the museum.

Andries Roodman is an expert in arts and antiquities, having studied in Amsterdam, Paris, London, and New York. Andries is a favorite of the high society of Bleakstone who enjoy his sophistication and cosmopolitan flair. Roodman frequents fashionable events and trendy restaurants, often escorting some high-born lady. Andries owes his current position to his high society connections and he takes advantage of his privileged status by avoiding work whenever he can. When he bothers to show up at the museum he hides in his office or idly mingles with visitors. Even

then, he all too quickly ducks out on some imagined errand and lingers at fashionable cafes or De Witt's auction house.

Despite his veneer of high class Roodman is nearly broke. Andries came to Bleakstone to flee creditors in New York. He is a compulsive gambler and is already in debt to several gambling dens in Etrusca. Roodman supplements his income by stealing artifacts from the museum and selling them at De Witt's Auction House. He is sure that no one will notice the losses, since the records of the collection are so poor.

Eager to climb the social ladder, Roodman has joined a number of clubs and organizations in Bleakstone. Recently he has heard of a circle called "Abzu," an exclusive club of wealthy and prominent men. The group is secretive but the exclusivity only proves to Roodman the advantages of joining. One member has hinted that there might be a place for Roodman if he can obtain "the Marduk Seal," an item lost somewhere in Bleakstone.

Becky Thomas

Visitors to the Museum may spy a trail of foolscap papers lying about the hallways and a slight young woman collecting the notes and bundling them together. So absorbed is she that she always drops a fresh trail of leaflets behind her. The girl halts her Sisyphean task just long enough to introduce herself as Becky Thomas, personal secretary to the curator.

Becky is pretty young lady with mousy brown hair. She is always dressed in fashionable clothing oddly out of synch with the museum's dusty atmosphere. She is bright and gracious but perpetually befuddled. The young

lady spends most of her time following Professor Mazzuchin, taking notes, and dropping papers in her rush to keep up.

Few would suspect that the earnest young lady is actually Rebecca Thompson, heiress to a great fortune. Rebecca only recently returned to Bleakstone, having been away at school for the last few years. The girl shocked her parents by applying to the newly founded University of Chicago. Fearful for her marriage prospects, her parents hope to scare her away from academia. They insisted that before higher education she must spend a year working at the Museum. Becky's parents are sure that a few months at that dreary place will scare some sense into their daughter. Becky's family insisted on her using a fake name to prevent undue favors. Winnifred Jackson saw through the pathetic deception immediately but she is too ornery to treat the girl with any special privilege.

Like most of high society, Becky has dabbled in spiritualism and psychic experimentation. At school she attended a fair share of séances, attempts at mesmerism, and sham magical rituals. Back from school, Becky reunited with an old friend who invited her into a coven of society girls interested in taking their mystical experiments to the next level.

Ronald Fletcher

Ronald Fletcher is the custodian and watchman for the Thompson Museum. A man in his late sixties, Fletcher is distinguished by his faded dungaree overalls and his coarse white beard. The old man constantly grumbles to himself with a voice like pebbles being ground in a mill. He is surrounded by the sickly

sweet smell of turpentine and rotten berries.

As custodian, Fletcher wages an unending war on rot and decay, albeit not without constant complaint. He is less diligent as a watchman, for he sleeps through his night watch and refuses to patrol the basement vaults when he alone. Fletcher claims to be a veteran sailor for the US navy and likes to tell stories of his naval battles during the Civil War. No one but Fletcher knows the truth, that he has never been to sea and spent his entire career building docks and piers for the navy.

Ron Fletcher was a dock builder in Elderslot until the Big Quake of 1881. The disaster collapsed a pier beneath which Fletcher and his crew were working. Fletcher's crew survived the

collapse but was trapped as the water level surged. Ronald was rescued, but only after spending a week floating in the black submerged ruins. The bodies of his crewmates were never recovered and Fletcher spent a month in the hospital, driven to near madness by the ordeal.

Since then, Fletcher is afraid of the dark and cannot stand to be near the lake or any other body of water. His phobias forced him to give up his trade and take a custodial job with the museum. Ron hates to talk about the ordeal, but if someone gains his trust, he may confide a terrible secret: It was not the deaths of his friends that drove him to madness. It was the *thing* he saw in the ruins, slithering greasily through the brackish waters, taking with it the bloated bodies of the dead.



Snake Eyes

Luck is an intangible force.

Fortune is an imperceptible quality, unobservable except by its effect. Yet, pure luck is an incomparable force upon the destiny of millions of lives.

Fortunes are won and lost, kingdoms doomed or saved, all decided by happenstance and random chance. Yet luck is not a benign force. Fortune gives with one hand, and takes with the other. Some are blessed by the whims of fate, but others are cursed. These sad few are jinxes, doomed to suffer the cruel caprices of fate. While those with good luck might delude themselves into believing that they are the masters of their destiny, those whom fortune spurns will never mistake their suffering. Be forewarned: Read this tome and learn how fortune may turn upon you as well. For if you find yourself staring into those snake eyes, it will be too late, and you will truly learn the meaning of bad luck.

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