

# Quoth the Raven

22

A Ravenloft  
Netbook



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## Quoth the Raven #22

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Ravens *were* harmed in the making of this book, but they were all jerks who pooped all over the floor.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Front Matter .....	i
Table of Contents .....	ii
Introduction .....	iii
Wolves to Guard the Sheep .....	1
Andrew "alhoon" Pavlides.....	1
Relentless .....	41
By Nathan "Dmitri Stanislaus" Okerlund.....	41
A Tour of Western Waters .....	45
By Nathan "Dmitri Stanislaus" Okerlund.....	45
The Lady in White .....	71
By Andrew Jensen .....	71
The Brightwell Legacy .....	80
By M.H. "Rock" Bartels.....	80
Die Kaiserreich .....	113
By Mikhail "NeoTiamat" Rekun.....	113
Domains That Came Before .....	132
By Matt White .....	132
Nation of Progress .....	168
By Mikhail "NeoTiamat" Rekun.....	168
The Midnight Market.....	188
By Mikhail "NeoTiamat" Rekun.....	188
Mochocarania .....	204
By John Berndt.....	204
Ustalav Gazetteer .....	206
By "Jester" David Gibson.....	206
OGL.....	243
Back Cover.....	244

# INTRODUCTION

*"The fishermen know that the sea is dangerous and the storm terrible, but they have never found these dangers sufficient reason for remaining ashore."*

- Vincent Van Gogh

Here we go again. Number twenty-two.

You'd think after a solid decade of these netbooks we'd run out of content. But here we are, still finding corners of the Mists to explore and new horrors to unearth. Where we find things lacking we invent new terrors, reimagining the lands of Ravenloft to suit our personal needs, and adding new people and places as needed.

Take Ustalav.

Please.

Seriously, take it and add it to your game. That land was created as a little dash of Ravenloft for Pathfinder's setting of Golarion by noted fan of the Mists, F. Wes Schneider. Since its creation many people have decided to skip the middleman and just move Ustalav into Ravenloft entirely. Recently, I opted to join the trend.

I've spent the last few years making and remaking [maps of Ravenloft](#). Looking at the Shadow Rift I decided "what if I filled that with land?" And it occurred to me that I could totally squish Ustalav in there. So I did. But that didn't seem to be enough as this new land lacked a darklord. Rather than write up the lord I decided to pretend that Ustalav had always been a part of the Core and describe it as such. You'll find the results at the end.

This also means the upcoming novel [Bloodbound](#) is totally a Ravenloft product.

Anyway... *Quoth the Raven*. This is my second issue and I'm still playing with the formatting, still getting my legs. The theme this time is "Lost Legacies" but, honestly, it feels a little loose. Something to work at for next year I guess.

I hope you enjoy

- "Jester" David Gibson  
October, 2015



# WOLVES TO GUARD THE SHEEP

A Menagerie of Monstrous Kargat Law Enforcers

Andrew "alhoon" Pavlides  
apavlides24@yahoo.com

*As Yondek was returning from the quarry, he noticed that the door of his neighbor, Beroonm stood slightly ajar. He recalled that he didn't see the human in the quarry that day. Since most of the workers were dwarves like Yordek, a human like Beroon was hard to miss. The dwarf frowned; Beroon could never hold his own with dwarven liquor, and a couple of nights ago, after a drink too many in the tavern, he had said some unflattering things about Azalin Rex. Worried, Yondek pushed the door, went inside the small wooden house, and looked around. No sign of Beroon, or his wife either. By that time, they should have been eating dinner or preparing to. Their constantly crying newborn son should be making the usual ruckus and their hyperactive daughter Mersha should be running about as if bee-stung, laughing.*

*Yondek shivered. "Perhaps they are visiting relatives," he thought. Entering the bedroom, he saw that this didn't seem to be the case; most of their clothes seemed to be there. "Perhaps a short trip then," Yondek thought, trying to calm the increasing uneasiness. He moved past the bedroom to the kids' room and bit his lip.*

*The newborn's crib was there, empty. Mersha's doll, the one she never parted with, was dropped on the floor. Mersha's*

*diminutive bed, the one Yondek had helped Beroon built, was over-turned. That's where Beroon and his wife were hiding their most expensive possessions, the silver bracelets they received as gifts from the whole village for their wedding. The bracelets were missing, while clothes and other inexpensive possessions were there... while the infant's empty basket was there... while Mersha's doll was abandoned there.*

*Yondek found his throat dry. Sadness replaced fear. He would never see Beroon again, never listen to him bragging about his newborn son, never chastise little Mersha for pulling his beard again. Their mysterious disappearance could have only one explanation in these parts.*

*Kargat.*

The following article details a Kargat cell under the command of the vampire Ermenus. Several Kargat agents are detailed, some monstrous, some human or demi-human. The cell can of course be made smaller or larger as needed by removing or adding members to suit the gaming needs. Members could also be used individually (as Kargat members or not) if the DM finds the need in his or her game. The cell could also be relocated to a different rural area of Darkon with slight



modifications. The area covered by the cell should ideally be of a size such that the cell could converge in a pre-arranged place within a day or so. To support this many monsters while leaving room for other predators, the population should contain about 7,000-10,000 adult peasants and also have some travelers passing by. The numbers of the Kargat are enough to effectively keep subdued the populace of areas of the suggested size.

## The Ermenus Cell

Ermenus' Kargat cell operates on the southeastern side of the Mountains of Misery and in the few settlements along the Dnar river, the Nova Vaasa border, and the southern part of the Nocturnal seacoast. Ermenus is part of the Corvian Kargat faction and follows the orders of Beryl Silvertress. As many in the Corvian faction, he's afraid of the paranoid dwarven vampiress, but being far away from her seat of power, he doesn't have much interaction with her. Using his influence and power, Ermenus walks a fine line between following Azalin's orders and acting as the head of a well-connected crime organization of monsters seeking to amass ill-gained wealth.

## Duties

The cell's main duty is to keep this distant, under-developed, but potentially mine-rich area firmly under the crown's control and stop it from becoming a haven for traitors, malcontents and other national threats. While outspoken critics of Azalin vanishing in the night, occasionally with their whole families, isn't an everyday occurrence, it's common enough to instill fear in the population. Subtle clues that the fates of the vanished are worse than death reinforce this fear.

Aside from keeping an eye on the local populace, Ermenus' cell also deals with Death's minions. Being far from the Necropolis, operating in a small community, and having access to a lot of martial power through their pawns, they had met with success in the past. And with Azalin's return and their numbers being bolstered, their task is easier.

The Kargat is also instructed to monitor sell-swords, traveling adventurers, and mercenaries operating in the area. The cell members readily comply, since would-be heroes may meddle in their criminal activities, but take care to not be exposed.

Lastly, on the order of their superior Beryl Silvertress in Corvia, the Kargat here also deal with powerful supernatural or natural threats. This is done in order to make the area more hospitable and speed up the establishment of a trade route between Nova Vaasa and Darkon, to reduce reliance on Falkovnian trade.

## Illegal Activities

While, nominally, the purpose of the cell is to provide stability in the area, the monsters that comprise it, both supernatural and human, often use their power to acquire wealth, power, or other personal goals and delights. Since Azalin's return, they take greater effort for these illegal or questionable activities to be at least nominally justifiable. An explanation often given is that through many of these acts they get information on other persons involved with criminal activities.

Members of the Kargat in the area act as an unofficial assassin's guild for the right price. The means to contact them are innocuous signs like a black cloth tied to one's window at night, or a broken candle next to one's door etc. These symbols are known by few shady characters, unsuspecting of the fact that they are



making deals with the Kargat. When a cell member is notified of someone wanting to make contact, they usually send an expendable agent to learn more. If the Kargat find the contract agreeable, they arrange a price. As monsters or veteran warriors with access to magic, deadly poisons, and connections, they are very effective in their grim task. They take care not to betray their identity as Kargat while taking such tasks, even if their unsuspecting clients ask them to pin the murder on the Kargat. If a client somehow suspects that the assassination involved the Kargat, he meets the same fate as the target.

Having easy access to illegal or locally regulated items, armed and loyal agents to carry them, and control over much of the illegal activities makes smuggling easy for the Ermenus cell. Dealing with troublesome black-market vendors that cut too deep in their profits reduces competition. Being the main suppliers of deadly poisons in the area (and taking care to keep their monopoly) the Cell has a very good idea of who wants to poison whom.

Stealing valuables from the victims of their brutal sense of justice is seen as a side-benefit of the job for the Ermenus cell, although they inform Azalin or Silvertress of exceptional items found. If a threat isn't of immediate concern, the cell is not above waiting for their future victims to acquire a little more wealth for them to steal. They usually sell their ill-gotten treasure in Corvia or other nearby settlements.

Some members of the cell are actively partaking in banditry or extortion, saying these acts help maintain their cover and keep in check where the bandits attack. After a couple of years, these members arrange for their pawns to be trapped and arrested by the local authorities.

## Recent History

Every few years the Ermenus cell makes a display of power to remind the upper echelons of society that they are still watched. The vanishing of one's whole immediate family, down to infants in their cribs, helps keep malcontents subdued. Even if hate towards the Kargat overcame fear, the people don't know where to strike; they do know, though, that killers in the dark would strike at the loved ones of any mob leaders. Once, as a show of power, the Kargat directly confronted a mob seeking vengeance. The monsters easily turned the attack into a massacre that left more than a score of villagers dead. The cell never resorted to this tactic again, preferring to strike from the shadows ever since. The Ermenus cell kept these intimidation practices during the years of Azalin's absence even though the numbers of the cell dwindled.

A most notorious case was shortly after Azalin's return, while tensions were high, as was individual ambition. A rural baron with suspected loyalties in the cell's area had ordered the execution of a poisoner found in his court. Unknown to the baron, the poisoner was a member of Ermenus' Kargat cell and the execution took place before Ermenus could learn about it. The baron's apparent ignorance of the poisoner's identity didn't hold sway. The Ermenus cell utilized the considerable means at their disposal to hatch an assassination plot.

A week after the execution of the poisoner, the baron vanished without a trace, his bodyguards slain, his servants poisoned, his children murdered and his most valuable possessions missing. Just a drop of blood on the baron's bed hinted of his fate. Just a couple of hours had passed since the grisly discovery when a messenger from castle Avernus brought a royal decree

elevating another noble to the rank of the baron, leaving no doubt that the dreaded Kargat was behind the gruesome crime. Unsurprisingly, no investigation ever took place into the killings. A week after the murders, the vanished baron's zombie walked stiffly into the nearby village and was destroyed by the horrified villagers. The new baron is considerably more eager to remain on Azalin's good side.

The Requiem and the turbulent years that followed weakened the hold of the Kargat in the area, but Beryl Silvertress kept enough control on the Ermenus cell to ensure that they were serving the absent Azalin Rex, at least partially, while indulging their avarice and gluttony on the side. The numbers of the cell have been reduced in the years of Azalin's absence but the Ermenus cell was resourceful enough to keep the appearance of a strong presence in handling an ever increasing number of problems with an ever decreasing number of members.

Azalin's return saw the battered cell rewarded with items of power to help them perform their duties and stabilize the area and soon, more members started replacing casualties. While Ermenus wasn't promoted for keeping control of this area for the king, he didn't face reprisals for the criminal activities his cell partook of either. Since Azalin Rex returned, the Ermenus cell has been more careful in their extra-legal activities, trying to at least have a modicum of justification for their acts.

## Members

The list of the monsters and humans that comprise the Ermenus cell is detailed in this section.

## Ermenus

The undead leader that has been in control of the cell since the Grand Conjunction.

### Description

Ermenus is an imposing figure of a man in his late thirties. He's tall and athletic with black hair and blessed with comely, if predatory and sharp, features. He usually wears a suit of black studded leather armor that fits him perfectly. Instead of the usual rivets and spikes used in such armor, the metal pieces of Ermenus' armor are shaped like small skulls. He carries with him a longsword and wears a piece or two of elegant, expensive jewelry.

In the rare cases that he intermingles with the living, Ermenus wears the clothes expected from a successful merchant or member of the gentry, along with a piece of jewelry -often one seeming to be of too high quality for his professed identity- and still carries with him his longsword in a fashionable sheath.

### Background

Ermenus was born in Karg but lost his parents to the Crimson Death. He survived with his brother and later thrived in the rough underbelly of the city through a mix of his own charm, ferocity, and smarts. He and the ragtag gang he had gathered were occasionally used by the Kargat without their knowledge. A member of the Kargat took special notice of him and, after passing the tests that the Kargat and Azalin put in his way, he was brought in the fold of the monstrous police of Darkon, leaving his former life, his brother, and his allies behind. After several years of service, Ermenus was given the opportunity to rise in the ranks by accepting the curse of Lycanthropy. Serving Azalin as a werewolf for a decade, he was turned to a vampire



about 2 decades before the Grand Conjunction. After Darkon expanded in the wake of the Great Upheaval, Ermenus was sent to the rural, unpopulated region that had been part of Arak to keep the area firmly under Azalin's grasp. While the position wasn't prestigious, he and his monstrous followers managed to make a profit from the isolation. He kept serving Azalin even during the years of the king's absence.

One of the most difficult tasks he had to perform for the Kargat, was the order to kill his brother within the first year that he had joined the organization. He did so without even asking why, proving his loyalty to the King. However, visions of his brother's look of betrayal when he saw his murderer still haunt him.

Ermenus has headed the homonymous cell for over two decades. He's the only one from the original group that still serves in that area. He has been there since the first mining camps and fishing communities were established and knows the area and its few citizens very well, as well as he knows the dangers and sinister creatures that plague it, since many of them actually work for him.

## Current Sketch

Ermenus is a member of the Corvia faction of the Kargat, and like most cell leaders of this faction he's afraid of the paranoia that plagues his superior, the dwarf vampiress Beryl Silvertress. The rare, and always unannounced, visits of the vampiress to the area send the cell into a frantic, near-panic state as they jump over one another to make sure Silvertress will be pleased with them; their existence depends on it. After all, the dwarf vampiress always brings with her a cane topped with a transparent crystal containing a crimson-hued nebula in the center. Ermenus knows

that if he looks closely, he would see the tortured form of a former lieutenant of his in the middle, pierced by the crystal and painting it red with his blood as he twitches helplessly, his mind lost to eternal pain several decades ago. Ermenus was never notified what his lieutenant did to suffer this punishment.

Ermenus is greedy and lusts for power, but won't take foolish risks in order to accumulate wealth and power, and he won't betray Azalin in exchange of money or favors; he has been tested on the matter several times. Like most members of the Kargat, he's loyal to Azalin. His loyalty is based in a mix of fear for the lich's power, appreciation of what he has been given and expectation of more power and wealth if he keeps being useful. He has instilled enough fear of the Kargat in the local leaders, and amassed enough favors and blackmail material through his proxies to be a very significant, if hidden, power in the area.

While not especially cruel for a vampire, Ermenus has no love for the people of Darkon under his care. He has no qualms about sacrificing innocents to achieve his goals or in service to Azalin. He views them more like work-animals that are kept alive and healthy for the benefit of their owner, and himself and his cell as the guard-dogs. Strict, evil, and of the opinion that a cowed populace is an obedient populace, Ermenus strikes at the families or loved ones of perceived threats and wrong-doers when he acts in his capacity as secret police and expects his subordinates to do the same.

His relations with the rest of the Kargat that comprise his cell are more individual-based but he expects respect and obedience. He is loyal to his cell and its prosperity, not so much to individual members. While he would sacrifice members of the cell if needed, he would avoid doing so unless necessary. Also, a



strike at one of his officers is seen as a grave insult in his eyes. To him, it is like a prisoner attacking one of the prison guards. He retaliates swiftly and without hesitation.

The vampire avoids mingling much with humans, since his weaknesses may betray his nature. When he has to do so, he pretends to be a minor noble or retired mercenary with noble blood. He doesn't wear his armor in public, but he still carries his sword.

His one morsel of guilt is the killing of his brother, so many decades ago. He sees this act as the turning point in his existence. Visions of his brother plague him occasionally when he's alone. In his rare meetings with Azalin since becoming undead, the lich darklord hinted that the phantom may not be a figment of Ermenus' imagination, but hasn't revealed more yet.

To his annoyance, Ermenus has found that the guilt associated with this condition triggers an involuntary change to wolf form whenever someone mentions his brother's name (Meretus) to him. The change to undeath didn't cure him of this affliction. Azalin and his superior, Beryl Silvertress, know of this condition. To his horror, he finds that people named "Meretus" seem to migrate into the area every few years. These always seem to have somewhat similar appearance to him, for people to confuse him in the night. He once had to kill a person that called him Meretus, triggering his change.

## Ermenus informants

Aside from his zombies and the cell he leads, Ermenus has a network of ordinary people under his indirect control, spread throughout the area, to act as his informants. For some, it is blackmail; for others, it is as simple as money. He's not above paying a few gold pieces to a thug and sending him to fight an enemy.

For a few in his network, he exerts control with the promise of an elixir of youth and beauty similar to the one used by Lady Kazandra. Those that are "elevated" are given a taste of a special concoction that includes a bit of the vampire's blood. The potion subtly changes the imbiber's mind to make them more loyal to their supposedly enlightened alchemist tutor while slowing down age and subtly enhancing the imbiber's beauty. True immortality is said to be kept for those that truly prove themselves. Ermenus usually has about four or five people that have used the potion at any one time and about as many that are still trying to win the favor of the extended life and beauty that the potion provides. None of them are aware that the potion's benefits fade with time.

Even suspicion that one of his informants has a hint about his monstrous nature or his affiliation is enough for Ermenus to dispose of the potential troublemaker. Most of his informants are unaware of the extent of the network. For the "cultists" and seekers of immortality and even for some of the criminals in his network, he instills fear by pointing a finger to the "evil Kargat". He portrays them as nameless antagonists eager to steal his secrets and slay those that partook in them. The people that would risk their lives and the lives of their families for eternal youth or monetary rewards are exactly the kind of people he wants in his employ, although he's wise enough to never ever trust them with more information than they absolutely need to know.

Very rarely, he will bring the case of a particularly promising and immoral agent to Beryl Silvertress, and then to Azalin himself. Sometimes the agent will be deemed acceptable and be elevated to the Kargat, while other candidates will fail the tests put before them and perish. The dwarf Enthor is

the only current Kargat member in the cell that has been recruited by Ermenus.

## Goals

Ermenus is content at this time with his influence in the area and is concentrated on amassing wealth and magical items. Dealing with the phantom visions of his brother looking at him, shocked and betrayed in the moment of his death, is in his agenda, but he endures them for now. He will also take risks to keep the trigger of his involuntary changes hidden. Finding and slaying people named after his brother is also a priority for him, but he takes care to not raise suspicion in the other Kargat members while dealing with them.

## Tactics and Skills

While he lacks magical ability, Ermenus is skilled in both mounted combat and in alchemy. He can prepare the special concoction Kargat vampires create to trap mortals and a variety of poisons. His bite turns creatures to zombies under his control instead of vampire spawn. If he feeds a special, expensive alchemical brew to a creature before turning it to zombie, the target becomes a different kind of obedient dead, capable of speech and having better reasoning abilities.

His usual way of dealing with human or demi-human threats is to gather enough information through his subordinates and large network of informants to assess the situation. Then he usually sends proxies to soften up and deal with the opposition, confronting the threat himself, or through his agents, afterwards. When dealing with undead or powerful supernatural enemies, though, he acts faster, trying to eradicate the enemy before much damage is done to the area. Having received orders to the cause and also having lost members to them, he takes special care to find and destroy any operative of the Unholy Order

of the Grave -Death's minions- in the area, *by any means necessary*. He would work with enemies, offer rewards from his own pocket, and take substantial risks to deal with them.

In combat, he prefers to disable and capture enemies if possible. This is not out of mercy, but in order to either interrogate them or keep them to feed on and then turn into zombies with his bite. He takes care to fight within a few miles of one of his coffins, but the area is large enough that he doesn't always have this luxury. While it would take too much effort to set up more coffins with enough earth so he can sleep in them, he can have some of the existing coffins moved.

Since he's unable to enter residences uninvited, Ermenus tries to lure enemies he wishes to confront personally outside, preferably away from civilization. To bypass his inability to enter a building uninvited, he either bribes, intimidates or charms his way in. Occasionally, he has had a Kargat agent or other proxy seduce someone from the place and take residence, only to invite the evil Kargat leader in on the following night.

## Lair

Ermenus has two main hiding spots, but he has hidden a few more coffins containing the necessary dirt throughout the area.

He hides a coffin and much of his wealth in a secret compartment below a prison tower called the "Tower of Vengeance," which lies near a coastal village. The vampire's lair was built along with the tower itself. The compartment is accessible through an iron grate in the lower level of the tower, which Ermenus passes through as either a bat or cloud of mist. The grate opens into a short tunnel of soft earth and is used by the guards to empty chamber-pots and filthy water. A



large number of centipedes, roaches, and rats inhabit this foul smelling tunnel, at the end of which is an opening about a foot wide. Behind that opening lies a large, clean chamber with stone-tiled floor, roof and walls. It contains the coffin and a couple of chests holding important books, valuable gems, coins and items belonging to the vampire. The tower has several cells for prisoners and a few guards that are mostly unaware of the predator in their midst. The tower also (due to the interference of the vampire) harbors Lost Ones and madmen. Ermenus occasionally feeds on prisoners, making sure that they won't betray his presence. A wraith is bound in the room and acts as its guard.

His other lair is a deep cave in a cliff, at the foothills of the Mountains of Misery, which acts as the informal headquarters of the Kargat here. Inaccessible except by flying, a hidden path, or dangerous climbing, this cave contains another of Ermenus' coffins as well as alchemical tools, reagents, maps of the area and larger items of value, along with more coins and valuables that the agents can use. This cave is furnished and is occasionally used by the Kargat for meetings. This lair is trapped with dangerous magical traps. A few obedient dead servants created by his bite reside in the cave and are tasked with maintenance and passing messages.

Aside from his resting places, the Kargat has safe-houses built for the purpose of holding prisoners. Ermenus and the other monstrous members of the Kargat feed from those prisoners regularly, until their health deteriorates to near-death, at which points Ermenus turns them to zombies under his command or has them killed.

## Ermenus

*Medium undead, neutral evil*

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**Armor Class** 18 (natural armor and studded leather armor)

**Hit Points** 76 (9d8 +36)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 18 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+4) **Con** 18 (+4)

**Int** 16 (+3) **Wis** 15 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+3)

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**Saving Throws** Dex+7, Wis+5

**Skills** Deception+6, empathy+5, intimidation+6, perception+5, persuasion+6, stealth+7, local area knowledge+6, alchemist's tools+6

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons

**Conditional Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

**Senses** Darkvision 120', passive Perception 16

**Languages** Darkonese, Falkovnian, Vaasi, Dwarven, Elven

**Challenge** 8 (3900 xp)

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**Shapechanger.** If Ermenus isn't in sunlight or running water, he can use his action to polymorph into a Tiny bat, a Medium wolf, a Medium cloud of mist, or back into his true form.

While in bat form, Ermenus can't speak, his walking speed is 5 feet, and he has a flying speed of 30 feet. While in wolf form, his walking speed is 40 feet. His AC in both forms is 16. His statistics, other than his size, AC and speed, are unchanged. Anything he is wearing



transforms with him, but nothing he is carrying does.

While in mist form, Ermenus can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. He is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing. He can't pass through water. He has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and he is immune to all nonmagical damage, except the damage he takes from sunlight.

**Legendary Resistance (1/day).** If Ermenus fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

**Action surge (1/short rest).** On his turn, Ermenus can use one extra action and one extra bonus action.

**Apply poison.** Ermenus usually applies a poison to his longsword before entering combat with living enemies.

**Misty escape.** When he drops to 0 hp outside his resting place, Ermenus transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious, provided that he isn't in sunlight or running water. If he can't transform, he is destroyed.

While he has 0 hp in mist form, he can't change his shape, and he must reach his resting place within 2 hours or be destroyed. Once in his resting place, he reverts to his vampire form. He is then paralyzed until he spends 1 hour in his resting at which point he regains 1 hp and starts regenerating as normal.

**Regeneration.** Ermenus regains 10 hit points at the start of his turn if he has at

least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If he takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn.

**Spider climb.** Ermenus can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Vampire weaknesses.** Ermenus has the following weaknesses:

**Aversion to mirrors.** Ermenus casts no reflection on mirrors or flat polished metal. He cannot willingly approach close to a strongly presented mirror.

**Forbiddance.** Ermenus can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants or permission by Azalin Rex, if in Darkon.

**Harmed by Running Water.** Ermenus takes 20 acid damage if he ends his turn in running water.

**Shadowless.** Ermenus casts no shadow. **Stake to the Heart.** If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into Ermenus's heart while he is incapacitated in his resting place, Ermenus is paralyzed until the stake is removed.

**Sunlight Hypersensitivity.** Ermenus takes 20 radiant damage when he starts his turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, he has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

**Trigger.** While Ermenus is no longer a werewolf, he still has a morsel of that curse remaining. When someone mentions his brother's name (Meretus) to Ermenus, the vampire's guilt triggers an involuntary transformation to his wolf form and he cannot change his form until dawn. Unable to change to mist form,

the undead will instead be destroyed if he is reduced to 0 hp while under this involuntary change. Ermenus' alignment changes to chaotic evil for the duration of the change and he will seek to destroy those that uttered his brother's name.

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### **Actions**

**Multi-attack (vampire form).** Ermenus makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

**Unarmed Strike (vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6+4) bludgeoning damage. Instead of dealing damage, Ermenus can grapple the target (escape DC 15)

**Bite (bat or vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing, grappled by Ermenus, incapacitated or restrained target. Hit: 7 (1d6+4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Ermenus regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way rises the following minute as a zombie under Ermenus's control.

**Bite (wolf form).** Melee weapon attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Ermenus regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies

if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0 and doesn't rise from the dead.

**Charm.** Ermenus targets one humanoid he can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see Ermenus, the target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by Ermenus. The charmed target regards Ermenus as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under Ermenus's control, he or she takes Ermenus's requests or actions in the most favorable way possible, and he or she is a willing target for Ermenus's bite attack. Each time Ermenus or Ermenus's companions do anything harmful to the target, he or she can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on him or herself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until Ermenus is destroyed, is in a different domain than the target, or takes a bonus action to end the effect.

**Children of the night (1/day).** Ermenus magically calls 3 swarms of bats or rats, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, Ermenus can call 2d6 wolves instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4+1 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire and obeying his spoken commands. The beasts remain for 1 hour, until Ermenus dies, or until he dismisses them as a bonus action.

**Longsword+1 (vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (1d8+5) slashing damage. If the blade is poisoned the target must make a constitution saving throw (DC 14) on a hit. On failure the target takes 4d6 poison damage. The target is also poisoned for 1 minute and



can repeat the saving throw at the end of his turn to end the condition at a success. A character dropped to 0 hp by this poison doesn't die; he or she remains at 1 hp but is paralyzed for 2d4 minutes. The poison is effective for 5 minutes after applied or until Ermenus damages a creature with his sword.

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### Legendary Actions

Ermenus can take 1 legendary action from the options below. The action can be used only at the end of another creature's turn. He regains his spent legendary action at the start of his turn.

**Move.** Ermenus moves up to 30' without provoking attacks of opportunity, as long as he doesn't have a grappled target.

**Attack (Vampire form).** Ermenus makes one unarmed strike or one weapon attack.

**Bite.** Ermenus can make one bite attack against a grappled or willing target if in vampire or bat form or a normal bite attack while in wolf form.

**Assist.** Ermenus can bark a command to one of his allies able to understand him or to one of the creatures or swarms he summoned. The target makes an attack as directed with advantage on the hit roll

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### Equipment

Studded Leather armor, longsword +1, 2 doses of poison, 2d6 + 10 gold pieces, jewelry worth at least 250 gp. Ermenus cell ring, Ermenus cell mask.

**Confronting Ermenus:** Given a few rounds to prepare, Ermenus is a powerful enemy, as his challenge rating suggests, able to call allies and use poison. However, players that make use of his weaknesses

will find less trouble dealing with this monster. Successfully locating and destroying his coffins or finding out about his trigger makes the vampire more vulnerable.

## Dermont ("Kerment")

The doppelganger Dermont is the leader of the Charred Raiders, a vicious group of bandits that receive the blame for many of the cell's crimes, on top of their own. He uses the false name "Kerment" in his persona as bandit leader.

### Description

Dermont is a doppelganger and as such his appearance changes. To his chagrin though, he has developed a small, telltale scar in the palm of his left hand, which remains in all his forms.

As the leader of the Dark Raiders, he appears like a tall, athletic man in his 30s, with short dark hair and a trimmed goatee. He dresses in studded leather armor and simple, dark brown practical clothes. He hides his hand, and the scar, with gloves.

### Background

Dermont is an outlander doppelganger with some skill in magic, claimed by Darkon's memory altering powers. What he remembers is that he comes from a family of doppelgangers that made a pact with certain mountain spirits from the Balinoks, several generations ago, to act as wolves in sheep's clothing, keeping the spread of humanity and civilization in check, in exchange for magical power. What he has forgotten is that all this happened in a different world, not in the Balinoks. Azalin, Beryl Silvertess and Ermenus know that his memories are false. He remembers traveling through Darkon, living a comfortable although somewhat boring life, developing



his magical power slowly for a few years, after leaving his clan to seek his own future.

Eventually, while having taken the place of a minor noble, he was discovered by the Kargat and arrested. Instead of being punished for his crimes, though, he was offered to join the monstrous organization. He found himself enjoying his new position, which allows him to keep an eye on human numbers, and gives him access to powerful allies, along with enough thrill to keep his life interesting.

In the years that he has worked for Ermenus, he has usually led a bandit gang for a year or two, gathering notoriety and diverting the blame from the Kargat when needed. Eventually he would betray his followers and set them up for the guards and the Kargat constable Opreir to capture them. A little trickery and make-up would make someone else pass for the bandit leader he pretended to be, enough for the peasants to cheer the severed head of the criminal bandit lord, without knowing the real perpetrator is usually among them cheering.

Much to his horror, Dermont started to be influenced, subtly at first, by his discarded identities. With every cycle of betrayal, the situation seems to grow worse. At first he noticed subtle changes to his persona and mannerisms. Then, after leaving behind the identity of a bandit with magical powers, he started hearing the voice of that persona in his head. The worst yet came after leaving behind the identity of the sorceress sister of that bandit, who was seeking revenge. Dermont found out that the cosmetic scar he had put in the left palm of the "vengeful sorceress" remained in all his forms, marking him forever, and he now could hear her voice urging him to seek revenge for the death of her brother who never-existed.

## Current Sketch

Dermont enjoys deception, misdirection, trickery and confusion. He is not especially cruel, nor sadistic, although the voice of the vengeful sorceress identity from his past urges him to exact more punishing revenge on members of the guard and sometimes, he complies.

Having adopted the guise of a bandit with sorcerous powers and then, after that persona's "demise," the guise of his vengeful sister, he has been instructed by Ermenus to avoid using magic in his current form. He keeps a non-magical wand as a prop on his person in case he has to use magic.

Dermont is reasonably loyal to the Kargat and Azalin, enjoying his position, his role fitting well with the pact made by his family, and respecting the power of the darklord and the organization. He also knows that if he is ever suspected of not acting in the interests of Azalin or against the wishes of his superiors, he would suffer a fate worse than death. With Dermont's ability to read minds and his ability to change his appearance, he is a very valuable member of the cell. Leading a group of bandits has all sorts of benefits for the Kargat as well.

Dermont is a master of adopting different identities for some time. His adopted identity has specific mannerisms, ways of speech and other characteristics and traits that are different from other identities he has used in the past, making it nearly impossible for people that knew one of his identities to recognize something familiar in a new one. When he has to imitate an existing person, Dermont spends as much time as possible studying his or her mannerisms, quirks and ways of speaking. Unlike some others of his kin, he prefers to keep a single appearance most of the time,

changing his appearance only when needed for a short time. Such secondary identities, as he calls them, usually blend to the background and go unnoticed.

Dermont's years of crimes, betrayal, and assuming identities have made a mark on his mind and recently on his body. To his horror, he has found that the identities he adopts seem to influence him and his mind progressively more, subtly changing the way he acts and thinks. After the voices of past identities started invading his mind and the scar appeared on his hand, he realized that he merges more and more with each passing identity. Afraid of the implications, Dermont has started spending more time in his own form, although he detests it as unprofessional. Ermenus informed Azalin about the situation, but the darklord didn't seem to be concerned.

Dermont often leaves his bandits for a short period for a mission, telling them that he goes to gather information. Usually Caleb remains in his stead to keep order, but both could be absent without major problems.

## Charred Raiders

The bandits Dermont currently leads with the help of the infamous "Caleb the Baker" currently number about a score of stone-hearted criminals. These bandits have a number of hide-outs in the area and usually go out in groups of five to eight. While some have some wilderness skills, they're more content to take their food at sword-point than hunt for it. While Dermont isn't usually cruel with his followers, those that show severe disobedience, try to desert the group, or steal from him are made into an example and given over to the other Kargat agent, Caleb.

The group takes its name from the charred, smoky husk that remains after this punishment, and the others are forced to

rub their hands in the ashes of their comrade. At the insistence of a past assumed identity, baronial and community guards captured by the group may also end up in Caleb's furnace.

Aside from fear, the Charred Raiders follow Dermont and Caleb because they often seem to have information about the location of rich caravans and the activities of the baronial and community guard or even anti-banditry campaigns by local heroes.

A notorious and mobile bandit group active in the area is useful to the Kargat. Many of the monstrous agents prey on humans and demihumans. Leaving the mutilated or rotted bodies near a road, pierced by arrows, points the finger towards the bandits. Also, the bandits are a convenient way to deal with traveling enemies when the Kargat doesn't want to show their cards. In a more opportunistic role, the mercenaries under control of different Kargat agents enjoy better payment, and the populace are more accepting of a secret police in their midst if the dangers of the area are greater.

## Goals

Dermont's main goal is to halt and reverse the merging of his mind and body with identities he creates. He knows his magical knowledge on the subject is not enough and, knowing his partners and superiors well, he doesn't expect sympathy or mercy from his cell, Azalin Rex, or even his fey patrons. As such, he has redoubled his efforts to be useful to Azalin Rex, hoping to earn his help, and also seeks to learn more transformation magic and understand its principles. So far, he has had little success, managing to gather only a little knowledge.



## Lair

Dermont doesn't have a specific lair, and travels from hide-out to hide-out.

## Dermont

*Medium monstrosity (Shapechanger), neutral evil*

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**Armor Class** 16 (armor)

**Hit Points** 65 (8d8 +16, he has above average hit points)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 12 (+1) **Dex** 18 (+4) **Con** 14 (+2)

**Int** 13 (+1) **Wis** 13 (+1) **Cha** 16 (+3)

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**Saving Throws** Wisdom +3, charisma +5

**Skills** deception +7, insight +3, knowledge (arcana) +3, perception +3

**Senses** darkvision 60', passive Perception 13

**Languages** Darkonese, Vaasi, Dwarven

**Challenge** 4 (1100 xp)

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**Shapechanger.** Dermont can use his action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid he has seen, or back into his true form. His statistics, other than his size, are the same in each form. Any equipment he's wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

**Ambusher.** The doppelganger has advantage on attack rolls against any creature he has surprised.

**Surprise Attack.** If Dermont surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 10 (3d6) damage from the attack.

**Pact of the blade.** Dermont can use his action to create a pact weapon in his empty hand. He can choose the form that this melee weapon takes. This weapon counts as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity to non-magical attacks and damage. His pact weapon disappears if he dismisses it, creates another, or if it's more than 5' away from him for a minute.

**Eldrich blade.** As a bonus action, Dermont can temporarily charge his pact blade with the force of his eldrich blast. The weapon counts is charged until it strikes a target or for 1 round and deals 5 (1d10) extra force damage on a hit.

**Spellcasting:** Dermont is a 5th lvl spellcaster. He has +5 to attack with spells and the DC for his spells is 13. Dermont knows the following spells and casts them all as 3rd lvl spells. He has 2 spell slots that he regains after a short or long rest.

**cantrips** (at will): *Eldrich blast, mage hand, prestidigitation*

**Known spells** (2 slots): *Armor of Agathys, sleep, hold person, phantasmal force, suggestion, hunger of Hadar.*

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## Actions

**Misty visions.** Dermont can cast silent image at will without expending spell slots or components.

**Multiattack.** Dermont can make two melee attacks, or attack twice with his eldrich blast cantrip

**Short sword (pact blade).** Melee weapon attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6+4) piercing damage. If the blade is charged with Eldrich blade



power, the target also takes 5 (1d10) force damage.

**Eldrich blast.** ranged spell attack: +5 to hit, reach 40 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d10+3) force damage.

**Read Thoughts.** Dermont magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of him. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, the doppelganger can continue reading its thoughts, as long as his concentration isn't broken. While reading the target's mind, Dermont has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

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### Equipment

Short sword (pact blade), Ermenus cell mask, potion of healing, non-magical wand, false potion. If the mission requires it, Dermont may be carrying poison or another potion from those available to the Kargat.

## Confronting Dermont

Dermont, being a bandit leader, is accustomed to heroes trying to deal with him. Unlike his previous two identities, he pretends to have no magical power in this form. As such, he would avoid using his considerable prowess unless threatened and, if it comes to that, he will try to leave no witnesses. He carries with him a false wand and a colored water bottle to use as props in case he has to use his magic. If he expects he will need to use magic, he will take a different form before battle and have only Kargat members to support him.

Since Dermont was unaware that the scar in his palm would remain, there are several victims alive that have seen the scar in the palm of the bandit sorceress, supposedly beheaded some months ago. Also, as his own personality merged to a degree with the identities he has adopted, he occasionally visits places in which he used to dwell in his two previous bandit personas.

## Caleb

Caleb "the baker" is the lieutenant of Dermont, mainly in charge of keeping the bandits in their place and assisting Dermont in assassinations.

### Description

Caleb is a muscular man in his late 20s, usually with mussed auburn hair. He usually has a sneering smile and his dark eyes seem to hold a cruelty that sets many people on edge. His arms show signs of scars that he has made himself and he often exhibits minor burns in his hands and face. Caleb dresses in breast plate armor and carries his sword with him.

### Background

Caleb was the son of a minor noble in Nartok who owed several taverns, bakeries, and mills. Even as a child, Caleb was known for his fascination with fire and his cruelty. In his early teens, he would throw hot coals on the kitchen staff for amusement, or hunt other kids with a hot poker. Later it was discovered that he would throw live cats and dogs in the furnace, enjoying their screams. His own family stopped protecting him when, one morning, the horrified personnel of the biggest bakery in his family's holdings discovered a charred human corpse in the largest furnace. No one had any doubts as to who was behind

that horrible murder and Caleb escaped the town ahead of an angry mob.

It was then that the Kargat approached Caleb. He was being watched, and the discovery of the corpse was no accident but the first test. Caleb joined the Kargat, rejoicing in the opportunity to develop his fascination. He served as muscle or torturer in Corvia and settlements around it for a few years until he was sent to join the Ermenus cell.

Caleb has gathered notoriety for himself in his time in the area, being elevated to a local bogeyman. He's known for joining bandit groups and acting as a cruel enforcer for them. News spread quickly that the gang of bandits led by Kerment (Dermont's alias) accepted him, and that, after dealing with those that disagreed with the decision, the band was named "The Charred Raiders.". His antics of burning people alive, or even locking them in ovens and furnaces to burn slowly, have not only earned him notoriety, but have occasionally forced the bandits he joins to relocate to avoid the angry ghosts of his victims. The Charred Raiders have started forcing priests to give proper funerals to those "baked" by Caleb and also use holy water on the remains. Most of the priests return shaken, but physically unharmed, from such tasks.

Recently, Caleb discovered that his obsession with fire has made him more flammable; he's easily injured by fire. However, he also discovered that he can make his blood spontaneously ignite, once it's outside his body.

## Current Sketch

Caleb is sadistic, cruel, arrogant, and has an obsession with fire that borders on pyromania. He's a very skilled warrior and he's trained in stealth and torture. He follows the orders of Dermont and Ermenus

knowing they're above his power but believes Azalin will eventually promote him.

The many inhuman deeds Caleb has committed have affected him. Since the discovery that he burns easier but can make his blood ignite, when "baking" he uses his own blood to start the fire under his begging and screaming victim. There have been a couple of surviving witnesses to this power, so he's been instructed by Ermenus to not over-use the ability. Caleb can also see invisible creatures if they're in the light of an open fire.

While his arrogance makes him unable to see it, both Ermenus and Dermont consider Caleb's insanity and well-known obsession with fire to be a possible liability. While Ermenus will take steps to protect Caleb, save him if he's captured or avenge him if he's killed, the vampire is worried that the unhinged man's antics may expose him when disguised on a mission. The missions he receives more often involve him torturing a suspect to get a confession, or acting in his notorious persona to get rid of someone, rather than infiltration and espionage; he's not considered subtle enough for these tasks, although rarely he's given such missions when necessary and while Caleb hasn't made a serious mistake yet, Ermenus is watching him.

## Goals

Caleb wants to distinguish himself so that he may rise higher in the Kargat, and then he will plead his case to Azalin to make him a baron. After all, who would suspect a baron of being a member of the Kargat? As a baron, Caleb plans to get fiery revenge on the peasants that chased him away from Nartok.



## Caleb the Baker

*Medium humanoid, chaotic evil*

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**Armor Class** 17 (armor)

**Hit Points** 75 (10d8 +30)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 18 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+2) **Con** 16 (+3)

**Int** 12 (+1) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+1)

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**Saving Throws** Strength +6, constitution +5

**Skills** Athletics +5, deception +3,  
intimidation +3, perception +3,  
stealth +4, torturer's tools +4

**Damage vulnerabilities** fire

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Darkonese, Vaasi, Dwarven

**Challenge** 4 (1100 xp)

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**Infamy.** If Caleb's identity is known or suspected by a local, he has advantage in intimidation checks.

**Unsettling.** There's something unsettling about Caleb that makes good and honest people unable to trust him. Caleb suffers disadvantage to charisma (deception and persuasion) checks when talking to innocents or good aligned people.

**Action Surge (1/short rest).** On his turn, Caleb can use one extra action and one extra bonus action.

**Duelist.** When Caleb has a weapon in one hand and nothing in his other hand, he gets a +1 bonus to AC

**Revealing flames.** Caleb can see invisible creatures if they are within the area illuminated by an open fire.

**Sneak attack (1/turn).** Caleb deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is

within 5 feet of one of Caleb's allies that isn't incapacitated and he doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

**Ignitable blood.** Caleb can make his blood ignite once it's outside of his body, if it's within 60' of him and it's fresh (less than 1 day old or preserved with alchemy). Once he receives at least 1 hp of slashing damage, Caleb can throw and ignite his blood as an action, or apply it to his sword as a bonus action. To apply it, he takes 2 slashing damage and his sword deals an extra 1d8 fire damage for 1 minute or until he hits a target. Caleb cannot use this ability on consecrated ground.

**Allergen.** Holy water, while not actually harmful to Caleb, stops his ignitable blood ability and his fiery vengeance ability for 1 minute, as Caleb cannot ignite his blood for the duration.

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### Actions

**Multiattack.** Caleb can make two attacks, only one of which could be to throw his blood.

**Sword.** Melee weapon attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8+4) slashing damage and 4 (1d8) fire damage if he has applied his blood on it.

**Ignitable blood (must have suffered slashing damage).** ranged magical attack: +4 to hit, ranged 10/20 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (2d4) fire damage.

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### Reactions

**Fiery vengeance (recharge 5-6).** If Caleb receives slashing damage in melee combat, he can use his reaction to ignite the blood that lands on his opponent if he or she is within 5'. If Caleb uses this



ability, the one that just wounded him must make a dex saving throw (DC 12) or receive as much fire damage as the provoking attack did to Caleb. He cannot use this ability on consecrated ground.

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### Equipment

longsword, Ermenus cell mask, 2 potions of healing.

## Confronting Caleb

Caleb is often surrounded by allies, to help him utilize his sneak attack. He's not yet aware that he can't use his trademark abilities on consecrated ground or if hit with holy water, so he won't take any precautions against these. A possible way for the PCs to discover this weakness is for Caleb to try to intimidate a priest (perhaps for a funeral to prevent vengeful dead from rising) or someone else inside a church using his blood. He would fail to ignite it, and discover his weakness that way.

## Rebvena

A red widow shapechanger in service of the Kargat, and leading lady of a traveling performer group named "Red Passion" that usually performs along the Nocturnal sea coastline.

### Description

In her human form, Rebvena appears as a beautiful woman with long, curly red hair. She usually dresses in provocative and inviting clothing. In spider form, she has a bright crimson body with a black, hourglass pattern on its back. The spider form is about 10' long, with the body taking about ½ of that.

### Background

Rebvena was born in Nova Vaasa, but has since been claimed by Darkon's memory

altering powers. The memories implanted to her by Darkon actually led her believe she was chosen from all her sisters for a greater purpose, and that purpose was revealed to be serving the Kargat, while growing comfortable and sating her appetites. Her false memories have indoctrinated her to considerable loyalty to Azalin and her cell. Ermenus knows she's claimed, as does the Corvia faction leader Beryl Silvertress. She joined the Kargat after Azalin's return and has been with the cell for about 3 years.

### Current sketch

Rebvena is a creature of many vices. She's vain, cruel, greedy, and lusts for the pleasures of flesh and the shrieks of her victims as she reveals her true form. She is an expert in seduction and at any time she has several lovers spread through the area in which she operates. She is easily bored and tosses lovers aside, breaking their hearts if they're lucky or devouring them if they're not. She likes screams of fear, pain, and wails of lament enough to put such scenes in most of the performances, both plays and songs, of the troupe. She especially enjoys mixing the screams of her victims as she reveals her spider form with the sounds of a performance taking place outside. It's her favorite form of "art". She enjoys that enough to occasionally risk sneaking in captives of the Kargat that are condemned to die.

Through the indoctrination in her memories and the power of the Kargat, Rebvena is loyal to the cell, feeling she is following her natural calling and the way things should be while enjoying the pleasures her station can afford. If she is removed from Darkon and reclaims her memories, she will realize that her whole identity is false and her loyalty to the Kargat will be shaken to the core.

If she gets the impression that Kargat presence is requested in an area, or receives orders to move to a place, she just takes her troupe that way. When a mission or assignment forces Rebvena to get away from the group for a few days, she pretends to be traveling to secure performances. Since she often returns with a job, or at least with money to spread around her camp, there are usually no complaints.

Rebvena spends much of her time socializing in the various communities she passes through and has many of her troupe do the same. She uses seduction and promises of pleasure to lure people to open themselves up to her, learning their secrets. She also uses blackmail without remorse. When she has to assassinate, she tries to lure the victim into her deadly embrace. If that is not possible, such as when she has to assault a group of enemies, she will take her troupe to a different place, travel back in disguise, change form, and attack as a monstrous spider without ever revealing her human self.

## Red Passion

Rebvena acts as the owner, lead singer, and dancer of the "Red Passion," with the help of another Kargat member, Enthor. "Red Passion" is well known in the area, although not always well received, for the violent and passionate plays and often vulgar and crass displays it puts on. It's not unheard of for people to disappear when the Red Passion leaves, although the usual explanation is that a person smitten with Rebvena decided to join them, only to return broken-hearted a few weeks later. Others that don't turn up are assumed to have perished by the dangers of the realm as they were making their way back.

The number of performers in the group fluctuates but usually includes a couple of extra singers, a few dancers and actors, and

a couple of jugglers and mimes. A few prostitutes travel with the group, plying their trade in the settlements the troupe visits. A few stable-hands, a cook or two, and a small group of warriors and hunters round out the group. Often a vendor or two joins the group for a time, paying a small fee. Enthor heads the group of warriors and acts as quarter-master and Rebvena's second in command. The Kargat makes sure that competitors of the "Red Passion" are either driven away or killed.

## Goals

Rebvena's goals include enjoying her life, which she knows will be short, while serving Azalin Rex. She likes expensive pieces of jewelry and dresses that flatter her already beautiful form, and seeks passionate lovers and people to flatter her. She also likes screams of terror and the death throes of her victims.

## Lair

Rebvena usually resides in a sturdy, large, red wagon driven by two draft horses, furnished with expensive pieces. The wagon is large enough for her to comfortably subdue and kill her victims when she changes her shape, without breaking any of her possessions. Large thick drapes cover the sturdy walls, muffling much of the sound. Simple enchantments woven in the fabric and walls nearly ensure that, while screams from outside can be heard, screams from outside are hard to notice. In game terms, a creature screaming in the wagon or sounds of battle require a perception check with DC 16 to overhear from outside and if a performance is taking place, the roll is made with disadvantage.

The wagon's door is arcane locked, as is the sole window. The wagon contains two large wardrobes, both arcane locked. One contains only clothes, while the other



contains valuables, tools for the Kargat to use, and occasionally a desiccated and rotting corpse of a former lover or Kargat target that the red widow feeds from.

## Rebvena

*Medium Shapechanger, neutral evil*

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**Armour Class** 17 (natural) in spider form,  
13 in human form

**Hit Points** 55 (6d8 + 18, she has above  
average hp)

**Speed** 30 ft. climb 30' (spider form)

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**Str** 18 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Con** 16 (+3)

**Int** 13 (+0) **Wis** 13 (+1) **Cha** 17 (+3)

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**Saving Throws** Charisma +5, strength +6

**Skills** deception +7, intimidation +7,  
persuasion +5, stealth +5, thief tools +2

**Damage Resistances** poison

**Senses** darkvision 60', passive Perception  
11

**Languages** Darkonese, Vaasi, Dwarven,  
Gnome

**Challenge** 4 (1100 xp)

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**Shapechanger.** Rebvena can use her action to polymorph into a large spider or back into the human form. Her statistics, other than her attacks, size, and AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. The red widow reverts to the spider form if she dies. She typically changes to her spider form only before attacking a victim in order to protect her identity.

**Call spiders (1/day).** Rebvena can summon two swarms of spiders, that arrive in 1d6+3 rounds and serve the widow for 1 hour, until she dismisses them or until the swarms are destroyed.

**Cunning action (1/short rest).** Rebvena can take a bonus action. This action can be used only to take the dash, disengage or hide action. Unlike the rogue trait, once used, Rebvena has to take a short rest to use it again.

**Deadly embrace.** Before changing to spider form and attacking, the Rebvena usually draws her intended victim to a passionate embrace. Then she changes form, without breaking this embrace. A character is considered grappled while in this embrace and to break free, the target must make a strength (athletics) or dexterity (acrobatics) check with DC 19.

**Sneak attack (1/turn).** Rebvena deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the widow that isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

**Spider climb.** While in spider form Rebvena can climb sheer surfaces and walls.

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### Actions

**Bite (spider form only).** Melee weapon attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d4+4) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 13 con save, taking 33 (6d10) poison damage on a failed save. A successful save negates the damage.

Rebvena has advantage to hit a grappled target.

**Dagger (human form only).** Melee weapon attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d4+4) piercing damage.



**Web (recharge 5-6).** Ranged weapon attack: +5 to hit, ranged 20/40 ft., one target up to large size. Hit: the target is restrained. A creature can use its action to make a DC 14 Strength check, freeing itself or another creature within its reach on a success. Dealing 10 slashing damage to the web (AC 12) also frees the creature without harming it.

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### Equipment

Dagger, Ermenus cell ring, Ermenus cell mask. If the mission requires it or as a precaution, Rebvena may be carrying poison or another potion from those available to the Kargat.

### Confronting Rebvena

More powerful than the regular red widow and having some rogue skills, Rebvena is deadly if she tricks a victim to her embrace and she knows it. While formidable in her human form too, Rebvena is considerably easier to defeat (She's CR 2 in her human form). Knowing this, if she has the time and suspects she may have to enter battle in human form, she would call spiders and allies and flee.

### Enthor

The mountain dwarf killer that leads the warriors and hunters that protect the Red Passion.

### Description

Enthor is a little over 4' tall, athletic and muscular. He has a light brown complexion in the shade of earth and gray hair and sports a traditional dwarven beard. He wears simple clothes in earthen tones and a green cloak, usually covering his chain shirt armor. Unless it is inconvenient, he carries

his hand-axe and his dagger openly. He rarely smiles and he's a dwarf of few words.

### Background

Enthor was born in the Mountains of Misery about 8 decades ago to a small dwarven clan. Enthor was to become a warrior for the clan but his lack of compassion and immoral behavior, combined with his uncharacteristic wanderlust led him be an outcast. The break with his clan came when it was discovered that he murdered one of his clanmates to steal a ruby found in the forgotten ruins that dot the mountains. His clan tracked him down, captured him, and kept him in a cage to execute him. He was to be left without food for three days and nights and then beheaded. The cage was kept on the surface as the clan's laws made clear that a murderer wouldn't be allowed underground.

That's where Ermenus, already a vampire, found the dwarf. He had already been notified by his spies that a dwarf kinslayer would be executed and decided to check. Ermenus gave to the condemned dwarf a dagger. With that, Enthor managed to cut his bonds, get out of the cage, and kill his guard, impressing the Kargat vampire. Looking to repay his debt, Enthor served Ermenus for a few years before being raised to the Kargat by Azalin during the Grim Harvest.

During the Grim Harvest, Enthor traveled in eastern Darkon using Azalin's enchanted blades to steal souls for the terrible Doomsday Device. He showed little hesitation and even less remorse in the vile task, not shying from harvesting dwarves when instructed. After Azalin returned, Enthor was assigned to Rebvena and her Red Passion troupe.

## Current sketch

Enthor is loyal to Azalin, the Kargat in general, and the cell. Aside from that trait he has no other morals. He lacks empathy and remorse and is willing to commit heinous crimes for the Kargat. He's also greedy and a miser although he's not foolish in his greed, nor completely unwilling to spend ill-gained money.

Enthor expects the Kargat to take risks to help him and to be rewarded for his efforts. Effectively he considers the monsters of the Kargat similar to a dwarven clan that he belongs to: a clan that suits him far better than the clan he was born into, a clan where he fits in with other remorseless monsters. So far, he's content with how those two expectations are met. If the Kargat ever decides that the risks and efforts required to help Enthor are too great and abandons him, though, the dwarf may well change sides, feeling betrayed. Azalin has realized this but hasn't informed Ermenus for reasons of his own.

None of the guards and hunters he leads would unquestionably kill for him, although a couple may not be above banditry or even murder for a share of the loot, which he rarely is willing to give. As such, when he has to assassinate, he prefers to stalk and kill his victims in their sleep. When facing the Unholy Order of the Grave or other threats to the realm, he may join up with sell-swords or gullible good adventurers as long as he expects they won't understand the evil he harbors. His usual line of work, though, is to guard and assist Rebvena and also use his aptitude for stealth and strong senses to spy on discussions in taverns, inns, or during performances.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Enthor realizes that in this line of work, he won't survive for centuries as he expects,

but he doesn't dwell on the thought and goes around taking calculated risks and slowly building up his wealth.

## Red Passion guards

Enthor leads the small group of warriors, scouts, and hunters of the Red Passion, and in case of an attack, all members able to fight. He sometimes trains with the warriors and stable-hands or shows wilderness tricks to the hunters. He doesn't do that out of camaraderie, but to build up some trust he can use and make them more efficient tools for the Kargat. While a couple of those under his command may be willing to murder for profit, usually he has to deal with the quality of character expected more or less by such traveling warriors.

## Goals

Aside from slowly amassing wealth, preferably gold, Enthor has few other interests at the time.

## Lair

Enthor resides alone in a small wagon of the Red Passion performers. The door and window are arcane locked as is the large chest where he keeps his valuables.

## Enthor

*Medium humanoid (Mountain dwarf), neutral evil*

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**Armor Class** 15 (armor)

**Hit Points** 45 (6d8 + 18)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 18 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+2) **Con** 16 (+3)

**Int** 12 (+1) **Wis** 14 (+2) **Cha** 9 (-1)

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**Saving Throws** Strength + 6, constitution + 5, dex + 4

**Skills** Athletics + 5, deception + 3, intimidation + 3, knowledge (nature) + 3,



perception +4 (+6 in mountains),  
persuasion +1, stealth +6, survival +5  
(+7 in mountains), thief tools +2

**Damage Resistances** poison

**Senses** darkvision 60', passive Perception  
14 (16 in mountains)

**Languages** Darkonese, Vaasi, Dwarven

**Challenge** 2 (450 xp)

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**Dwarven resilience.** Enthor has advantage  
on saving throws against poison.

**Expertise.** Enthor doubles his proficiency  
bonus in deception, intimidation and  
stealth checks.

**Cunning action (1/short rest).** Enthor can  
take a bonus action. This action can be  
used only to take the dash, disengage or  
hide action. Unlike the rogue trait, once  
used, Enthor has to take a short rest to  
use it again.

**Sneak attack (1/turn).** Enthor deals an  
extra 7 (2d6) damage when he hits a  
target with a weapon attack and has  
advantage on the attack roll, or when the  
target is within 5 feet of an ally of the  
dwarf that isn't incapacitated and he  
doesn't have disadvantage on the attack  
roll.

**Favorite enemy.** Enthor has advantage on  
wisdom (survival) checks to track humans  
or undead.

**Natural explorer.** While in mountains and  
traveling for more than an hour, Enthor  
receives the following benefits:

- He gains a +2 bonus at perception and survival checks
  - He can move stealthily at normal pace when traveling alone
  - When foraging, he finds twice as much food
- 

## Actions

**Multiattack.** Enthor can make two attacks:  
one with his axe and one with his  
dagger.

**Hand-axe.** Melee weapon attack: +6 to  
hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7  
(1d6+4) slashing damage.

**Dagger.** Melee weapon attack: +6 to hit,  
reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d4+4)  
piercing damage.

**Dagger.** ranged weapon attack: +4 to hit,  
ranged 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 4  
(1d4+2) piercing damage.

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## Reactions

**Quick draw.** Enthor can spend his reaction  
to draw both his axe and dagger at the  
beginning of a round of combat as long  
as he's not surprised.

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## Equipment

Hand-axe, 2 daggers, Ermenus cell mask,  
potion of healing. If the mission requires  
it, Enthor may be carrying poison or  
another potion from those available to  
the Kargat.

## Confronting Enthor

Enthor, while a capable warrior,  
presents little threat by himself. As such, he  
prefers to fight when he has the numerical  
advantage, or to catch his targets sleeping.  
When that's not possible, he tries to attack  
from ambush and have a couple of allies in  
the fight. If a fight turns against him, he will  
use his cunning action to flee and try to lose  
his pursuers in the wilderness.

Enthor has no qualms to fight dirty,  
including hiding behind innocents or forcing  
them to remain around him to shield him  
from area attacks. He also has no problem  
abandoning his allies (other than the  
Kargat) to be killed in his stead. While



Enthor would like to use poison often to make a fight easier, he's provided with poison to use only when his superiors decide it is needed or if he pays for it out of his own pocket, something that he avoids, since he's a miser.

Although he doesn't realize it, he's actually one of the most expendable members of the cell. Ermenus is loyal to his cell and will take reasonable risks to save or help Enthor, but he wouldn't go so far as put his operation to great risk for a breathing assassin. If Enthor is captured by powerful player characters and they guard him well, Ermenus will grudgingly abandon him to his fate. When the dwarf realizes he's been cut off, he will feel immensely betrayed and could turn on his former allies.

## Qeron Opeir

Sir Opeir is the constable for one of the barons in the area, serving in the Kargat out of devotion to royalty.

### Description

Qeron Opeir is an athletic man in his early thirties, with auburn hair and stern features. In his formal attire, he wears his dark blue uniform or his splint armor. When not on duty, he prefers gray and blue colors. He always carries his sword with him.

### Background

Sir Opeir is the second son of a minor noble from Il Aluk who perished during the Requiem. The Opeir family was loyal to the crown for generations and Qeron was raised from infancy in a household that regarded all of Darkon and its inhabitants as rightful property of the King. Qeron Opeir was given education to help administrate the realm in any capacity his king requested, and training in the martial arts, as was proper of a man of his station.

When the Requiem claimed his family and most of his fortune, young Qeron Opeir grieved, but he didn't accept that Azalin Rex had been destroyed. When the dead rised again to defend Nartok, Sir Opeir rejoiced; the King was still in Darkon. When Azalin returned, Sir Opeir traveled to meet his King, fell to his knees and offered his life, his fortune and the whole of his being to his king to do as he pleases with them.

A few months later, Azalin took him on his word, and he was initiated in the Kargat. Under Azalin's orders, he sold the remains of his property, traveled to a barony in the Misty Mountains and settled there among the mining camps. His status and training were important enough for him to be accepted in the Baron's employ as high ranking law enforcement officer, and with a few subtle manipulations by the Kargat, he became the constable, the highest rank of law enforcement in that barony, within a short time.

He isn't subtle about his absolute devotion to the crown. Once it was said in front of him that if Azalin suggested he should fall on his own sword, he would do it without thinking to escape Darkon, nor even asking why. His answer to the noblemen was that if Azalin asked them to fall on their own sword and they tried to escape, he would bring them back to do it and if they questioned the king's reasoning, he would have their tongues.

### Current Sketch

Sir Opeir is a devoted, loyal royalist. He has been informed of how his family's loyalty and devotion were rewarded, but he considers this as tokens of generosity by the monarch who should be served with absolute loyalty because that's the right thing to do. If the king asks for atrocities, so be it. The people and the land are his to do as he pleases, as are the dead. He

doesn't hide his loyalty, although he hides his affiliation with the Kargat.

He is one of the few Kargat agents that isn't totally consumed by evil and has some morals remaining. That doesn't mean he would lose any sleep over atrocities made in Azalin's name or for the benefit of the crown, but he would avoid illegal activities that don't benefit the king. As such, he's one of the least wealthy members of the Ermenus cell, since he doesn't partake in the looting. He tolerates the crimes committed by the organization, even the ones not made in the name of Azalin Rex, since he is loyal to the cell and he values the presence of the Kargat in the area even if it means a "few" crimes committed just out of greed or cruelty.

Sir Opeir is not suspected to be in the Kargat, mainly because most think he's too obvious a choice to actually be in the secret police and he doesn't display any of the cruelty associated with the Kargat. He's considered too moral to actually tolerate the death, or worse, of innocent kids. However, Ermenus is worried that someone at some point will suspect Sir Opeir and perhaps such a person would spy on the constable. Opeir is ordered to keep a low profile, without too much success, nor too many failures. Also, the vampire takes care to minimize contact by Opeir with the rest of the cell. If the constable is to attend a meeting, extra precautions are taken to make sure that he is not followed and the meeting is not spied upon.

Opeir, aside from the obvious value of holding the highest law enforcement rank and being in direct contact with a local baron and his court, serves the cell in another capacity. Ermenus expects that everyone looking for the Kargat, would at some point investigate Opeir. As such, a portion of the vampire's network is devoted to watching the constable and reporting his

moves and the moves of those asking about him, claiming he's worried about the long arm of the law and secret agents.

Sir Opeir suspects Ermenus may have a lair in or near the "Tower of Vengeance" and takes care to put people whom few would ever believe in the lowest level for the vampire to feed from, minimizing the risk of exposure.

## Lair

Sir Opeir spends his time in the court of the baron he serves and lives in a large house near his liege.

## Sir Opeir

*Medium humanoid, lawful evil*

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**Armor Class** 19 (armor)

**Hit Points** 52 (8d8 + 16)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 17 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Con** 15 (+2)

**Int** 12 (+1) **Wis** 14 (+2) **Cha** 15 (+2)

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**Saving Throws** Strength +5, constitution +4

**Skills** Athletics +5, deception +4, insight +4, knowledge (military tactics) +3, perception +4, persuasion +3

**Senses** passive Perception 14

**Languages** Darkonese, Vaasi, Elven

**Challenge** 2 (450 xp). The presence of Sir Opeir in an encounter raises the adjusted total XP to estimate encounter difficulty by 25%.

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**Action Surge (1/short rest).** On his turn, Opeir can use one extra action and one extra bonus action.

**Fanaticism.** Sir Opeir receives advantage on all saving throws or rolls to resist compulsion, supernatural or not, that



would have him act against the interests of Azalin Rex.

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### Actions

**Multiattack.** Sir Opeir can make two melee attacks.

**Sword.** Melee weapon attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

**Leadership (1/short rest).** After taking this action to assert his authority, for 1 minute, Sir Opeir's presence inspires his allies and he can utter commands to aid them fight more effectively. Whenever an allied creature that he can see within 30 feet of him makes an attack roll, the creature can add +2 to its roll provided it can hear or see the constable. A creature can benefit from this bonus only once per round.

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### Equipment

long sword, splint armor, shield, Ermenus cell mask, potion of healing.

## Confronting Opeir

Sir Opeir is not difficult to defeat by himself, but since he has the baronial guard under his command, that would rarely be the case. Ermenus is usually watching anyone that takes special interest in the Constable, fearing exposure. This could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy as an over-eager informant of the vampire could over-play the interest of PCs toward the constable, which could lead in an assassination attempt towards them. Poison in their wine is a sure way to get the interest of targeted people.

## Urf

The caliban wereboar Urf, is an infected werebeast that leads an unsuspecting band of mercenaries who offer their services to local nobility.

### Description

Urf is a caliban, a wretched deformed humanoid touched by magic or curse in the womb. Urf stands at over 6', although he would be taller if he didn't have a stooped back, and he is powerfully built. His hands are muscular and uneven in length. His eyes and teeth are misshapen and dislocated, so he speaks with a slight slur. His hair is black, coarse and oily. His wereboar form is a hybrid between a boar and a man. In this form, the deformities of the caliban are less pronounced.

### Background

Urf was abandoned by his parents in an orphanage in Martira Bay. While he could have had it worse, he suffered mistreatment at the hands of guardians and other orphans. He learned to use his considerable strength to defend himself and get what he wants. After a few incidents too many, he found himself thrown in the streets. He joined a local gang and killed his first man in his early teens.

Since Urf's appearance marked him out for guards to notice, but he could see in the dark, Urf was often tasked to patrol or carry heavy loads in the sewers and dark coastal caves under Martira Bay, the docks and surrounding coast. It was in one such cave, one night of the full moon that he was attacked by a vicious boar. Urf managed to escape, but at the next full moon, he woke up covered in the blood of his gang leader, with the leader's half-eaten body dropped next to him. While he hid the body, the next night he found himself over the half eaten body of another gang member.



Trying to flee the city, he was arrested by guards, suspicious of his behavior and appearance. It was in the cell that night that Kazandra of the Kargat approached him, offering to help him avoid the gallows and his gang's knives and even help him resist those transformations. Urf joined the Kargat.

Since joining, Urf served for some time under Kazandra, learning to have some control over his transformations. During the shrouded years, Urf, being resistant to non-silvered weapons, operated in the Vale of Tears. He killed undead and other enemies of the state with the help of swords-for-hire that didn't know his affiliation or his curse and could stomach both his cruel form of justice and the grim, dangerous task. Thus the band of the Tooth-slayers started.

With Azalin's return, Urf has been sent to assist Ermenus. With a bit of nudging from the Kargat cell, his band found employment in the area. As their reputation for swift and cruel efficiency grew, so did their numbers. More immoral mercenaries, former bandits, and calibans joined, and they took over a couple of abandoned buildings as outposts for their band.

## Current sketch

Urf is a domineering bully that pretends to be more civilized than he is, trying to hide his savagery and crass nature as he hides his curse. *He is a wild pig*, not just a man who transforms into one. While he's not as sadistic as Caleb, or as immoral as Enthor, he's undeniably an evil, cruel beast. He enjoys the fear and embraces the revulsion he strikes in his enemies and allies and bolsters it. Since he can't be loved, he will be feared. Since he can't be admired, he'll be reviled.

He purposely lets rumors spread about his cruel ways of punishing those that attack caravans and mines under the

protection of the band, as well as desertation and disobedience in his followers. He doesn't deny nor confirm that he eats those that earn his enmity and has occasionally appeared in front of his followers with blood around his disfigured mouth.

Urf tries to keep his affliction a secret. Most of his mercenaries do not suspect that he is a cursed monster and he changes form voluntarily only in the presence of Kargat members or when alone, relying on his more mundane combat skills among unsuspecting humans. Since he's not completely immune to normal weapons, he can mask his resistance to normal weapons as skill and luck.

Aside from leading a force to fight enemies of the state, undead, and other threats, Urf learns a lot of information from his group. His mercenaries move through the caravans, guard mines, and protect the developing settlements. They visit taverns and brothels and discuss rumors with merchants. Occasionally, they are hired for some illegal activity. Thus they provide a wealth of information for the Kargat.

Urf is loyal to the Kargat, feeling a kinship with the monsters that comprise the cell, enjoying their benefits and wealth. And since Ermenus was once an afflicted werecreature, he thinks that he may eventually join the upper ranks as well.

Urf's trigger is the full moon. During the three nights of the full moon, he transforms into a man-boar hybrid unless he manages to resist. He has access to certain alchemical concoctions and training that make him more likely to resist the transformation, but they don't always work, and the potions make him weak and nauseated. So, he usually locks himself in a safe-house during those nights.

Recently, after a spree of cruelly and sadistically killing captured bandits of the

doppelganger Dermont's former gang, he realized that he has more control over his transformation and over his actions while a lycanthrope. He can remember more of his actions and exert a modicum of control. However, that came at a cost, as he soon realized; while in human form, he would lose control of his actions due to rage, alcohol etc. The more control he exerted over the monster, the less control he had over the man.

The extent of this new condition was discovered when Ermenus was informed and a few experiments were carried out. The cell discovered that the wereboar was also much easier to control with magic. Ermenus has notified Azalin Rex and Beryl Silvertress. While the dwarf vampiress was about to order his execution, a messenger from Azalin brought the order that Urf is not to be disposed of... yet. Urf doesn't know how close he has come to termination.

## The Tooth-slayers

The Tooth-slayers are a mercenary band that operates in the area, mainly guarding mine operations, caravans, and providing protection while settlements are being built. When undead appear, the Tooth-slayers are usually the first to be employed to hunt them, with Urf himself leading them against the Unholy Order of the Grave. Aside from their legal actions, the band is not above paid assassination or guarding smuggled goods.

The band is comprised of 30-35 stone-hearted mercenaries and calibans. Just a few of them have been with Urf from the beginning; most are recent recruits from the area and the nearby settlements like Corvia. The band operates outside of the law and they have been known to give refuge to bandits that have not harmed those under the band's protection. In remote

settlements, the band is not above exacting a price akin to a protection racket.

The Tooth-slayers don't have one camp or base. They occupy a few unused and abandoned villas and houses in the area, close to places they are tasked to protect. Each such outpost has 5-10 members in residence usually. A few live in inns or small camps in the settlements under their protection. It is rumored that the biggest one, at the base of the Mountains of Misery was not abandoned before the band moved in.

**Goals:** Urf wants to enjoy his life, which he realizes will be short and leave a lasting mark in the world. He wants the respect from others that he didn't have in his early life and sees wealth, cruelty, and fear as the easy tools to get it. He also wants to regain control of his life. While he enjoys the benefits of lycanthropy, he would like to control the transformations without losing control of himself.

**Lair:** Urf spends about half of his time in the largest outpost of the Tooth-slayers, a large remote villa near the foothills of the Mountains of Misery and the rest in inns or the various outposts of the band. He usually spends the three nights of the full moon locked away in safehouses of the Kargat.

## Urf

*Medium humanoid (caliban, shapechanger), neutral evil*

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**Armor Class** 14 (armor) in humanoid form and 12 in hybrid form (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 71 (11d8 + 22)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 19 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Con** 15 (+2)

**Int** 11 (+0) **Wis** 13 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+1)

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**Saving Throws** Strength + 6, constitution + 4



**Skills** Athletics +6, deception +5, insight +3, intimidation +3, perception +3, stealth +3

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from weapons that aren't silvered or magical (Lycanthrope natural attacks bypass this resistance)

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Darkonese, Falkovnian

**Challenge** 4 (1100 xp).

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**Shapechanger.** Urf can use his action to polymorph into a boar-humanoid hybrid, or back into the caliban form (unless under the effects of an involuntary change). His statistics, other than AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. Urf reverts to the hybrid form if he dies.

**Chemical Bane.** Camphor acts as poison for Urf. If he is wounded by a weapon coated in camphor solution he takes 4d6 poison damage and is poisoned for 1 minute, unless he makes a constitution save with DC 14. Success in this save halves the damage and negates the condition. Ingesting dried rosemary leaves has the same effect. Ingesting camphor deals double damage.

**Enchantment vulnerability.** Urf suffers disadvantage on wisdom saves against enchantment spells and powers that would control his mind.

**Hunger.** Urf has to consume 15 lbs of raw meat (or double that cooked) each day or suffer one level of exhaustion regardless of whether he fed on other food or not.

**Trigger.** Urf has a trigger that turns him or her to the hybrid form. During the 3 nights of the full moon he changes form

automatically when the moon rises unless he passes a wisdom saving throw with DC 14. He remains in the hybrid form till the moon sets. If Urf is exposed to the full moon's light, he must repeat the saving throw every hour.

If Urf drops to below half his hit points, he must make a saving throw (DC 14) or suffer an involuntary change for 1 minute. Similar life-threatening situations may also trigger an involuntary change at the DM's discretion. Witnessing an involuntary change may call for a horror check.

Under an involuntary change, he is prone to attack like a rabid animal, ignoring plans, possibly targeting allies.

**Exert control (1/long rest).** Urf can use this power to reroll a failed save against his trigger. After Urf uses this power, until he completes a long rest, he suffers disadvantage on all skill checks and saves made in his caliban form to control his fear or anger or to resist taunts. At the DM's prerogative calls to make those skill checks could be more frequent.

**Action Surge (1/short rest).** On his turn, Urf can use one extra action and one extra bonus action.

**Charge (Hybrid Form Only).** if Urf moves at least 15 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with his tusks on the same turn, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

**Relentless (1/short rest).** if Urf takes 14 damage or less, that would reduce him to 0 hit points, he is reduced to 1 hit point instead.



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### Actions

**Multiattack.** Urf makes two attacks, only one of which can be with his tusks.

**Greataxe.** Melee weapon attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (1d12+4) slashing damage.

**Tusks.** Melee weapon attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6+4) slashing damage.

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### Equipment

Great-axe, chain shirt (would be ruined if he transformed in it), Ermenus cell mask, Ermenus cell ring, potion of healing, shapehold potion.

**Confronting Urf:** Urf is a formidable warrior in both his forms and is usually accompanied by allies. Perceptive players that meet him in a tavern may notice that he eats too much food, often raw meat, and he avoids foods cooked with rosemary leaves (because they contain traces of camphor). Unless subtlety is required, while disguised for the Kargat he assumes his hybrid form and fights with a different greataxe so as to not draw suspicion.

## Ferensis

An alchemist and scholar, leading a quiet life in a village close to Dnar river. Ferensis is secretly a wizard for the Kargat, providing many of the magical services required by the cell.

### Description

Ferensis is a man in his mid-forties, with graying hair, a short goatee, and a thin mustache. He has small, calculating gray eyes. When in his shop, he dresses in dark-colored clothes of the expected quality for a successful local merchant -- a bit too

successful considering the small request for sages and alchemists in the area. When outside the village gathering ingredients, he wears more practical clothing.

### Background

Ferensis spent his first few years in an orphanage in the gnomish town of Mayvin. He was soon noticed by the gnome alchemist Finoom for his keen intellect and interest about knowledge and was brought to work in the gnome's shop while still a kid, in return for food and a place to stay in the shop. Through his teen years, he learned much from his mentor and employer although, to his frustration, Finoom forbade him from pursuing the arcane arts. While his life was not one of luxury or leisure he was not treated harshly by his guardian.

One day he overheard his employer arguing with a customer who wanted to buy poisonous ingredients, driving the man away, and threatening to inform the authorities. Ferensis met with the man behind Finoom's back and arranged to create and provide a quantity of poison during the night and in quantities that Finoom wouldn't notice. The man and his friends addressed Ferensis again with similar requests every few weeks for some time.

The reputation and skill of the young poisoner grew steadily until one night that Finoom found Ferensis working on a poison. The gnome was aghast that this ward was stealing his ingredients behind his back and moreso that he was providing poison to shady characters for nefarious purposes.

The argument that followed was a short one; Ferensis killed the gnome alchemist that had taken him in, trained and fed him for a decade, suspecting Finoom would turn him in or kick him out. In the next few days, Ferensis claimed that Finoom was ill,

while he treated the corpse to hide the marks of the attack. When he was satisfied, he claimed Finoom succumbed to his illness. His duplicity worked and no investigation was carried out.

Yet, the shop was not his. The apothecary and lab passed to Finoom's close kin. While Ferensis was considering his future, a knock came at the door, deep in the night. Ferensis was approached by the Kargat, who offered him tutorship in both alchemy and magic in exchange for his services, with a guarantee that his crimes will not be prosecuted. He was being watched since he left the apothecary and the careful, emotionless, and well-disguised murder of his guardian was deemed worthy.

Joining the organization, at first Ferensis was sent to Il Aluk to study and also keep an eye on the intellectual circles there. A few years later, as a budding wizard, he was sent to Corvia with similar assignment, where he spent about a decade. Finally, about a year before the Requiem, Ferensis was transferred to the Ermenus cell in order to replace a fallen wizard of the Kargat, setting up his shop in a remote small village near the Dnar River. While it doesn't occur often, Ferensis has taken part in attacks on undead and other horrors the cell deals with, and he's often present when the cell attacks or arrests people that have trusted him.

## Current sketch

Ferensis is an evil man with few loyalties who hides behind the mask of an unassuming, somewhat aloof, and eccentric scientist and intellectual. He is emotionally unable to form sincere emotional relations with other people, like friendship or romance, although he fakes such feelings to gain the trust of a few select people that interest him or the organization. Ferensis actually takes pleasure betraying those that

trust him and confide in him, even though he knows fully well the fate that awaits them once he turns them over to the Kargat.

He is one of very few scholars in the area, so passing adventurers that want to consult someone are usually pointed towards him, which allows him to keep an eye on such activities. He also keeps correspondence with many other budding scholars, priests, and gentlemen in the area. He doesn't admit that he's a wizard, to avoid drawing attention, but a few suspect that the knowledgeable alchemist dabbles in the arcane. Ferensis doesn't bother to quell these rumors but if asked, he denies them. When he expects trouble or has to delve far in the wilderness for components, he may hire a bodyguard or guide. A couple of those know he's a wizard, having witnessed his spells, but they respect his privacy.

His loyalty to the Kargat is based on the power of the organization, the wealth and knowledge he gains within the monstrous police, and the perverse pleasure he takes betraying people who trusted him to monsters.

Azalin, Beryl Silvertress, and Ermenus are all aware of his lack of loyalty, and especially his knack to betray those that trust him. Ermenus has a habit of dropping by the wizard unannounced quite often and giving him books or ingredients that Ferensis *was thinking* of buying, keeping him informed that his very thoughts are monitored. Ferensis is unaware that Dermont is a doppelganger, who occasionally spies on him, and that he is the source of this subtle intimidation. Ferensis doesn't chafe under this scrutiny, he considers it expected and sensible.

Unbeknownst to Ferensis, Azalin has already contacted Beryl Silvertress about his "promotion". Once another capable wizard is recruited in the area, Ferensis is to



contract a magical, untreatable, fatal disease, at which point he will be offered undeath as the only way to escape oblivion. Azalin's power over undead will seal Ferensis's loyalty forever.

## Goals

Ferensis is interested in increasing his magical power and his knowledge of alchemy. While he's not a frivolous spender, he is interested in gold to be able to buy books, ingredients, and also be able to enjoy expensive beverages, perfumes, and food, or the discreet touch of courtesans. (All these indulgences he keeps hidden so as not to draw suspicion.).

## Lair

Ferensis lives in a modest-sized building in a small village. Part of the house serves as the shop, another as his living quarters, and the laboratory and many of his books are in the basement. The door leading to the basement is arcane locked, as is the chest that contains his most precious items, like expensive wine, perfumes, or potions and the occasional magic item he provides to the Kargat. The chest is also trapped.

From his living quarters, Ferensis seems to be doing somewhat better than expected. While nothing is too obviously out of place, his house is a bit too large and his living quarters are furnished with more expensive furniture and art than one would expect.

## Ferensis

*Medium humanoid, chaotic evil*

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**Armor Class** 14 (mage armor)

**Hit Points** 38 (7d8 + 7)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 10 (+0) **Dex** 13 (+1) **Con** 12 (+1)

**Int** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 13 (+1)

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**Saving Throws** Intelligence + 5, charisma + 2

**Skills** Deception + 3, insight + 3, knowledge (arcana) + 5, knowledge (history) + 5, knowledge (religion) + 5 persuasion + 3, alchemist tools + 4

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Darkonese, Vaasi, Draconic, Gnome

**Challenge** 3 (700 xp).

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**Practiced alchemist.** Ferensis creates poisons and magical common and uncommon potions at half the normal time required.

**Spellcasting:** Ferensis is a 6th lvl spellcaster. He has + 5 to attack with spells and the DC for his spell is 13. Usually he has the following wizard spells prepared.

**cantrips** (at will): minor illusion, light, mage hand, poison spray

**1st lvl** (3/4 slots): shield, mage armor\*

**2nd lvl** (4 slots): arcane lock, blur, blindness, Melf's acid arrow

**3rd lvl** (3 slots): dispel magic, psi-shock, stinking cloud

\* spell already active

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## Actions

**Poison spray.** Magical ranged attack: range 10 ft., one target. Saving throw constitution DC 13. Failure: 13 (2d12) poison damage.

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## Equipment

Ermenus cell mask, Ermenus cell ring, potion of healing, potion of invisibility, poison, hellfire, scroll of invisible climb.



## Confronting Ferensis

If Ferensis is attacked, he will resort to magic immediately, without caring to preserve the thin facade that he's not a wizard. He will use his shield spell to avoid hits and will prefer to escape, knowing he can't hold up in a prolonged fight. When paired with other Kargat members, or when hiring a bodyguard, he will stay away from the melee and use his spells from a distance. Given time to prepare, he may choose different spells for the occasion. His spellbook contains more spells than listed as determined by the DM.

Characters may suspect something is amiss with the local scholar since he seems to be living beyond his expected means. A few mercenaries in the area have worked with him and know he's a spellcaster. Those that have spent enough time with him may have noticed that in addition to the secretiveness typical of Darkonese wizards, he also seemed to lack empathy.

## Monsters working together

The Ermenus cell members, as described above, each have individual goals and priorities and different reasons for being loyal to the organization. Ermenus spends much of his time watching and directing his subordinates to make sure everything works efficiently. Co-existence for so many evil and powerful creatures is difficult at best. It is Ermenus' power, the fear of the dwarven vampiress Beryl Silvertress, as well as mutual interest that binds the cell together.

Several members of the cell have specific vulnerabilities or issues that make their exposure possible and the cell is aware of the fact. Theoretically, the wereboar Urf could lose control the wrong moment,

someone might hear the muffled screams and break into Rebvena's wagon while she's in spider form killing a victim, or a myriad other problems might expose agents of the cell. Beyond exposure to the populace, which can be dealt with, there is always the danger an exposed member will be spied on and lead enemies to the rest.

To prevent exposure, the Kargat meet at their headquarters only rarely, preferring to meet at pre-arranged safe-houses. They communicate through coded messages and drop-points and act with a great degree of autonomy. Ermenus informs cell members of long term missions and goals and they seek each other for help only when necessary. An attack on the Kargat would unite them swiftly, though, and their response would be brutal. Ermenus doesn't mind sacrificing 100 people to avenge a single cell member, even one that he may personally not like or consider a liability.

## Bars on the prison door

Every member of the Cell has a role to play in the cell. Ferensis is vital for providing arcane magic and corresponds with local scholars. Urf, Caleb, and Enthor provide muscle directly and the Tooth-slayer mercenaries or the bandits of Charred Raiders provide armed cannon fodder. Enthor is an excellent and skilled tracker and Urf's mercenaries work in the crucial for the crown mines and budding settlements. Sir Opeir, a high level law enforcer for much of the area the cell covers, operates in the government and noble circles even outside of the baron he serves. Rebvena has connections in the lower class of society and monitors unrest there. Dermont as a doppelganger is able to infiltrate everywhere and the Charred Raiders take the blame or divert attention as needed.

In the center of this intricate web sits Ermenus himself. Through false promises of

eternal youth, the vampire has eyes and ears where the other members do not. He has access to the trade guilds, crafters, and the criminals that operate inside civilization, unlike the bandits that prey outside of it. The Ermenus cell is the only organized crime ring in the area, and Ermenus its crime lord. Through intimidation, magic, or bribes, his cell is the de facto power in the area, able to exert influence nearly everywhere, under the tolerance and protection of Azalin Rex.

If the cell is lacking somewhere, it is access to the church, whether it is Eternal Order or Ezra. With the loss of a clergy working for the Kargat, the cell hasn't managed to extend much influence there and lacks divine magic. Another part that is virtually impenetrable by the Kargat are the dwarven settlements in the Mountains of Misery. The small isolated communities and clans are close knit and Ermenus doesn't see any reason to make the effort required to gain influence with a few dozen dwarves that rarely wander far from their clan.

## Dealings with other monsters

The monsters of the Kargat are not the only inhuman creatures in the area. The Kargat know of the Dark Delves and have cordial relations with them and know how to contact them. As a token of respect, they occasionally provide the dragon Ebb with gold or captives for food. They treat the other Dark Delves as allies even though the agenda of this organization is very different than serving Azalin's interests. With their lack of divine spellcasters, occasionally the Kargat turn to the Dark Delves for support. The unspoken alliance with the Dark Delves is tenuous though; several times in the past, the Kargat have hunted down members of that society when they were assumed to be a threat or conspired with enemies, knowingly or not.

The Unholy Order of the Grave is the main target of the Ermenus cell as per standing orders from Beryl Silvertress. Anyone suspected for dealing with them is investigated; anyone suspected to be connected with them is brought in and interrogated. Those working for the Unholy Order of the Grave, knowingly or not, are mercilessly hunted down. Even members of the Kargat that are suspected to be compromised are investigated and occasionally executed. Ermenus will not risk bringing the wrath of the unpredictable Corvia Faction leader on his cell.

Ermenus knows of a Kargat cell that operates in the North, around Delagia, and could call them for support and he knows Beryl Silvertress in Corvia and how to contact her if necessary. Similarly, a Kargat cell that operates on the Mountains of Misery and Tempe Falls has ways to contact the Ermenus cell for help. Aside from Ermenus, the rest of his cell do not know of anyone outside their cell, and in the few cases that they are called to work with other Kargat, both sides are instructed to keep their identities secret behind masks, and avoid questions.

The Kargat may eliminate other monsters, undead, or supernatural threats, but they only do so if the presence of these creatures is perceived as too bothersome or disruptive (or if those enemies are assumed to have amassed enough gold). Usually, they are content to let local heroes deal with them. Greater priority is given to enemies that can exert control than to simple, lone predators.

## Tools of the Trade

The Kargat of the Ermenus cell have various means at their disposal. Individual members carry enchanted items or poisons. Many useful items and bags of coins (usually containing 150-250 gold pieces) are



located in the unofficial head-quarters of the Kargat, in the cave where they occasionally gather. Others are located in hidden safe-houses spread through the area so that they can access them in a hurry.

Both Ermenus and Ferensis know how to prepare a variety of poisons and potions as needed but have the power to create only common and uncommon magical potions.

## Mask of Ermenus cell

*Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement by a creature inside the cell headquarters)*

This black linen mask is a band of cloth with an opening for the eyes, that when worn covers the upper part of a person's face. An attuned creature wearing the mask has advantage on dexterity (stealth) checks made at night.

## Ring of Ermenus cell

*Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement by a creature inside the cell headquarters)*

This simple brass ring grows warm when Ermenus requires a meeting with the creature wearing the ring. The ring Ermenus has is slightly different. It is adorned with three dark gems. It grows warm when a cell member requires a meeting and one of the gems becomes lighter in color. Each gem corresponds to one of the other three rings. Currently, Urf, Rebvena, and Ferensis have a ring. The Kargat pass the rings among themselves freely when needed.

Twice per day, a creature attuned to the ring can spend a bonus action to enchant a weapon in his or her possession. For 10 minutes, the chosen weapon is treated as a magical weapon in order to overcome resistance or immunity to non-magical weapons that some enemies of the cell possess.

## Coating of poison

*Alchemical item*

This non-magical ointment is a dangerous poison applied to weapons before combat to give the members of the cell a deadly edge. A creature wounded by a slashing or piercing weapon treated with this ointment must make a DC 14 constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 4d6 poison damage and it's poisoned for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each turn, ending the poisoned condition on a success. A creature dropped to 0 hp by this poison doesn't die; it remains at 1 hp but is paralyzed for 2d4 minutes.

The poison is quickly rendered ineffective when exposed to air. A coating of poison is good for about 5 minutes or until damage is dealt by the poisoned weapon.

To apply the coating easily, a woolen cloth is covered in this poison to absorb it and then kept in an airtight pouch or container. Each such cloth can be used twice. Such cloth costs 600 gold pieces but since the poison is rarely found for sale, the price may be significantly higher, and its sales are usually monitored by the Kargat and their agents.

## Hellfire

*Alchemical item*

This substance is a powerful variation of alchemical fire, treated with Caleb the Baker's blood and other components. It is kept in small ceramic sealed jars that break on impact. As an action, a creature can make a ranged attack with such a jar (range 30/60). On a hit, the target takes 2d6 fire damage at the start of each of his or her turns. A creature can end this damage by using its action to make a DC 12 dexterity check to extinguish the flames. Water doesn't put out the source of this fire,

although items that caught fire by contact with hellfire can be put out with water.

Since this item requires a drop of Caleb's blood, it is not for sale. If Caleb the Baker dies or leaves, the Kargat would lose access to this item when their remaining supply is used up.

## Indulgence

*Potion, uncommon*

This insidious magical poison, utilizing the enamoring, confusing powers of a vampire, reduces the imbiber's inhibitions towards indulging his or her vices and urges, unless a DC 14 wisdom saving throw is made to resist the magic. The effects of the poison persist for 1d4+1 hours. During that time, the imbiber finds it difficult to resist his or her urges and pursues his secret, darkest desires. A man that would drink a cup of wine could drink until he passed out. A person slighted or offended in the past could seek out and kill those he or she believes responsible. A married woman that used to merely admire a neighbor's appearance could make advances toward him, even in front of her husband or kids.

The alignment of the affected creature moves one step towards chaotic and one step towards evil. For example, a lawful neutral character would act as neutral evil. To resist indulging in an action that strays from the new alignment or for which the character knows there will be bad consequences, the character must make a DC 12 wisdom save. For very severe deviations or consequences, this save can be made with advantage.

This magical poison has a slight red hue, a bitter taste, and feels cold. It can be used in a drink but to take effect the target must drink all of it. The Kargat prefer to use this poison in red wine to mask the color and the taste. They use it to disgrace targets, to create shifts and mistrust or sow

confusion and to break up alliances and groups. Rebvena also uses it to draw persons who initially resist her charms to her wagon.

## Potion of poison

*Potion, uncommon*

This magical concoction is odorless, colorless and tasteless. However, it is actually poison masked by illusion magic. 3d6 minutes after a creature consumes it, the poison activates. It takes 2d10 poison damage, and it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. At the start of each of its turns while the creature is poisoned, it takes 2d6 poison damage. At the end of each of the creature's turns, it can repeat the saving throw. On a successful save, the effects of the poison end. Diluting the poison in a cup of water or wine or a plate of food doesn't alter its effects. Diluting it further (in a wine pitcher or large beer cup), halves the damage dealt and reduces the DC to 12.

## Potion of Shapehold

*Potion, uncommon*

When a creature drinks this muddy green, thick potion, it benefits from advantage on saves to keep its form for the next 8 hours. While the potion is mainly used by Urf to resist his curse, any creature drinking it would benefit from advantage to saves against transformation (like from a polymorph spell).

The potion is not without side-effects. The creature drinking it is poisoned for 10 minutes and its hit point maximum is reduced by 2d6 hp until the next long rest. If a creature wants, it can make a constitution save (DC 13) to resist the potion, both the benefits and the side-effects. Habitual use of this potion has adverse long-term effects on one's health.



## New spells

Ferensis has access to the following spells in his spellbook. Warlocks and sorcerers could also have access to the Psi-sock spell in their spell-list if they get their hands on it, but not to the invisible climb spell

### Psi-shock:

*3rd-level enchantment*

**Casting time:** 1 action

**Range:** 60' feet

**Components:** V,S

**Duration:** instantaneous

You send psychic magic to overwhelm a living creature's mind functions. The target must make an intelligence saving throw. If the creature fails the save, it suffers 6d8 psychic damage and becomes dazed, having disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn. If the creature succeeds on the saving throw, it takes half as much damage and doesn't suffer disadvantage.

Non-living creatures and objects are immune to this spell. Aberrations and vermin have advantage on the intelligence save.

**At higher levels:** The damage of the spell increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 3rd.

### Invisible climb:

*3rd-level illusion*

**Casting time:** 1 action

**Range:** Touch

**Components:** V,S,M (an eyelash encased in gum arabic, a drop of bitumen and a spider)

**Duration:** concentration, up to 1 hour

This spell combines the spells spider climb and invisibility in one casting,

sacrificing a higher spell slot in order to have both spells active and cast by a single spell.

Until the spell ends, one willing creature you touch becomes invisible and gains the ability to move up, down, and across vertical surfaces and upside down along ceilings, while leaving its hands free. The target also gains a climbing speed equal to its walking speed. Anything the target is wearing or carrying is invisible as long as it is on the target's person. The target loses its invisibility if it makes an attack or casts a spell.

## Faceless followers

Aside from the members of the cell, the Kargat utilizes several other people with or without their knowledge. None of these hapless souls realize how expendable their lives are to their masters.

### Ermenus cultist

Ermenus keeps a few individuals (about 4-5) in his employ, ensuring their loyalty to him by means of a vile concoction, similar to the one Lady Kazandra uses for the Kargatane. This potion slows aging by half and subtly enhances the imbiber's beauty for a length of time (usually 6 months to a couple of years). However, it also subtly influences the mind of the person drinking it to be loyal to Ermenus.

Being given a taste of immortality and enhanced physical appearance, and influenced by the mind-affecting properties of the potion, these cultists are remarkably loyal to their enlightened master.

Ermenus often seeks innkeepers, courtesans, smugglers, traveling merchants, influential trade guild members, and similar well connected people to put under his power. Many of these have been in his employ, aspiring for the gift he can give

them, for some time and have received some rudimentary training or picked up a few tricks during the years.

## Ermenus agent

*Medium humanoid, lawful or neutral evil*

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**Armor Class** 13 (leather armor)

**Hit Points** 19 (3d8 + 6)

**Speed** 25 ft.

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**Str** 13 (+1) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Con** 14 (+2)

**Int** 13 (+1) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+1)

---

**Saving Throws** Wisdom +3

**Skills** Deception +3, insight +3, investigation +3, perception +3, persuasion +3

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Darkonese + one language (usually Vaasi, Falkovnian or dwarven)

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 xp)

---

**Conditioned.** Influenced by the concoction brewed by Ermenus, these cultists are remarkably loyal to the vampire. They have advantage to saving throws to resist compulsions that would set them against Ermenus' orders and interests.

**Cunning action (1/short rest).** An agent can make a bonus action. This action can be used only to take the dash, disengage or hide action. Unlike the rogue trait, once used, the agent has to take a short rest to use it again.

**Enhanced beauty.** The agent is physically attractive. He or she doubles the proficiency bonus for charisma (persuasion and deception) checks based on his or her appearance, to a total of +5.

**Slower aging.** The agent ages at a reduced rate, about 50% slower than normal for his or her race. The change is subtle enough that it would go unnoticed for years.

**Sneak attack (1/turn).** The agent deals an extra 3 (1d6) damage when he or she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the agent that isn't incapacitated and the agent doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

---

### Actions

**Multiattack.** The agent can make one short sword and one dagger attack.

**Call of the blood (1/day).** The agent gains 10 temporary hit points for 1 minute. At the end of this time, he or she suffers nausea that causes disadvantage to attack rolls and ability checks for 1 minute.

**Short sword.** Melee weapon attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Dagger.** Melee weapon attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

---

### Reactions

**Parry.** The agent adds 2 AC against a melee attack that would hit him or her. To do so, the agent should be able to see the attacker and yield two weapons.

## Tooth-slayers

The tooth-slayer mercenary band members are hardened by several fights and rigorous training. While the stats provided here don't cover all members, they are representative of the bulk of the



mercenary force. Usually, they carry a glaive and wear scale armor. For every 2 or 3 tooth-slayers encountered, one will carry a crossbow. They usually patrol in groups of 3 to 6, accompanied by a veteran.

## Tooth-slayer

*Medium humanoid (human or caliban),  
any neutral or evil*

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**Armor Class** 15 (scale armor)  
**Hit Points** 16 (3d8 + 3)  
**Speed** 30 ft.

---

**Str** 14 (+2) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Con** 13 (+1)  
**Int** 10 (+0) **Wis** 10 (+0) **Cha** 9 (-1)

---

**Saving Throws** strength +4  
**Skills** Perception +2  
**Senses** passive Perception 12  
**Languages** Darkonese  
**Challenge** 1/4 (50 xp)

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**Training against undead (1/short rest).** A tooth-slayer that misses a melee attack against an undead of the following types: ghoul, skeleton, wight, zombie or similar undead, can reroll the attack roll and keep the best roll.

---

### Actions

**Glaive.** Melee weapon attack: +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d10+2) slashing damage.

**Glaive's butt.** Melee weapon attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6+2) bludgeoning damage.

**Crossbow.** Melee ranged attack: +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage.

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### Reactions

**Parry.** The tooth-slayer adds 2 AC against a melee attack that would hit him or her. To do so, the mercenary should be able to see the attacker and yield a heavy, two-handed weapon.

## Tooth-slayer veteran

*Medium humanoid (human or caliban),  
any neutral or evil*

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**Armor Class** 17 (splint armor)  
**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 + 10)  
**Speed** 25 ft.

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**Str** 16 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Con** 14 (+2)  
**Int** 10 (+0) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+0)

---

**Saving Throws** strength +5, wisdom +3  
**Skills** Athletics +5, perception +3, intimidation +2  
**Senses** passive Perception 13  
**Languages** Darkonese  
**Challenge** 1 (200 xp)

---

**Action surge (1/short rest).** On his turn, the veteran can use one extra action and one extra bonus action.

**Training against undead (1/short rest).** A tooth-slayer veteran that misses a melee attack against an undead of the following types: ghoul, skeleton, wight, zombie or similar undead, can reroll the attack roll and keep the best roll.

---

### Actions

**Glaive.** Melee weapon attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d10+3) slashing damage.

**Glaive's butt.** Melee weapon attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6+3) bludgeoning damage.

**Crossbow.** Melee ranged attack: +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage.

---

### Reactions

**Parry.** The tooth-slayer veteran adds 2 AC against a melee attack that would hit him or her. To do so, the mercenary should be able to see the attacker and yield a heavy, two-handed weapon.

## Parting words

The Ermenus Kargat cell is well connected, powerful and closely knit. They can work as antagonists for the player characters or, hiding behind agents, they may use them to deal with threats in the area. Quite possibly, the Kargat may learn of powerful adventurers working in the area, watch them and utilize them through proxies until the characters become too dangerous, or kill a member of the Kargat.

The PCs may deal with one agent, eliminating a monster like Rebvena, a psychopath like Caleb or a bandit leader like Dermont, thinking that they have brought a little peace in the area, only to find themselves in the sights of very powerful, cunning, and determined adversaries. If the PCs fight back and beat the Kargat badly at their own game, more Kargat agents would reinforce them perhaps gaining the enmity of the whole Corvia faction and their unpredictable, powerful leader, the dwarven vampiress Beryl Silvertress.

However, the rest of the Kargat are not as interested at revenge as the cell would be; they won't keep mounting losses at a fight they can't win. Beryl Silvertress or perhaps even Azalin himself may order retribution strikes to cease if the PCs show too much aptitude at exterminating agents that go against them. The presence of the

Unholy Order of the Grave would also temporarily put an end at such a cycle of violence at any point, as the Kargat would focus on them instead, even offering pardon or temporary truce to the PCs if they help.



# RELENTLESS

By Nathan "Dmitri Stanislaus" Okerlund

The name stood out in gold letters against the black wood of the prow, but no seaman needed such a notice to know what ship it was making anchor in Mordentshire-harbor, cutting through the waves with eerie grace while the fog rolled in from the sea behind it to take the harbor and town in its cold embrace. No seaman could mistake those clean, sharp lines, if he had seen them even once; and no man, woman, or child of human sensibilities could fail to feel the darkness that clung to every spar and shroud.

With perfect economy of motion the sails were reefed and the anchor put out, and the brigantine came to rest, more menacing in its stillness than it had been in motion. A whistle, and the longboat was put out and glided across the harbor with its oars rising and falling in unison. The men in it looked ordinary enough, but no-one moved to speak to them as they disembarked, and the crowds of the Mordentshire market-day made way for them as if they were so many hangmen. Many a long look was cast after them, and not a few signs against witchcraft made behind their backs.

Young James Blackmore was one of those who looked longest. He had had the thought of this ship and those men in his mind these last seven months, since Rosaline Teach's father had sworn no man—meaning James—who could not house his daughter beneath a roof of his own would be allowed to call on her, much less ask for her hand in marriage. There

were many ways an enterprising young man could get money enough to put Jasper Teach in a more friendly frame of mind, but all of them involved hard labor (which was no worry to James; his worst enemy, if he had had any, would not have called him slothful) and time. Two of his fellow-suitors were captains with houses of their own already, and he could not hope for that amount of wealth in less than a decade by any ordinary course of action. Which left the extraordinary. And whatever else might be said of Peter van Riese, he paid his men a princely wage.

There was that other business, of course. It would be just as well to leave now, lie low for a while, so that Annabella would understand the situation. He hadn't been the only young man to have enjoyed her company in these last three months, whatever she might say, and if she were in an interesting condition she wouldn't have him there to pin it on. That would ruin his chances with Rosaline, even if the other didn't. But James didn't like to think of that much; didn't like to think of Annabella much, either, now that things stood as they did.

It was with that thought uppermost that James made the decision. Hurrying after the crewmen, he tapped the last on the shoulder and muttered, "Ah, excuse me..."

The sailor turned and looked at him, his face hard. "I'm looking for a place," he said, quickly. "A berth. If the captain will have me. D'you know if I might...?" The sailor

gave him an appraising look—slightly skeptical, slightly pitying—and then whistled. His mates turned back briefly, their faces oddly pale in the dimming light (the fog was getting thicker, and quite quickly). “Boy wants to see the captain,” the sailor said.

At this all five of them gave James the same look their fellow had, and then the tallest shrugged. “We’ll see you aboard,” he said, and turned away again.

The sailor sighed and shrugged. He was curiously indeterminate in his looks—brown hair, brown eyes, ordinary height, neither fat nor thin, neither old nor young, dressed much as any sailor might be for a trip ashore—but there was a curious gravity to him, a heaviness which seemed more the product of having lost any quality of levity or good nature than of natural dignity. “Right, then, you’re with me,” he said.

It was the only thing he said. They went back to the longboat in silence, rowed out to the ship, also in silence, and then James was aboard and looking about in awe. The fog had now obscured most of the town, and the afternoon sunlight had given way to a gloom rather like that of early evening, but with a leaden quality all its own. The crew seemed rather cast down by it; they toiled with astonishing fluidity, but in near-silence, every man attentive to his work and nothing else.

“Er...where do I go?” James asked. The sailor pointed with his chin toward the stern, then made his way forward, leaving James alone on the deck. Befuddled and a little frightened, James looked after him and then toward the door leading, as he must suppose, to the captain’s cabin. Swallowing his questions and his fear, James made his way aft; the crewmen he passed glanced at him, but no-one addressed him. It was the hardest thing he had ever done to force his

hand to rise and knock at the captain’s door.

“Come in,” a deep, brusque voice commanded. Opening the door, James had a confused impression of charts, maps, and books, meticulously organized but still overflowing their bounds, in a room spacious and airy by the standards of the sea; but such things could hardly compete with their master for attention. Captain van Riese was a tall man—tall enough that his cap brushed the ceiling—and wide-shouldered, with shoulder-length silver hair falling in waves over his coat collar and a neatly trimmed beard of the same color. He would have been a strikingly handsome man even if not for his eyes; eyes so pale a blue they were all but white, and a gaze that went through a man like a musket ball through a sheet of paper.

“Well? Come in, lad, and shut the door,” Van Riese commanded, and James found himself obeying almost without noticing what he was doing. “You have business with me?”

“Y-yes, captain. I-I hope...that is, I heard...that you are taking sailors.”

“Oh. Come to sign on, have you?” The captain gave James a few moments of intense scrutiny, and then said, “You’ve heard the stories, of course? That it’s a ghost ship, and that I’m the Devil himself, ferrying men to Hell—all of that tittle-tattle.”

It did not seem quite safe to deny it; James nodded, reluctantly.

“Speak up, lad, I asked you a question.”

“Yes, captain, I’ve heard...stories like that.”

Van Riese nodded and looked down again at the rutter before him, then snapped it shut and put it aside. “And if I told you all those stories were true?” he said, turning the full force of his uncanny gaze on the young man.



This was not at all what James had expected; paralyzed, he finally forced a few words from his lips. "Then, uh, captain, sir...I would believe you?"

Van Riese threw back his head and laughed—so open a sound that James began to wonder if the weird, oppressive feeling which had dogged him since seeing the black hull of the Relentless in the harbor was only a product of suggestion and an overactive imagination. Relaxing, he allowed himself a shamefaced grin.

"Well, lad...what's your name?"

"James, sir. James Blackmore."

"Well, Mr. Blackmore, your candor does you credit, at least. I scorn to dissemble, Mr. Blackmore. The Relentless is an uncanny ship, and I am a hard master. Hard, but I like to think fair. I suppose

granted, rubies the size of your thumb, voyages among strange lands?"

"Er...yes, sir?"

"Well, as it happens, there's some truth to those as well." The captain's pale eyes caught the lantern light for just a moment as he turned to the window, burning redly in his pale face. "Name a heart's desire, Mr. Blackmore, when you sign with me, and you'll get it. By hook or by crook. I don't say it's any of my doing; all I promise is hard labor, far shores, and a fair wage. But those who ship with me find they get what they set out to find. Not all of them want it any longer when they get it, but that's no doing of mine."

James nodded, or thought he did; despite its size, and its large windows, there was something oppressive about the atmosphere in the room, and he felt



you've also heard the stories of wishes

curiously light-headed—almost feverish.

Perhaps it was the fog, which was now so thick that the ship's lanterns had been lit, despite it being only mid-afternoon.

"I...understand, captain," he got out. "What, ah...how much...is the wage, sir?"

"One broad gold coin per day for an able-bodied seaman, lad, finest Dementlieuse solars on the barrelhead."

Gold! At those wages six months would see him fairly started, and a year...

"I'll take it, sir."

Van Riese smiled crookedly. "Good lad." Reaching to a stack of papers at the right of his desk, he riffled through it and then fetched one out. "Make your mark there, then, and come aboard this evening with whatever you'll need. I expect we'll sail with the tide."

James took up the goosefeather pen offered him and was about to inform van Riese that he could write his name, like any good Mordentishman, thanks very much, but as he set pen to paper he saw that his name was already written there, in a bold flowing hand not his own.

Looking up, he saw van Riese staring at him, the half-smile still on his lips. "Oh, yes, Master James Blackmore," van Riese said quietly. "I knew. We put in especially for you. It took us a bit out of our way, but I think it's always worthwhile when it's a matter of getting a new hand aboard."

James felt much as he had when the boom of his father's fishing sloop had cracked his head and put him over the side in a squall five years ago; the same sensation of having lost, somehow, the power to act, and yet remaining conscious of one's actions. The action of setting his mark by the name already written seemed like something in a story, or in a dream in which he was someone else, some third party who was now choosing, or had already chosen, this fate on behalf of James Blackmore.

And then the thing was done, and he set down the pen and wondered what, exactly, was the heart's desire he would receive for his indenture. It had seemed so clear just that afternoon, but somehow it had fled. He could no longer quite recall the reasons, and they no longer mattered.

"Come hell or high water," van Riese whispered, as if reading his thoughts, "you're one of mine, now."



# A TOUR OF WESTERN WATERS

## **The Fraternity of Shadow's Survey of** the Sea of Sorrows

By Nathan "Dmitri Stanislaus" Okerlund  
Art by Talon Dunning with thanks to Brothersale

### Introduction

Cold as sorrow, grey as death, trackless as the Mists themselves, and concealing almost as many mysteries; surely nothing represents a Nature inimical to man so clearly as the sea. Even in these times when the sea-roads are well-traveled by ships plying their trade, and a voyage from Port-a-Lucine to Paridon offers no more hazard than an overland trip to Hazlan, one wonders at the audacity of the sailors who put their trust in log, lead, and lookout and voyage into the boundless deep. How much more then should we marvel at the daring of those first Mordentish sailors who left the land behind and sailed into the unknown?

### Landscape

The real landscape of the Sea of Sorrows—that is, its islands—will be discussed each in its own place. The sea itself is rather more shallow than the Nocturnal Sea, with 50 fathoms of line commonly able to reach the bottom; it is also colder than the its eastern counterpart, and has, if anything, worse weather. There is perhaps six feet of difference between high and low tide in most places along its

coasts. Estimates as to the size of the Sea of Sorrows vary so widely as to make reporting such measurements all but meaningless; the distance from Port-a-Lucine to East Riding is given in otherwise generally comparable maps as anything between ten and three hundred miles. Most mapmakers use a scale, which would give a distance of perhaps sixty miles north to south and forty east to west, but the traveler is warned that this is no more than a convenience for the cartographer.

### Flora

Kelp beds line the coast of the Sea of Sorrows from Mordentshire Bay northward and are especially dense along the more rocky portions of the Lamordian and Darkonian coasts. The occasional large mat of sargasso weed or strand of sea-mire (presumably drawn from Saragoss) will occasionally be found in the southwestern parts of the sea, and sea moss is abundant in the waters around Markovia, as are corals, whose calcified remains form a significant obstacle to navigation around that island. Much rarer, and much more valuable, are such plants as gillweed (virtually indistinguishable from sargasso in appearance, but capable of conferring the

ability to breathe water on air-breathing creatures) and red tears (bright red algae which produce hallucinations when ingested in sufficient quantity; in Blaustein this plant is consumed recreationally and sometimes used as an anesthetic).

## Fauna

The Sea of Sorrows is a rich resource, particularly to the folk of Mordentshire, for its abundant fishing. Flatfish such as halibut, flounder and sole are caught in great quantities and eaten fresh or salted; herring, shad, sardines and alewives feed the fishermen themselves, while the more wealthy enjoy such delicacies as tuna, salmon, and swordfish. Crabs and lobsters are also trapped along the shores, and abalone and other shellfish are also abundant, particularly along the coast of Lamordia. (The rare and striking ghost crab, with the mark of a skull in white on its slate-grey shell, is never eaten because of the superstition that it represents wicked or greedy fishermen lost at sea.) Squid are very common north of Markovia, and large and active octopuses are actually dangerous to incautious abalone divers. Their much more intelligent and ferocious cousin the shadow kraken is known to haunt the reefs south of Markovia, as well as appearing frequently in other waters. A colony of the strange fish-octopuses known as "morkoth" can be found in some abundance just north of Blaustein; unlike the Nocturnal Sea I have found no evidence of any previously unsuspected great undersea nation, but stories of intelligent and very dangerous creatures such as the "sea spawn master" and reavers are common and well-attested.

**Wildlife :** CR ½ porpoise, seal CR 1 manta ray, Medium shark, octopus, Medium sea snake squid, stingray CR 2 Large shark

## Useful Flora

**Gillweed:** Gillweed is almost exactly similar to Sargasso weed, save for a slight purple tinge to the leaves and stalks (Knowledge (nature) DC 25 to identify correctly). Ingesting four ounces of fresh gillweed confers water breathing as a potion of water breathing (CL 5). Gillweed cannot be cultivated in captivity and loses its potency within five minutes of being removed from sea water (it can, however, be kept for up to 24 hours in a vessel filled with sea water). Certain Blaustein pirate captains claim to know of the location of great mats of gillweed, but the difficulties in maintaining its potency for long periods of time means that it is not presently a valuable sale good.

**Red Tears:** These red algae are usually strained from sea water with a handkerchief and suspended in alcohol for ingestion. Ingesting this mix produces mild hallucinations and has an anesthetic effect. It is a popular drug of abuse in Blaustein, but is not commonly used elsewhere in the Core; its taste is unpleasant and the hallucinations it produces are often unpleasant as well. Thankfully, it is not in itself addictive. It does have a certain value for ships' surgeons called upon to perform emergency amputations, bone-settings, and so forth. Primary damage 1d2 Wisdom and anesthesia, secondary damage 1d2 Wisdom and hallucinations (Save DC 18).

CR 4 Huge shark CR 5 whale (orca) CR 6 whale (baleen) CR 7 whale (cachalot) CR 8 giant octopus CR 9 giant squid

**Monstrous :** CR ½ sea spawn (spawn) (DoD), sea zombie CR 1 lacedon (MMI) CR



2 sahuagin (MMI) CR 3 bowlyn (DoD) CR 4 reaver (DoD) sea hag (MMI) CR 5 morkoth (MMII), sea spawn (master) (DoD), aquatic remnant CR 6 aquatic ooze, (FF), jolly roger (DoD), kopru (MMII), reekmurk (FF) CR 7 chuul (MMI) CR 9 caller from the deeps (SW), dire shark (MMI), ice golem (FB) CR 12 kraken (MMI)

## History

Mordentish records declare that the coast of their country once abutted the Mists almost directly, with perhaps a mile of water between the shore and the Mists. In January of the year 630 the Mists retreated, revealing a much larger sea whose cold grey waters impressed them as the very epitome of symbolic sorrow—"an ocean of tears", in the words of one chronicler. Almost immediately it came to be known as the Sea of Sorrows. Mordent had, of course, no ocean-going vessels—nor did any other domain at that time—but nevertheless records exist of one ship adapted to such voyages that was seemingly already plying those waters. The infamous [i]Relentless[/i] made its first appearance in Mordentshire-harbor in that same year; its captain, Pieter van Riese, was described then, as he is now, as a man in early middle age prematurely grey, above the common height, and of commanding presence. The discovery (or placement) of such inhabited islands as have since been discovered is documented in the history of each such island; suffice it to say that the history of the Sea of Sorrows is the history of sailors' tales, and the great fixed point and inescapable center of all such tales are the enigmatic van Riese and his spectral ship.

Only the briefest summaries of such stories can be given here, given that literally every sailor I spoke with had their own

uncanny tale of the ship (most supposedly involving a former shipmate or relative, but a surprising number claiming a first-hand experience of some kind). All agree on certain points: that the Relentless is always accompanied by bad weather (either dense fog or storms); that when it comes to harbor it appears to be an extraordinarily well-built, but otherwise normal, three-masted brigantine, with a crew of ordinary sailors, but when seen at sea it is ghostly and crewed by van Riese alone; and that bad luck always befalls those who see it on the high seas. (If encountered in port it is not necessarily a dire omen, although it is not a good one.)

Van Riese is held by some to be a ghost, whose refusal to acknowledge his death is so strong he remains in the physical world; by others, to be a man accursed to wander the seas until some condition is met (the condition varies from telling to telling, when it exists at all). Some stories of the latter category give Van Riese a vaguely heroic air as a struggler against Fate, but most depict him as a figure of dread. Even the Blausteiners, as hardened and irreverent a group as I have ever come across, are extremely reluctant to discuss Van Riese's personality, motives or goals; some few sailors are said by others to have sailed with him, but I met no-one willing to claim such a distinction himself, much less willing to reveal what such a sailor might know of van Riese from personal experience.

Among the most common stories told of Van Riese is one in which he sails into port, recruits an unsuspecting crew for a new voyage, and promptly sails with them into Hell, or the Other Side, or whatever similar place suits the storyteller's fancy. The story contains obvious flaws in logic—why would sailors fail to recognize the one ship that every sailor knows by reputation

at least, or join up with a captain so uncanny? If Van Riese could disguise himself so well as to obviate these difficulties, how could the Relentless be so instantly recognized by all who see it on the high seas, or how could it be proved that it was the Relentless at all? But the general outline of the story seems to have a certain amount of truth. I have heard enough well-corroborated and circumstantial stories to believe that the Relentless does come into ports up and down the Sea of Sorrows—not frequently, but not so very rarely either, perhaps making two or three visits to a major port in a decade—and when he comes, he generally recruits at least one man for his crew, supposedly on very generous terms. The individual or individuals so recruited may or may not be seen again; stories abound of a young man

signing up to serve on the Relentless and returning six months later as a greybeard, or reappearing after generations have passed without having aged a day.

Many stories also recount the terrible vengeance Van Riese takes on pirates who trespass on his waters; the most famous, but by no means the only one, is recounted in the history of Dominia and is among the most widely told among the sailors of the Sea of Sorrows, perhaps as a touchstone or founding myth explaining their great solidarity.

## Populace

The sailors of the Sea of Sorrows can be divided into three groups: the “blue-water” sailors, the “inboard” sailors, and Blausteiners, each of whom have their own attitudes, superstitions, and habits.

### Piracy on the Sea of Sorrows

The stories of Pieter van Riese and the Relentless often mention that those who shed blood on the Sea of Sorrows put themselves in his power. This is absolutely true; a person who sheds another’s lifeblood into the Sea of Sorrows and dies anywhere where he or she can hear the tide will rise from the grave as a restless spirit and take ship aboard the Relentless. However, this only applies to the Sea of Sorrows proper; the coastal waters of other domains do not trigger this curse. This lies behind the superstitious prohibition on attacking ships while out of sight of land, and is also behind such customs as marooning and walking the plank—if no blood is shed, the curse isn’t triggered. Everyone who sails on the Sea of Sorrows knows this rule and will only resort to violence in the last extremity, as no-one wishes to “sign up for the long voyage”. Sailors who kill someone on the Sea of Sorrows will often leave their ship as soon as possible and move somewhere well inland. Because of this prohibition, even when combat occurs the participants will usually do all they can to avoid fatalities.

On the other side of the coin, certain depraved captains and their followers have given up hope of avoiding Van Riese’s call and take advantage of others’ non-violence to their own advantage. After all, the Grey Captain can only claim your soul once—might as well kill five men if you’ve killed one. Such ships and captains are extremely dangerous, and even other Blausteiners may quietly work to bring them to justice ashore.



Blue-water sailors are those who routinely sail out of sight of land and who make voyages through the Mists. They represent perhaps a fifth of the total maritime traffic on the Sea of Sorrows, but they have the most lucrative contracts, the most renown, and the most danger. Most blue-water ships are captained by half-Vistani Captains of the Mists and crewed by a mixture of half-Vistani, the more honest sort of Blausteiners and the more daring sort of Mordentishmen and Lamordians.

Inboard men, also known as "sandhuggers" and "stay-at-homes", are those fishing and coastal vessels which never intentionally go far out of sight of land. Inboard ships are generally smaller and less seaworthy than blue-water ships, although there are large trading ships that ply the coastal trading route between Mordentshire-by-the-Sea and Martira Bay. If the ships do not actually return to their home harbor by nightfall, they generally drop anchor at or before sunset and spend the night ashore. An experienced inboard captain knows the location of each creek and potential stopping place between Mordentshire and Martira Bay, and many know the coast all the way down to the Misty Border on the Valachan coast. There are also a small number of Ghastrian traders who travel among the islands of Ghastria, trading among the different islands in a way similar to the inboard men of the coastal Core.

Blausteiners, often called "sea wolves" or "sea devils" by honest tradesmen and sailors, range across the Sea of Sorrows in their galleys and xebecs, preying on their fellow sailors. Unlike blue-water sailors, they generally avoid sailing out of the Sea of Sorrows, and unlike inboard men they are quite comfortable sailing out of sight of

land. Their main notoriety, however, comes from the fact that the Blausteiners are the only sailors who do not acknowledge the Law of the Sea—the deeply engrained custom of mutual help, or at least non-interference, which governs the sailors of other nation. (The Blausteiners vehemently dispute the claim that they do not follow this custom; to their way of thinking, only a ship which is actually at sea—that is, out of sight of land...can lay claim to the protection of the Law of the Sea. Once land is in sight, in their opinion, the Law is no longer in force.)

Among the three groups, the blue-water sailors have the highest status; they make the most daring and most profitable voyages, they are the best sailors, and they regard inboard men with a mix of fellow-feeling—they are fellow sailors, after all—amusement, and disdain. They regard the sea-wolves of Blaustein with a mixture of deep-seated antipathy, for their piracy and slaving, and respect, for their abilities as sailors.

The Blausteiners, for their part, largely reciprocate this feeling of grudging respect. A Blausteiner pirate captain will certainly take a blue-water vessel as prize if he can catch it within sight of land, but he will generally set the crew at liberty on Blaustein rather than selling them into slavery, and if a Blausteiner pirate ship and a blue-water vessel meet at sea they will generally swap news or needed supplies with an air of guarded amiability. The Blausteiners have nothing but contempt for inboard men, however, and prey on them without conscience; if, somehow, they meet up with a inboard vessel which has wandered out into blue water they will generally offer no assistance and may even track the unfortunate vessel back to land.

Inboard men occupy the low rung of the social ladder in terms of respect, though

of course they rank higher than the Blausteiners in terms of respectability. They may be irked by the air of superiority affected by the blue-water ships and their crews, but they will generally acknowledge the superior standing of the blue-water sailors in the social hierarchy of the Sea of Sorrows. There may be mutterings about “half-breeds” and “lunatics”, referring to the half-Vistani parentage of many blue-water sailors, the mixed heritage of native Blausteiners, and the propensity of both groups for hair-raising exploits and short life expectancies, but when it comes down to brass tacks both inboard men and blue-water sailors know that the Law of the Sea holds as much for one group as for the other. Inboard men generally fear and hate the Blausteiners, for obvious reasons; if they happen to meet out of sight of land, inboard men generally do their best to ignore the Blausteiners and hope they go away. Only under truly desperate circumstances will they reduce themselves to asking for assistance, and only the most principled or hopeful will lend such assistance if Blausteiners ask it of them.

A brief précis of each nation bordering the Sea of Sorrows follows:

**Captains of the Mists:** They are not a nation, of course, but their importance makes them worthy of note. The half-Vistani sailors who are experienced in Mist navigation are few in number, but their unusual abilities make them sought after. For better or worse, they are well aware of the price their abilities can command and cheerfully extract every penny they can from their business partners.

**Zherisia:** Despite its location in the Mists, its relatively easily and commonly traversed Mistways leading to the Sea of Sorrows make it worthy of note here. Many ships plying the Sea of Sorrows are owned

by Zherisian businesses, and a surprising number of Paridoners can be found among the sailors of the Sea of Sorrows.

**Mordent:** Mordent is actually a naval “power”, with as many men and ships in the Sea of Sorrows as Darkon and more than any other nation. Of course, many of them are fishing boats or small vessels engaging in local trade, rather than blue-water ships, but Mordent has by far the closest ties to the sea of any Core nation in terms of having a seafaring population.

**Darkon:** Darkon is the only nation to have warships in the Sea of Sorrows (in fact, the only domain to have a regularly constituted “navy” at all, although Prince Othmar would like to change that). They spend their time chasing slavers and smugglers and nosing up and down the coast in a demonstration of Azalin Rex’s power.

**Blaustein:** Blausteiners are the great exception to the Law of the Sea, and they are widely disliked and feared. Native or “true” Blausteiners—a man or woman actually born on the island, rather than someone who has fled there from some other nation—are also considered to have uncanny powers over the weather, to be shapeshifters, and to be natural sailors (some go so far as to say a true Blausteiner cannot drown). Having one native Blausteiner aboard is considered lucky; having two or more is not, since they tend to fight among themselves and create divisions among the crew.

**Lamordia:** The Lamordians are well known as shipbuilders and local traders; numerous Lamordian vessels ply the coastal routes, and many of the best blue-water ships are built in the shipyards of Ludendorf. However, Lamordians are not particularly common among blue-water crews, with their national bias toward the



rational and pragmatic perhaps making itself felt here.

**Dementlieu:** Dementlieu boasts a fair number of trading vessels and fishermen, but virtually none who venture out of sight of land; they are not a maritime nation.

**Valachan:** The Valachani hardly ventured to sea; they only acquired a coastline after the Great Upheaval, and that coastline has steadily diminished since its first appearance—perhaps from lack of use, as some wags have suggested—and has now retreated almost to the Mordentish border. The sailors of southern Mordent are somewhat apprehensive about this development and hope to see it halt at the border, if not sooner.

**Ghastria:** Despite being surrounded by the Sea of Sorrows, the Ghastrians are not seamen; those who do go to sea as fishermen and local traders keep in sight of land and rarely venture across the sea to the Core, much less to more exotic locations.

## The Realm

### Government

The Sea of Sorrows has, of course, no law nor government *per se*, as it is not a polity of fixed borders and with a native population. The one great law of its sailors is the custom known as the Law of the Sea, referred to previously, which is usually formulated simply as “At sea, all men are brothers.” The dangers of maritime travel are so great that in their face almost all those who sail its waters set aside grievances and personal enmity, if such exist, and the desire for gain, in favor of a spirit of comity and fellow-endeavor. The law is, of course, not perfectly nor

universally observed, but it is striking that it is broadly and commonly observed, even by those whose behavior when ashore would not lead one to expect it of them. The major (partial) exception are Blausteiners, as discussed above, and the outlander pirate crews which appear with some frequency in these waters, apparently drawn in by the Mists.

### Economy

Trade on the Sea of Sorrows is vital for Paridon and Blaustein (for a given value of “trade”, in the latter case) and important to Mordent and Ghastria; the other nations bordering the Sea of Sorrows profit from maritime commerce, but can hardly be said to rely on it. Mordent, in particular, relies on its fisheries to feed itself, and takes great quantities of cod, sole, herrings, and sardines from fisheries near the Mordentish coast.

### Diplomacy

Darkon has made an effort to enforce naval supremacy over the Sea of Sorrows, with three warships based in Martira Bay plying the sea-lanes (mostly along the coast). This is largely a *pro forma* gesture; there is no national conflict on the Sea of Sorrows to speak of, save for the general distaste for Blaustein. This is certainly at least in part because none of the nations bordering the Sea of Sorrows have diplomatic difficulties among themselves; if, say, Falkovnia had a border on the Sea of Sorrows the matter might be quite different.

## Sites of Interest

### Slaver’s Rock

This spire of stone, located a few miles northeast of Blaustein, covers perhaps ten

acres but towers to about five hundred feet in height; it would be notable only as a minor hazard to navigation save for the fact that it counts as “dry land” for the purposes of the Blaustein pirates and slavers, who therefore feel free to prey on any ship they find within view of it. There is usually at least one pirate vessel within sight of Slaver’s Rock at any given time, and honest captains are forced to give it a wide berth whenever possible. It is also famous as the site where Blaustein pirates maroon captives or their own wayward brethren; it is entirely without shelter or fresh water, and the only possible sustenance is the seabirds (and their eggs in nesting season) which nest on the upper reaches of the Rock. Unsurprisingly, it has an evil reputation and is reputedly the home to many restless spirits.

## The Gray Shallows

Located south of Ghastria, this region has numerous sand shoals which shift with great rapidity, making them a significant hazard to navigation. Although few ships sink here, it is not at all uncommon for ships to be grounded on the shoals and forced to spend a great deal of time and labor freeing themselves. The bottom here is of grey sand. Depth is two to twenty fathoms.

## The Circles

One of the eerier “landmarks” of the Sea of Sorrows, the Circles are found a few miles northwest of Blaustein. The water is eight to twenty fathoms in depth, and dark circles are actually visible on the sea floor. Ships passing through this region often have great difficulty in maintaining a steady course and keeping the sails in good trim...not from any freak of the weather, but because of the strange lassitude and

confusion which tend to fall over those sailing these waters. It is widely rumored that these mental effects are due to the presence of a large number of morkoth who make their lairs here, in the circular mazes which give the place its name. The bottom is largely of dark stone, sand and shell. Slaver’s Rock lies at the northwest edge of the Circles, and Blaustein slavers often take advantage of the strange influence of the place to capture ships passing through this region. The bottom near Slaver’s Rock is dark grey gravel and white sand, with gravel predominating more as one nears the Rock. Depth is ten to thirty fathoms.

## The Stormline

This is an imagined feature of the landscape, which runs on a roughly north-south line just touching the westernmost point of the Isle of Agony and thence into the Mists. The Stormline is so called because the weather is often quite remarkably different on one side of the line from the other—generally with calm on one side and storms on the other. Depth along the Stormline averages sixty fathoms.

## Breaker’s Reefs

Found to the southeast of Markovia, this extensive coral reef is not a great hazard to navigation unless one wishes to approach Markovia itself. Unfortunately, the best beaches for landing on the island are protected by these reefs, making arrival on the island a dangerous proposition. The reef is also infested with dangerous creatures, including one infamous kraken known to attack ships which founder there. Depth along the reefs themselves is often less than one fathom (to the reefs) and two to five fathoms to the sea floor.



## North Reach

North of the Isle of Demise the sea assumes a characteristic dark grey tone and waves increase in height. The bottom is brown sand and shell. Depths average fifty fathoms or more.

## Leviathan's Waters

East of Ghastria. The water is a characteristic bottle-green color; waves are small and irregularly spaced, creating a high degree of chop and many whiteheads. The bottom is of yellow sand. Depths average thirty fathoms.

## Weather patterns

Storms are most frequent in February and March and from August to October, and generally follow one of two patterns, either rising in the west and moving east until they reach the Stormline, where they are diverted either to north or south, or rising in the north, off the coast of Darkon, and moving south down the coast. Fair weather is associated with east and south winds. There is often a sharp break in the weather as one crosses the Stormline, such that the weather may be hail or even snow on the Lamordian coast but warm and clear over Markovia. Visibility is almost always limited to five miles or less by haze; the sky is never really clear, although the overcast is less impenetrable than that of the Nocturnal Sea. Heavy fog is common, as is a weather pattern in which there is heavy fog to within about a mile of the coast but clear weather over the coast itself. This is often called "pirate weather", since the Blausteiner pirates often conceal themselves in the fog and await passing ships, then dash to capture their quarry while land is in sight.

## DM's Information on Navigation

For those wishing to use these rules to guide navigation in the Sea of Sorrows, the rules for navigation in Stormwrack (pg. 87) may serve as a guideline, with the following alterations:

General penalty to navigation: All navigation checks made by sailors on the Sea of Sorrows get a -10 penalty. This penalty can be offset by applying any or all of the following bonuses:

The helmsman may add a bonus to the navigation check made by himself or another member of the crew as follows: +6 to reach the helmsman's home port, +4 to a frequently visited port (more than five previous visits), +2 to any previously visited port.

The ship itself may get a +1 to +5 bonus for having made previous visits to a given port, at the DM's discretion. This may be influenced by considerations such as where the ship was built and where the timber it is made of came from.

Touching water and/or earth from the desired destination to key points (the helm, keel and/or mainmast) gives a +2 bonus for each; if both water and earth are applied these bonuses stack for a +4 total.

If the thoughts of any member of the crew, passenger or stowaway are sufficiently focused on one place (whether it be a place they want to go, or wish to avoid), that in itself may be sufficient to bring the ship there, at the DM's discretion.

## Navigating the Sea of Sorrows

The sailors on the Sea of Sorrows sail an empty and trackless waste; unlike caravans crossing the almost equally featureless deserts of Pharazia or Har'Akir, they cannot even reference the stars to guide them. Inboard men, of course, ply their trade along the coast and are intimately familiar with the coastlines they pass, and even points such as Markovia can be seen and sailed to if one merely follows the coast of the Fingers and the Isle of Demise to their utmost point. The sea itself is not as featureless as it seems to a landsman; certain weather patterns predominate in certain areas, the color of the sea (dark grey north of the Isle of Demise, bottle green southeast of Ghastria) can be used as a rough guide, and the use of the sounding lead to bring up a sample of the sea floor can often be used to help determine a general location (see Sites of Interest for very general notes on this point).

Over and above this rational system, the sailors believe in and rely on what I suppose can be most easily encapsulated as a sympathetic system of navigation. After a great deal of discussion with Captain Howe, the crew, and others, I believe this can be broken down into three parts.

First, and most important, sailors believe that the Sea of Sorrows responds to the thoughts of those who sail it. If you put a Mordentishman at the helm of a ship, the sea itself will steer the ship toward Mordent; if a Lamordian, toward Lamordia, and so forth. This is most effective when the sailor is sailing to his home port, but it is widely agreed that an experienced sailor can "sniff his way" to a port merely by taking the

### Well-known ships of the Sea of Sorrows

*Sweet Joan*, of Mordentshire-harbor, Esdras Calloway captain.

*Briar Rose*, of Mordentshire-harbor, Jeremiah Blackstone captain. Captain Blackstone is the son of Elijah Blackstone, who I understand to be a contributor to our sadly delayed document on the perils of the deep.

*Vir Verte*, of Martira Bay, Aliandra Bowbreak captain.

*Bon Homme Marius*, of Port-a-Lucine, Jean-Ezra Legrande captain.

*Mistral*, of Martira Bay, Gareth Darkholme captain.

*Sunseeker*, of Paridon, Ysandra Kolstelyn captain

helm and concentrating on where he wants to go. (The half-Vistani "Captains of the Mists", as they style themselves, are supposedly most adept at this, with native Blausteiners rated second, but it is thought to be a knack anyone with sufficient experience can obtain.) This extends, to a lesser degree, to anyone aboard the ship; ideally, the whole crew will set a particular destination in mind and focus on arriving there, to speed the ship's passage.

Second, the ship itself is supposed to retain some memory of its "place of birth", meaning both where the timber it was built from was logged and where the ship itself was built, and will tend to return to these familiar points unless guided in a different direction.

A ship which has routinely traveled along a given trade route (say, Paridon to Port-a-Lucine and back) will tend to stick to its familiar circuit and may be "reluctant" to voyage in a different direction; an especially



## Sailor's Cant

*The sailors of the Sea of Sorrows tend to use Mordentish as a lingua franca, but with a strong admixture of Lamordian technical terms and a number of Darkonese phrases or expressions. The following are among the common terms used by sailors which are likely to be unfamiliar to the non-nautical.*

*Bark, barky: An affectionate substitute for "ship," usually one's own.*

*Bow: The front of the ship.*

*Black Ship: The Relentless*

*Blank: West*

*Blue: Good, correct, well done.*

*Brown: East*

*Brother/sister: A crewmate.*

*Cank: Bad, wrong, crooked.*

*Cousin: A fellow-sailor.*

*Fog in, fog over: Enter the Mists.*

*Gree: North*

*Grey Captain: Pieter van Riese*

*Inboard: Short for "inboard sailor", a sailor whose ship rarely or never sails out of sight of land.*

*Landlubber, lubber: Someone without sailing experience.*

*Lunatic: A half-Vistani sailor.*

*Mudfoot: An especially disparaging term for an inboard sailor.*

*Pater/Mater: The ship's captain.*

*Port: The left side of the ship, when standing on the ship and facing forward (toward the bow).*

*Starboard: The right side of the ship, when standing on the ship and facing forward (toward the bow).*

*Stern: The back of the ship.*

*True blue: An experienced blue-water sailor.*

*Vert: South*

*Wolf, seawolf: A Blausteiner*

experienced or strong-willed helmsman may be necessary to direct it to a new destination. Finally, the ship can be "taught" to seek for a particular place by taking soil and water from that place and touching them to certain key points (the helm and keel are widely agreed upon; there was a warm disagreement between Captain Howe

and the mate about whether touching the masts made this process more or less effective). Thus, taking water from a Rokushman spring and sand from one of its beaches and touching them to the ship will cause the ship to seek after the "taste" of that soil and water—always assuming that

the crew do not spoil the effect by thinking too much of other places!

I am not at all convinced that this "system" of navigation is more than superstition, but it is at least widely held and strongly adhered to, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the Sea of Sorrows in some way responds to such cues in directing those who travel over it—surely a most intriguing example of the power of Mind over Shadow, if true.

## Postscript

Having compiled the foregoing, I had thought to add no more to my description of the Sea of Sorrows, but I had not counted on the power of Fortune to offer us unsought-for opportunities.

Yesterday morning at about dawn the Relentless entered [East Riding?] harbor. Word spread immediately; the event was already the only topic of conversation at the breakfast table, as speculation into what business van Riese might have heard ran rampant. Considering the matter briefly, I knew my course was clear; at least while at anchor, the [i]Relentless[/i] was, from all I knew of it, an...shall I say ordinary?...at least a corporeal ship, from which sailors were seen to come and go. Might I not do the same?

Saying nothing of my intentions to Captain Howe, who I was sure would make the most tiresome sort of objections and expostulations, I went immediately to the harbor and found (after some searching and the offer of a truly princely payment) a fellow willing to take me out to the ship. The Relentless is all it was described as being—possessed of superb "lines", even to an eye so relatively inexperienced as mine, and curiously menacing in a way one most commonly associates with the more dramatic sort of ruined castles or deserted

manors. It was easy to believe it a ghost ship even as my oarsman hailed the ship, received a guardedly cordial reply, and I climbed the side and found myself on the deck.

All there was more or less as expected, for one by now so accustomed to the nautical routine—the sailors at their common tasks, the ship riding easily at anchor. All was eerily quiet; there was none of the song or idle talk invariably accompanying such task aboard the *Pelican*. On arriving on deck I informed the nearest crewman of my name and business (as I have described it elsewhere—a professor of Richmulot engaged in a cartographic study of the Sea of Sorrows, a designation which I thought would prove attractive to Captain van Riese). After a moment's muttered conversation with a fellow, I was shown the way to the captain's cabin and introduced to Captain van Riese himself.

He is a tremendously impressive person, well above the average height and strongly built, apparently of some forty years of age but with hair and beard prematurely grey and even white, piercing pale grey eyes in a face only moderately weathered by exposure to sun and surf. He is, then, physically striking, but even more than that, he carries the air of natural authority, so often seen in sea captains and military commanders, to a greater degree than any person I have ever met. Having conversed with him, the stories of his ability to command the winds and waves themselves now seem no mere myth-making hyperbole told by credulous sailors, but mere facts consistent with his overwhelming force of personality.

He bid me enter and made me welcome with a show of respectful courtesy before asking my business, at which I told him of my journey around the Sea of Sorrows. He evinced great interest in the copied and



annotated maps and charts I had brought to provide my entrée to the conversation; as we spoke, I became aware of certain habits of speech and a certain trace accent which reminded me inescapably of none other than the arch-traitor Van Rijn. Suddenly struck by these similarities and the obvious similarity in names between the two, I decided in a moment to risk asking him if he knew of or had even met my friend Erik van Rijn.

As I did he fell silent and observed me with great care for a long moment; then he spoke coolly.

"Professor Hazan...I knew that name rang a bell. As it happens, I have seen your *friend* Van Rijn. Spoken with him a time or two. We're countrymen, did you know? Born just a few miles apart, and not so very many years either. Funny how these things turn out. As for where he is, I don't know and can't tell you. As for where he's going...why, he's going home."

Captain Van Riese smiled.

"I could have taken him myself, if he'd asked. Saved him a great deal of time and trouble. But..." He shrugged. "He didn't ask. And it didn't strike my fancy to offer. I'll say no more of what passed between us, out of respect for a fellow wanderer."

For a moment a wild idea of inducing the captain to speak by force danced in my brain. As if seeing the thought, he smiled more widely and said, almost whispering, "You'll be wanting to go now, Master Hazan. Unless you're interested in joining the crew?"

The threat in his words was unmistakable, the air of menace in the cabin all but literally palpable. I have been in several tight scrapes over the course of compiling these reports, but never have I felt in more peril, body and spirit, than I did in that moment. I could do no more than bow and take my leave.

Despite his unwillingness to impart further details, I feel sure the arch-traitor has conversed with Van Riese in the recent past. I have hopes of having learned something—however little—of his recent travels. On my way back to shore I succeeded in learning from a sailor aboard the Relentless that their last port of call was...

## Pieter van Riese

### Background

Pieter van Riese was born in Amsterdam, Gothic Earth, at a time when it was one of the great shipping centers of the world, and from childhood his eyes were filled with the sails of tall ships in the Isseljmeer and with maps—wildly contradictory maps which changed from year to year as sailors returned from far voyages with their often-conflicting tales of where they had gone and what they had seen.

Van Riese's family had always followed the sea; he was big for his age and a quick study, and he first took ship as a cabin boy at the age of seven. By the time he turned twenty he had already begun to captain small ships making smuggling trips between Amsterdam and the English coast. He quickly acquired a reputation as a

excellent seaman, a first-rate navigator and cartographer who knew how to get the most from his ship and his men. He had also begun to acquire a reputation as a hard man with an unpredictable temper, capable of laughing off a calculated insult on one day and lashing out in response to an innocent remark on the next. He was widely known to be proud as the Devil himself, intensely ambitious, and, more unusually, as an outspoken atheist. He was often heard to lament that he had been born too late to get in ahead of Columbus; he was also often heard to predict that the present age of exploration and advancement of knowledge would culminate in the entire mastery of man over Nature—even including Death itself. Although he usually said such things jokingly, many who heard him believed that at heart he was sincere.

Soon Van Riese's ambitions became focused on a concrete point: he would find the Northwest Passage to the reaches of the Orient and win, if not eternal life, at least eternal fame and earthly fortune. He made two attempts at the Northwest Passage but was driven back each time by the onset of winter and by (as he felt) ships incapable of weathering the Arctic conditions prevailing in the high North Atlantic and crews incapable of real dedication to their goal. His first expedition ended in only a mild failure, losing eighteen

men of seventy and bringing both his ships home; the second was a near-total disaster, with only van Riese and six of his sixty men returning from it. The second expedition also dealt a severe blow to Van Riese's reputation; the accounts given by his fellow-survivors were somewhat confused and contradictory, but all blamed him for pressing on long past the point of reason and endangering his men, and one of his men frankly accused him of murdering a

crew member who had pressed him a little too strongly to return home. Van Riese denied all such accusations and pressed every friend and business acquaintance he had ever made for funds for a final expedition, while spending great time and energy on designing and building a ship which could stand up to the rigors of the journey.

After five grueling years of work, van Riese had the money, the men, and, most of all, the ship to achieve his

dreams—a two-masted brigantine built to a design of Van Riese's own imagining, the product of the finest shipyard in Harwich, England, and named by Van Riese himself as a sign of his ambitions and his attitude: *Relentless*.

Having thus prepared himself, van Rijn and his crew set out in late spring to attempt their passage. As summer came the *Relentless* and her crew pressed forward, threading their way between the





islands west of Greenland mile by cautious mile, mapping their progress carefully and doggedly pressing ever westward. At first all felt their progress to be limited but real, but as summer began to pass the more experienced crewmen began to wonder if it might not suit them better to turn back and return in the next year, maps in hand, to continue their journey—or at least to sail south into the bay recently discovered by Henry Hudson and winter on its southern shore.

Van Riese refused to listen to such advice. He used every means of persuasion available to encourage the crew to make their passage in a single trip, painting a grim picture of the possible results of making a semi-permanent camp on some unknown shore and using every map and chart available to “prove” that they had only a short distance yet to go and they would find themselves in the Pacific Ocean. This was at least plausible, and might have entirely persuaded all aboard—if not for certain other signs that began to indicate that all might not be well with the captain. Always a light sleeper, he began to spend all night awake, poring over maps and charts and talking—not to himself, but to the ship. Van Riese had always been extraordinarily proud of the Relentless and, like all seamen, to consider her a living thing with a personality and mannerisms of her own; but the way he spoke of her and to her soon impressed even the least imaginative of the crew as uncanny, and as autumn wore on all began to wonder if the captain’s grip on sanity was loosening.

Most were relieved when van Riese stopped his long one-sided midnight “conversations”, but when the quartermaster daringly joked that van Riese and the ship were no longer talking, van Riese smiled broadly, clapped him on the shoulder, and told him there was no need—

that he knew so well what the ship was thinking they no longer needed to talk. The quartermaster, thinking it a joke, laughed heartily, and in an instant van Riese snapped, striking him to the deck and snarling that it was nothing for a fool to laugh at, that he knew the ship just as he knew his hands and feet.

It might have made worse trouble among the crew, save that it almost seemed to be true; the sails all but seemed to reef and furl themselves, and van Riese seemed to be able to find a breeze even on the stillest day and a safe path in the strongest storm.

But nothing could escape the ice.

As autumn passed and winter drew on the Relentless and its crew were constantly surrounded by great castles and islands of ice, and it took all the skills of frost-bitten hands and feet to keep her clear of their grasp. Eventually even van Riese’s preternatural seamanship and the best efforts of the crew failed to keep her free, and the Relentless found herself locked in a field of ice, unable to move except as moved by the currents. Her excellent construction gave the crew a measure of safety, but it became increasingly apparent to all but van Riese that the ship was a loss. With great good luck the crew might wait for the ice to freeze solid, portage the ship’s boats to open water, and make an escape, but nothing could save the ship herself. Van Riese refused to consider such a course of action and demanded that all the crew stay together and with the ship, and for a time prevailed; but as the ship’s supplies dwindled the crew began to whisper of mutiny.

Van Riese, seeing which way the mood of the crew was tending, mulled his options and finally called a general meeting of the ship’s crew to clear the air. Van Riese gave his own reasons for continuing forward at

some length, then offered to let anyone who had objections to share them. At first no-one was willing to come forward, but finally the first mate—a long-time friend of van Riese's, who had sailed with him on all three of his expeditions—declared himself in favor of turning back. Thus emboldened, every member of the crew eventually declared himself in favor of abandoning the *Relentless*. Van Riese took the news with great calm, and declared that he had expected them to vote in such a way; in honor of the end of their great voyage and noble struggle against the elements he would immediately issue an extra double ration of grog to all hands, which he would serve himself from his private stores.

This announcement was received with great enthusiasm, and the men crowded forward for their celebratory toast, cheering for "Van Riese and the good old *Relentless*". Van Riese gave out the strong drink with a generous hand, giving third and fourth drafts to those who asked, smiling and joking with the crew and seemingly in the best of humors.

About an hour later, the first crewman fell to the deck, gripping at his stomach and retching. Soon all were in a similar condition, and van Riese walked the length of the *Relentless*, still smiling fixedly, pausing occasionally give a crewman a kick in the teeth or a blow from a marlinspike. Relying on drunkenness and the arsenic he had laced into the grog to incapacitate the crew, he methodically tracked down and beat to death every man on the ship, ending by pinning the mate to the deck with the marlinspike and letting him writhe out his death throes beneath the Northern Lights. His savage deed of mass murder completed, van Riese continued to pace the deck of his ship, whipping himself into a towering rage at how he had been betrayed by the cowardice of his men. He had

punished them, but how would he get back what was rightfully his? Finally, raving and shrieking, he demanded that someone, anyone, give him what he needed to achieve his goal: open water, a loyal crew, and the power to defy Death itself. Falling to his knees on the deck, he promised his soul and his ship to the service of any power that would give him what he wanted; finally, exhausted, he slept, expecting never to wake again.

But awake he did--although it was like no waking he had ever had. Van Riese found himself pacing the deck of the *Relentless*, alone, in open water—a dark grey-green sea, the sky overcast, the season indeterminate but certainly no Arctic winter. He was alone, save for his ship, and he learned immediately that his boast of sailing the *Relentless* single-handed was now literal truth. Wherever he thought to go, the ship went. He had his ship, there were crew when he called for them, whom he could banish with a thought, and he soon discovered he had no need of sleep or food, and he had endless swells of dark grey-green water on every side.

He was, at last, absolutely free to go where he would...and yet, as he soon learned, he had no control over where he would arrive. His tremendous library of maps and charts now has no reference to where he travels; he may sight Markovia to the north, sail "west" for weeks or months, and never come to the coast of Dementlieu, turn to the south and find himself entering Paridon Bay. He may come anywhere there is water to hold him—from time to time he has found himself in the Musarde, or Lake Vallaki, or even stranger places not found on any map known to scholars of the Core.



## Current Sketch

Captain Pieter Van Riese appears as a man just leaving the prime of life, well over the average height and still powerful, with hair and beard prematurely grey. Although by any standard a handsome man, by far his most striking feature are his light grey eyes—"Mist-grey" is the most common description—and there are very few who can meet his gaze without quailing. He usually exudes self-confidence and can be charming, although his jocularity almost always has a menacing edge. If crossed or thwarted his reactions are extremely unpredictable; at times he might simply shrug off an insult or a setback, and other times the slightest provocation will draw a murderously furious response.

He now understands how his wish (his dying wish, though he never acknowledges his ghostly state and may not know he is dead) was granted; everything he asked for he has received, and his offer of service has been accepted. Some unknown power now moves him according to its whims. Far from the absolute autonomy he wanted and thought his wish would grant him, he knows himself to be a slave, working to ends he does not know and can hardly guess, and he will never be his own master again. He feels (or imagines) the pressures of the Dark Powers on him, leading him where they will; sometimes he exerts himself to thwart their perceived plans, but more often he grimly acquiesces. Van Riese is unusually self-aware and self-directed for one of the phantasmal dead, but the fixations on the concerns of his past life make themselves subtly manifest in some of his actions. Despite more than one hundred years of wandering, he still obsessively maps the coasts of the places where the Relentless makes landfall and tries to consolidate his notes and charts into a

seamless whole. He cannot be brought to believe that his maps and charts are entirely useless; although in many ways he is quite rational, reason can never convince him that his future efforts along those lines will be as futile as his past efforts.

The Relentless now continually wanders the seas of Ravenloft and of Gothic Earth, where Van Riese's name has been forgotten entirely and his ghost ship is known only as the [i]Flying Dutchman[/i]. Whatever body of water the Relentless finds itself in is, for that moment, connected with the Nocturnal Sea, and vice-versa. Finding the Relentless and taking ship on it, or following it into the Mists, is therefore at least theoretically a way one could escape the Mists—at least as far as Gothic Earth, at any rate.

## Ship for Hire

Van Riese has learned that he can know where he will arrive—but only if someone has commissioned him to go there. This is, in a way, even more humiliating than his enforced service to the powers he accepted as his master at the time of his death, but if the price is right, or if he feels too deeply the need to know where he's going for once to refuse an offer, he can be persuaded to sail anywhere—no destination is too exotic or too hard to reach. Some even say he can sail to any *time* he wishes.

## The Seamen of the Relentless

Van Riese takes recruits for his crew from two groups—men who have shed man's blood on the Sea of Sorrows, and men who voluntarily sign up to serve with him. The first group are the source of the well-known stories of "signing up for the long voyage" and the basis of the great superstition against bloodshed among sailors on the Sea of Sorrows; the second

are the source of the stories that one can sell his soul to Van Riese in exchange for a boon. The crew is, of course, not strictly necessary to manage the Relentless, but Van Riese gets other uses from it; he finds it pleasant to have men under his command, he can use them to get information from sources on shore, and, if circumstances demand it, he can sell them, body and soul, to interested buyers. He generally reserves this last as a punishment for mutineers, complainers, and shirkers.

It is widely supposed that anyone sailing on the Relentless simply disappears as soon as the ship is out of sight of land; although there is a great deal of truth to this, it is not entirely accurate. Volunteers for the Relentless serve for a period determined at the time of their signing on, but because of the Relentless' continual voyaging through the Mists they may return to their home port seemingly on the same day they left, but having aged twenty years, or to have been gone twenty years (or more!) and not to have aged a day. This, and the fact that some never return at all, is the reason for the Relentless' fatal reputation. Countervailing rumors (also largely but not perfectly factual) about the high wages Van Riese pays, the boon granted those who serve with him, and that those who have once served with Van Riese will be lucky at sea forever afterward, ensure that there are always some few desperate or reckless enough to risk signing with him.

## Terms of Service

Van Riese is drawn to those who are strongly considering signing articles to serve aboard the Relentless. He generally offers one gold piece per day, and often mentions the fact (and it is a fact) that those who sign with him wanting a specific boon will generally get it. (If situations require game

mechanics, treat this as a limited wish made at the beginning and granted at the end of the sailor's service. This wish should be corrupted in the same way that the Wishing Imp's are, but as subtly and ironically as the Dungeon Master can arrange.)

## Traveling on the Relentless

The *Relentless* is a level 5 sinkhole of evil, with the Despair and Rage emotional taints. In the Material Plane on the Sea of Sorrows it appears as a ghost ship, and Van Riese is alone unless he summons the ghosts of dead sailors to his aid; in the Ethereal Plane and when Mare Perditorum is overlapping with another domain (e.g., when it comes to port) it appears to be a normal ship with a normal crew, and crew members can have normal interactions with others aboard the ship. Crew members may be living men who signed on to serve in the Relentless or ghosts; the ghosts may bear the wounds that caused their death, but the two groups are otherwise indistinguishable. In the Material Plans the Relentless is incorporeal and capable of sailing at maximum speed (sixteen knots) no matter what the weather appears to be in the Material Plane. In the Ethereal the Relentless is corporeal, and the speed and direction of the wind in the Ethereal Plane will be appropriate to the direction Van Riese wants to travel, and may or may not have anything to do with the weather in the Material Plane. The weather in the Ethereal Plane within one mile of the Relentless is always what Van Riese wants it to be. This cannot be changed by mortal magic. Weather in the Material Plane can be altered, but cannot harm the Relentless—so a druid might create weather which would allow a ship in the material plane to keep up with the Relentless, but could not create a storm and sink the Relentless, or damage the Relentless with lightning.



## Sinking the Relentless

When in the Ethereal Plane the Relentless takes half of the normal damage for an object (i.e., ¼ damage) from lightning or fire, but takes double normal damage for an object (i.e., full damage) from ice. It takes damage normally (see statistics block) from other sources. It cannot be sunk at all in the Material Plane of Ravenloft, but must take the full damage necessary to sink it from attackers in the Near Ethereal Plane. As long as it remains afloat, Van Riese cannot be permanently slain; both he and the ship must be reduced to zero hit points, at which point both are destroyed forever.

Fighting Van Riese and the Relentless in the Ethereal Plane has the obvious advantages of being able to treat both as corporeal, and of being able to win once and for all by sinking the ship. It has the disadvantage of forcing Van Riese's would-be vanquishers to fight in a Rank 5 sinkhole of evil in the Ethereal. The terrifyingly intense psychic vortex of the ship makes Van Riese and his crew immune from turning in the Ethereal Plane.

## Pieter van Riese CR 19

*Male human ghost bard 14*

**NE Medium incorporeal undead (ghost)**

**Init** +6; **Senses** darkvision 60',

tremorsense; Listen +7, Spot +7

**Aura** Sinkhole of Evil rank 5, Frightful Presence

**Languages** Dutch\*, English, Mordentish, Darkonese

**Outcast Rating** 2

**AC** 25, **touch** 25, **flat-footed** 23 (+2 Dex, +13 deflection; no armor bonus while incorporeal and fighting corporeal creatures)

**hp** 105 (14 HD + Toughness); DR incorporeal immunities

Immune Undead immunities

**Resist** cold 10, turn +8 SR 28

**Fort** +8 (immune to effects requiring a Fort save unless the effect works on objects or requires no saving throw), **Ref** +15, **Will** +14

**Speed** fly 30 ft (must maintain contact with the Relentless)

**Melee** enervating touch, touch attack +10/+5 (1d12 plus energy drain) or ghost touch mace +2 +16/+11 (1d6+6)

**Ranged** dominate (DC 32)

**Base Atk** +10; **Grp** -

**Atk Options**

Special Actions Corporeal Manifestation (also causes the Relentless to manifest), spells, bard abilities

**Combat Gear** leather armor +4\*, ring of resistance (as cloak) +4, ghost touch mace +2

\*Effective only against ethereal opponents

**Spells:** 4/6/5/5/5/3 0th (6): dancing lights, ghost sound, mage hand, mending, message, open/close 1st: animate rope, grease, obscuring mist, unseen servant 2nd: fog cloud, hold person (DC 24), suggestion (DC 24), tongues 3rd (4): crushing despair (DC 28\*), glibness, haste, slow (DC 25) 4th (4): dimension door, shadow conjuration, shout, solid fog 5th (3): mind fog (DC 26), song of discord (DC 29\*), summon monster V (2d4 bowlyns only)

\*Will DC +3 from the Relentless' Sinkhole of Evil aura of Despair and Rage

**Abilities** Str -, Dex 15, Con -, Int 14, Wis 9, Cha 36

**SQ** incorporeal traits, undead traits

Feats Ability Focus (dominate), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Spell Focus (enchantment), Toughness\*

\*As per Pathfinder, gives 1 hit point per level

**Skills** Bluff +25, Concentration +28, Diplomacy +25, Hide +10, Intimidate +30, Knowledge (geography) +25, Knowledge (nature) +25, Knowledge (local) +25, Listen +7, Profession (Sailor) +16, Search +10, Sense Motive +16, Spot +7, Use Rope +7

**Possessions** cloak of Charisma +6, leather armor +4, ring of resistance (as cloak) +4, ghost touch mace +2, amulet of proof against detection and location

**Sinkhole of Evil:** The Relentless is a fifth-rank sinkhole of evil, with the Despair and Rage emotional taints, affecting a 300 foot radius around the Relentless. All Will saves in this radius against despair- and rage-inducing effects (for anyone other than Van Riese and his minions) increase their DC by +3 while in the Material Plane.

**Frightful Presence:** When the Relentless appears, all living creatures within 300 feet who see it must make a Will save (DC 28) or be panicked for 2d4 rounds. This is a visual necromantic mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that successfully saves against this effect cannot be affected by it again for twenty-four hours.

**Energy Drain (Su):** Living creatures hit by Van Riese's incorporeal touch attack gain three negative levels. This ability may be used once per round. The DC is 30 for the Fortitude save (Charisma based). For each negative level bestowed, Van Riese gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Dominate (Su):** Van Riese can crush an opponent's will just by looking into his or her eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that Van Riese must use a standard action, and those merely looking at him are not affected. Anyone he targets must succeed on a Will save (DC 32) or fall instantly under Van Riese's influence as though by a dominate person spell (caster level 14th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.

**Rejuvenation:** If reduced to 0 hit points in the Material Plane, Van Riese and the Relentless disappear, to reform elsewhere on the Sea of Sorrows at the next full moon. Only if the Relentless is sunk by attackers in the Ethereal Plane can Van Riese be laid to rest.

**Tremorsense:** Van Riese can detect any corporeal being weighing more than 5 pounds which is touching the Relentless.

**Lost At Sea (Ex):** Any navigational device, magical or mundane, ceases to function permanently if brought within 300 feet of the Relentless while at sea (out of sight of land). This effect cannot be overcome by any mortal magic. Van Riese fails any navigation or Knowledge (geography) check automatically if it concerns where he wants to go; if he is advising another, or making a voyage at another's behest, he makes such checks normally.

**Off the Charts:** The Relentless, like other Rank 5 sinkholes of evil such as the Phantom Lover's tower and Castle Tristenoira, exerts such a corrupting influence on its surroundings that it causing time and space themselves to become unstable around it. The Relentless can actually sail to any time the Dark



Powers wish it to. In addition, the Dark Powers can bring the Relentless into bodies of water that are normally part of other domains. Most commonly this involves the Relentless coming to port in the Sea of Sorrows, but the Relentless sometimes ranges further afield. It been sighted in the Sea of Venemous Tears, the Nocturnal Sea, Saragoss, and even Lake Vallaki, as well as the seas of Gothic Earth. When this occurs, that domain is connected to Mare Perditorum, and there is a domain boundary between that domain and Mare Peditorum in a 300 foot radius around the Relentless. The Relentless loses its Terror of the Seas quality while in the waters of another domain, but retains all other extraordinary and supernatural qualities. Van Riese has no control over when this will occur except when he has been hired to make a voyage to a specific place; he can go to that place, and only that place, when he is acting under someone else's orders. He can, however, sense when anyone wishes to join the Relentless and come to port to find them.

**Corporeal Manifestation (Su\*):** The psychic vortex of the Relentless and Van Riese is so strong that the Relentless is always visible in the Material Plane, so their Manifest ability functions differently from that of lesser ghosts. When the ship is not corporeal, it appears as a ghost ship, with Van Riese alone on board. When Van Riese causes it to manifest—usually because he is coming into port to make a delivery or to pick up crew—the Relentless appears to be a normal sailing ship. Corporeal manifestation brings everything within 300 feet into the

Ethereal Plane, where the Relentless is a corporeal ship, and Van Riese and his crew appear to be (almost) normal sailors. Under ordinary conditions Manifest is a Supernatural ability which can be cancelled by effects such as anti-magic sphere; however, no mortal magic can cause the Corporeal Manifestation ability of the Relentless to fail in this way.

**No Homecoming (Ex):** Any ship whose crew sights the Relentless while at sea (out of sight of land) will be shipwrecked before it returns to port.

**Signing the Articles (Su):** Anyone who voluntarily signs on to service with the Relentless may make one limited wish, which will be fulfilled at the time Van Riese releases the sailor from service. (This wish will generally be subtly warped and its fulfillment unsatisfying, if not outright disastrous.) Exposure to the temporal vortices created by the Relentless's aura will age the sailor 1d12-1d10 year per year of service aboard the Relentless, and the sailor will return to his home port 1d12-1d10 years per year of service after he left. The results of these two rolls do not influence each other. If a sailor ages past the end of his life span or is so young he would be unborn, he dies or disappears. Signing the articles creates the equivalent of a geas spell on the signer, binding him to do Van Riese's will for the term of indenture.

*Example:* A sailor signs on for ten years of service on the Relentless out of Mordent. At the end of his term he ages (79-62) seventeen years and appears in Mordent again (69-33) thirty-six years after he left.

**Bard abilities:** Van Riese's "bard" abilities have been altered in a few ways to better

reflect the abilities of a sea captain who relies on force of will and strength of personality to whip his crew into battle, as described below.

**Captain's commands:** As bardic music, except that use of these abilities depends on a minimum number of ranks in Diplomacy or Intimidate rather than in Performance.

**Wanderer's knowledge:** Van Riese gains a bonus equal to half his bard level on Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nature), and Linguistics checks. He can reroll a check against one of these skills, but must take the result of the second roll even if it is worse. He can reroll one additional time per day at 5th level and every five levels thereafter. Note the Lost at Sea trait applies to pertinent Knowledge (geography) checks.

**Countermand:** As the bardic ability countersong (Diplomacy).

**Overawe:** Van Riese can use his commands to strike his enemies with unease and foreboding, giving a -1 penalty to attacks, damage, and skill checks for a number of rounds equal to Van Riese's Charisma modifier (9 rounds). To be affected, an enemy must be within 30 feet and be able to see and hear Van Riese. A Will save (DC 29 in the Material Plane, 32 in the Ethereal Plane) negates the effect. If the save succeeds, the creature is immune to this ability for 24 hours. This ability relies on audible components. (Intimidate)

**Call to surrender:** Van Riese can use a captain's command to encourage an enemy to surrender. To be affected, an enemy must be within 30 feet and be

able to see and hear the buccaneer's performance. An affected enemy feels the irresistible urge to drop any held weapons and fall prone. This effect lasts for 1 round—essentially, the affected enemy takes no actions on its next turn other than to lie prone, although it is not considered flat-footed or helpless. A Will saving throw (DC 20) negates the effect. This ability affects only a single creature. Song of surrender is an enchantment (compulsion), mind-affecting, language-dependent ability and relies on audible components.

(Intimidate)

**Inspire courage +3:** As the bardic ability (Diplomacy)

**Inspire confidence:** As the bardic ability (Diplomacy)

**Inspire greatness:** As the bardic ability (Diplomacy)

**Captain's Curse (Sp):** Van Riese can use his commands to cause fear in his enemies. To be affected, an enemy must be able to hear the bard perform and be within 30 feet. Each enemy within range receives a Will save (DC 30) to negate the effect. If the save succeeds, the creature is immune to this ability for 24 hours. If the save fails, the target becomes frightened and flees for as long as the target can hear the captain's maledictions. Frightening tune relies on audible components. (Intimidate)

### **The Relentless in the Material Plane**

In the Material Plane the Relentless appears as a ghost ship, uncrewed save by Van Riese, with its sails in tatters and its bow damaged if not crushed by the ice which eventually crushed it. Van Riese will



not usually use his Corporeal Manifestation ability while on the high seas, and under ordinary circumstances he will never deliberately damage another ship or engage in combat; however, its sinkhole of evil, Terror of the Seas, and No Homecoming abilities are always active. If forced to engage in combat Van Riese will dominate one or more party members (focusing on spellcasters and ranged attackers), use Mind Fog and Song of Discord, then summon bowlyns and augment their abilities by haste and bardic abilities, engaging in melee combat only as a last resort or to recover hit points via his enervating touch.

**Relentless:** Colossal vehicle; Seaworthiness (cannot be sunk); Shiphandling +8; Speed wind × 40 ft. (perfect, fly); Overall AC -3; Hull sections 24 (sink N/A); Section hp 80 (hardness 5); Section AC 3; Rigging Sections 3; Rigging hp 80 (hardness 0), AC 1; Ram 4d6; Mounts 2 light and 1 heavy; Space 60 ft. by 20 ft.; Height 10 ft. (draft 10 ft.); Complement 30; Watch 7; Cargo 120 tons (Speed wind × 15 ft. if 60 tons or more); Cost 10,000 gp.

## Pieter van Riese in the Ethereal Plane

*Male human 5th rank ghost bard 14*

NE Medium undead (corporeal ghost)

**Init** +6; **Senses** Darkvision, tremorsense; Listen +7, Spot +7

**Languages** Dutch\*, English, Mordentish, Darkonese

**Outcast Rating** 6

**AC** 31, **touch** 25, **flat-footed** 29 (+2 Dex, +6 armor, +13 deflection)

**hp** 105 (14 HD) **DR** 10/good

**Immune** Undead immunities, turning **SR** 28

**Resist** fire 10 lightning 10

**Saves** Fort +8 (immune to Fort effects unless they affect objects or require no saving throw), Ref +13, Will +14

**Speed** 30 ft

**Melee** enervating touch, touch attack +10/+5 (1d12 and 3 negative levels) or ghost touch mace +2 +16/+11 (1d6+6)

**Ranged** dominate (DC 32)

**Base Atk** +10; **Grp** - (incorporeal)

**Atk Options**

**Special Actions** spell-like abilities, bardic abilities

**Spells:** 4/6/5/5/5/3 0th (6): dancing lights, ghost sound, mage hand, mending, message, open/close 1st: animate rope, grease, obscuring mist, unseen servant 2nd: fog cloud, hold person (DC 25), suggestion (DC 25), tongues 3rd (4): crushing despair (DC 32\*), glibness, haste, slow (DC 26) 4th (4): dimension door, shadow conjuration, shout, solid fog 5th (3): mind fog (DC 28), song of discord (DC 34\*), summon monster V (2d4 bowlyns only)

**SQ** incorporeal traits, undead traits

**Abilities** Str 18, Dex 14, Con -, Int 15, Wis 9, Cha 36

**Feats** Ability Focus (dominate), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Spell Focus (enchantment), Toughness\*

\*As per Pathfinder, gives 1 hit point per level

**Skills** Bluff +21, Concentration +28, Diplomacy +21, Hide +10, Intimidate +34, Knowledge (geography) +25, Knowledge (nature) +25, Knowledge (local) +25, Listen +7, Profession (Sailor) +16, Search +10, Sense Motive +16, Spot +7, Use Rope +7

**Possessions** cloak of Charisma +6, leather armor +4, ring of resistance (as cloak)

+4, ghost touch mace +2, amulet of proof against detection and location

**Sinkhole of Evil:** The Relentless is a fifth-rank sinkhole of evil, with the Despair and Rage emotional taints, affecting a 300 foot radius around the Relentless. All Will saves in this radius (for anyone other than Van Riese and his minions) increase their DC by +6 while in the Ethereal Plane. (This +6 increase has been added to all relevant saving throws in this stat block.)

**Frightful Presence:** When the Relentless appears, all living creatures within 300 feet who see it must make a Will save (DC 32) or be panicked for 2d4 rounds. This is a visual necromantic mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that successfully saves against this effect cannot be affected by it again for twenty-four hours.

**Energy Drain (Su):** Living creatures hit by Van Riese's incorporeal touch attack gain three negative levels. This ability may be used once per round. The DC is 26 for the Fortitude save (Charisma based). For each negative level bestowed, Van Riese gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Dominate (Su):** Van Riese can crush an opponent's will just by looking onto his or her eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that Van Riese must use a standard action, and those merely looking at him are not affected. Anyone he targets must succeed on a Will save (DC 32) or fall instantly under Van Riese's influence as though by a dominate person spell (caster level 14th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.

**Rejuvenation:** If reduced to 0 hit points in the Material Plane, Van Riese and the

Relentless disappear, to reform elsewhere on the Sea of Sorrows at the next full moon. Only if the Relentless is sunk by attackers in the Ethereal Plane can Van Riese be laid to rest.

## The Relentless in the Ethereal Plane

In the Ethereal Plane the Relentless appears to be a normal, albeit extremely well-crafted, brigantine. It has a full crew, composed of ghosts bound to Van Riese's service and normal men who have taken ship with him for pay. The two groups are not easily distinguished, although many of the ghosts bear the marks of how they exited the mortal world.

Fighting the Relentless in the Ethereal Plane is, in a sense, easier than fighting it in the Material Plane, because it's actually possible to win (by sinking the Relentless). However, Van Riese's already formidable abilities are even more powerful in the Ethereal, and he can call on his full crew to aid him, rather than just the few bowlyns he can bring to his service in the Material Plane. Some of them are rather dangerous people in their own right, including the infamous darkling pirate Laszlo Durakes and the almost equally infamous Blaustein witch « Black Joan » Hargrave. In the Ethereal Van Riese will use his abilities to bolster his crew in addition to using his dominate and touch attacks and his spells.

**Relentless:** Colossal vehicle; Seaworthiness +8; Shiphandling +6; Speed wind × 40 ft. (good); Overall AC -3; Hull sections 30 (sink 10 sections); Section hp 80 (hardness 7); Section AC 3; Rigging Sections 3; Rigging hp 80 (hardness 2), AC 1; Ram 6d6; Mounts 2 light and 1 heavy;



Space 80 ft. by 25 ft.; Height 15 ft. (draft 10 ft.); Complement 40; Watch 10; Cargo 250 tons (Speed wind × 30 ft. if 150 tons or more).

## Crew of the Relentless

First Mate Laszlo Durakes, 12th level ranger, Naiat Vistani darkling (3rd magnitude ghost)

Second Mate « Black Joan » Hargrave, 6th level sorcerer (3rd magnitude ghost)

Bosun Blind Bill Vrakes, 6th level barbarian (2<sup>nd</sup> magnitude ghost)

Pierre « the Cat » Soucheaux, 5th level rogue (living man)

Hans Helgrim, 5th level fighter (living man)

Longshanks Laetemmer, 4th level fighter (2<sup>nd</sup> magnitude ghost)

Elspeet Maas, 4th level rogue (living woman)

5 3rd level followers

9 2<sup>nd</sup> level followers

## In ethereal

*NE Medium undead (5th rank ghost) bard*  
14

**Init** +; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +28, **Spot** +28

**Languages** Lamordian\*, Falkovnian, Mordentish, Balok

**Outcast Rating** 2

**AC** 29, **touch** 29, **flat-footed** 28 (+1 Dex, +14 deflection, +5 sinkhole)

**hp** 250 (20 HD), fast healing 5, **DR** 5/-

**Saves** Fort +30, Ref +27, Will +19

**Speed** 30 ft

**Melee** enervating touch, touch attack  
+16/+11/+6 (1d6 and 3 negative levels)

**Ranged** dominating gaze

**Base Atk** +15; **Grp** +19

**Skills** Bluff +37, Climb +14, Concentration +12, Diplomacy, Knowledge (geography) +26, Knowledge (nature) +26, Knowledge (Ravenloft) +10, Listen +, Move Silently +12, Profession (Sailor) +24, Search +20, Sense Motive +3\*, Spot +28\*, Survival + Use Rope +10

## 4<sup>th</sup> Edition game

### statistics

## Captain Pieter van Riese

**Level 21 solo controller**

Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP

**HP** 1240\* (620) **Bloodied** (310)

**AC** 37 **Fortitude** 35 **Reflex** 33 **Will** 35

**Immune** disease, poison **Resist**

insubstantial, necrotic 10, Vulnerable 5 radiant

**Saving Throws** +5

**Speed** 6

**Action Points** 2

\* 1240 hit points of damage must be done to the Relentless to kill Van Riese forever. If he takes 620 hit points of damage in the "material plane" of Ravenloft Van Riese is forced to disincorporate and the Relentless will disappear into the Ethereal. If encountered or followed into the Ethereal, Van Riese and the Relentless have 1240 hit points.

**Tangling Mist (minor, at-will)** Ranged 10, burst 2. Creates a patch of semi-solid fog; count as difficult terrain for all non-insubstantial creatures and grants concealment to insubstantial creatures and only insubstantial creatures.

**Spectral Touch (standard, at-will)** Melee +25 vs. Reflex, 2d8+9 necrotic plus dazed

**Double Blow (standard, at-will)** Van Riese makes two Spectral Touch attacks against an adjacent opponent, or one Spectral Touch attack against two opponents adjacent to him.

**Dominating Gaze (minor, at-will)** Ranged 10, +25 vs. Will. The target is dominated (save ends).

**Terror of the Seas (standard, encounter)** Close burst 20. +23 vs. Will. The target is stunned until the end of Van Riese's next turn. Aftereffect: The target gains Vulnerable 5 necrotic until the end of the encounter.

**Captain's Curse (standard, recharge 4, 5, 6)** Close burst 5, +23 vs. Will, 2d6 + 9 psychic plus dazed.

**All Hands On Deck (standard, recharge 6)** Van Riese summons six bowlyn minions from the Ethereal.

**Jump To Your Places (minor, at will)** Close burst 10. All minions in the burst may shift up to five squares and make a standard attack.

**Ball Lightning (standard, close burst 10, recharge 6)** Close burst 10. +23 vs. Reflex. 4d10+7 lightning damage.

**Relentless Shift (move, at will)** Van Riese shifts up to 10 squares (to a different point on the Relentless only).

Immune disease, poison; Resist insubstantial, 10 necrotic

**Speed 6**

**Spectral Touch** +19 vs Reflex, 8 damage plus slowed.

## Bowlyn Level 19 Minion

Medium shadow humanoid (undead)

**Initiative** +17 **Senses** +14; darkvision

**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion

**AC** 31 **Fortitude** 31 **Reflex** 28 **Will** 28



# THE LADY IN WHITE

By Andrew Jensen  
Art by Paladin-Ciel of Studio Aegis

Borca is a realm steeped in intrigue, treachery, and poison. A few who've been there say that what you need fear most are the people who live there, not the monsters. Even fewer whisper that the people are the monsters. This does not go to say that Borca is without its monsters, some that even exemplify certain human failings...

This adventure is a monster hunt and is well suited to the Van Richten's Guide approach. Consequently, the description of this scenario will be based on those guides, with separate sections for recommended events and optional complications. However, the monster in question is one that Van Richten himself never faced. It is a porcelain lady, a specific kind of walking dead. This monster is fully described in *Van Richten's Guide to the Walking Dead*.

Resources for Borca beyond the campaign setting book include *Ravenloft Gazetteer IV*. Looking up the legend of Elizabeth Bathory is also recommended, easily found on the internet. However, everything you need to play will be described in the adventure itself.

## Background

Buried in the history of Borca was a noble woman named Countess Irena. She was exceptionally vain, and ruthless. Fearing the relentless march of aging, she turned to dark magic to preserve her good looks. The most effective technique turned

out to be a ritual to bathe in the blood of virgins. She did this gladly, and was soon heralded as the most beautiful woman in the realm. However, her foul habits were uncovered by an enterprising elf adventurer, Loren. He revealed this truth to the then darklord, Camille Boritsi. Camille had felt threatened by Countess Irena's rising popularity and jealous of her beauty, and this shocking revelation had given her all the excuse she needed to act. With an incensed public behind her, Camille stripped Countess Irena of all rank and property, save for one mansion deep in the woods. She ordered the Countess sealed in one part of the manor, for lifetime house arrest. Unable to escape, Countess Irena was fed through a small aperture in one door. Her keeper was the very elf who had exposed her. Burning with a desire for vengeance, for he had lost loved ones to the vain Countess, Loren fed her slightly less every day. Thus, Countess Irena was doomed to starve to death, howling at the walls of her prison.

Now it is the present day. An enterprising group of thieves came across the ruins of the house while on the run from the local constabulary. Driven by the hopes of loot, they entered and broke open the door to her wing. Awakened by the loss of the old barrier and the proximity of blood, Countess Irena crawled back into the world, as an undead porcelain lady. Two of the thieves were ensnared by the power of her song, and quickly drained dry of blood. The other panicked and fled, but the monster

pursued them. One was eventually run down and his head smashed. The other escaped into the nearby village.

Immediate danger to herself gone, Countess Irena returned to her mansion, now lair. After a day or two, she ventured out for her first hunt. After a few weeks of her lethal stalking, the locals have begun to panic. They contacted the Van Richten Society, hoping that skilled monster hunters might resolve the issue...

## Principal characters

### Countess Irena

#### Appearance

When alive, the Countess was the Borcan ideal of beauty, with pale skin, black hair, delicate pose and grace. She has retained much of that, appearing as a striking woman in her twenties.

However, she is now clearly monstrous. Her eyes are now black empty pits, with trails of dried blood leading out of them. These

trails go down to her tattered white dress, leaving long, brown streaks.

When she drains blood from her victims, the blood leaks out of the black pits of her eyes. Her skin is now literally made of porcelain. In addition to being obviously unnatural, she now must break her own

skin to move. This doesn't impede her in most respects, though it's horribly painful, so she remains as stiff and unmoving as possible to avoid having to constantly re-break her own joints. It also does make audible noises when breaking, like broken plates being ground together.

#### Current Sketch, weaknesses and abilities

Countess Irena has precious little mind left to her. She's barely above an animal's level of intelligence. She is highly cunning and knows how to stalk prey and set up ambushes. However, right now she's driven solely by hunger and a sense of territoriality. This is not to say her that all elements of her personality are completely gone, though. Her vanity does remain.

When confronted with a mirror, she compulsively stops to admire herself. A

mirror presented forcefully can be used as a tactic by those wishing to confront or escape her. However, hostile action will break this spell and

prevent mirrors from working for the rest of the encounter.

Physically, the Countess is a powerful opponent. Her skin is made of porcelain, giving her a natural

armor. Unlike many creatures of the night, she does not burn.

While her black hair and white dress will quickly burn away, no damage will be





sustained. She is strong enough to smash through wood doors. She drains blood via porcelain-to-skin contact, often when using her unnatural dance ability. When not draining blood, she kills her victims by clubbing them on the head with her fists. Between her unnatural skin and strength, she can reduce most skulls to soggy bags of gore with just a few blows.

Perhaps her strangest ability is her song. By opening her mouth (accompanied by the sounds of her porcelain skin breaking) she can sing enchantingly. Anyone hearing it risks being compelled to come to her and sway. She will select her favorite from the lot and dance with them. The skin-to-skin contact of their hands will allow her to drain blood, eventually leaving her dancing partner a dried husk. Any others nearby will dance with her in turn or have their skulls crushed.

She has a keen sense in the environs of her home. She has a general sense of the location of intruders in her mansion. The Countess is also intimately familiar with it, and knows how to take advantage of every corner.

She prefers to operate at night, as she can see perfectly fine in the dark and knows that most of her prey cannot. However, sunlight does not cause her any harm or discomfort. She shares the standard undead invulnerabilities, such as poison. She uses the latter to her advantage, by traversing only the deadliest, and most poisonous, parts of her forest to travel to and from her mansion home. She is vulnerable to effects involving sacred or holy magic.

## Robin Tallowfoot

### Appearance

A Halfling creeping up on his forties, he is a rugged individual, used to spending

most of his time in the forests and hills of Borca. He wears the border guard uniform, and carries a short sword and sling. Robin has noticeable crow's feet around the eyes.

### Background

Robin's background is mostly unremarkable for a Halfling living in Borca. Mostly overlooked by the ruling class, he found employment as a ranger and border guard. This suited him fine, as it basically gives him some legal authority and a paycheck to do what he loves most. What he loves most is wandering around the woods and being alone. On occasion he has been called upon to help the lost or deal with problems. He deals with them with dispatch, and then goes back to his usual habits.

### Current Sketch

Robin is a highly skilled woodsman, who has found his employment with the Borcan elite to be agreeable. Despite an often dismissive attitude towards the townsfolk, he does feel a responsibility to them and wants to end the killings. He is aware of how badly productivity has fallen because of the attacks, and this is sure to invite attention from their landowner. And attention from him is never a good thing.

Robin can serve many purposes in the story. At first, he is there to guide the characters around and familiarize them with Borca. Later in the adventure, he can either serve as a helpful sidekick or die dramatically to emphasize the danger.

## Count Stepka

### Appearance

Paunchy from too many feasts, Count Stepka tries to style himself a dashing rogue but still maintain his noble air. He fails at both. His hair is excessively scented, his smile too unctuous and he generally fails to

project confidence and instead settles for arrogance.

## Background

Count Stepka is a minor noble, though he'll never permit anyone to say that. Recently he's come into financial trouble, owing largely to poor gambling habits. The sudden drop in productivity in his lands (small as they are) threatens to do worse than beggar him. He owes Ivan Dilisnya money, and he is sure he will be assassinated if he does not produce the funds soon.

## Current Sketch

The Count is desperate but doesn't want to let it on. He's convinced himself, before even seeing any evidence, that these "monster" attacks are simple brigands and the constabulary is too lazy to deal with it. He is sure that setting an example will right things and he can go back to the comfort of his home.

Count Stepka's role in the adventure is to bring added complications for the players. He will demand the entire inn for himself, and forcibly evict any occupants. Then he will find any one he deems suspicious and want them hanged. At the story teller's discretion, he can interfere in other ways, like demanding the characters pay a tax, be interrogated at critical moments, etc. It should be remembered that he is the legitimate authority when he arrives, and he comes with a substantial armed guard. The players should not be forced into confronting him violently. If they attack him, it should be because it's their plan. The story teller might have to remind them that if they do assault him, the townsfolk would be obliged to side against them. After all, the local darklords would hardly side with the little people!

Perhaps the most effective way to deal with Count Stepka is to convince him the

threat is real. Once he realizes what the real problem is, he'll know that all his other actions won't get him the money he so desperately needs. He may even contribute some of his guard to the effort, though he won't do anything to endanger himself.

## Most likely chain of events

### Discovery

This adventure assumes the players received an invitation, either due to their connections to the Van Richten Society or owing to their reputation as adventurers. They receive the invite by whatever means is most likely to engender trust. If the invitation is by any means other than Robin Tallowfoot, the missive contains only basic information. The letter (written by Robin) will convey the following bits of information. This information could also be gleaned from a talkative tavern.

- It will give accurate instructions to the village.
- It will relate how a series of killings have left the community terrified. It describes crushed bodies and corpses sucked dry of blood.
- It will reveal that the killer strikes at night.

At this point, players may be thinking that it is a vampire, possibly a starved one, judging from its rapacious nature and too obvious feeding habits. If Tallowfoot delivered the message personally, he can answer additional questions. The following clues can be found.

- He can confirm that the details in the message are factual.



- He knows the local area very well, so expect him to be able to answer questions of that nature reliably.
- The area is mostly quiet with no real history of monsters, at least in his lifetime.
- He doesn't know anything about the legend of Countess Irena.
- The attacks started on the farther outskirts, targeting cottages far away from everything except the forest. He fears the killer is working inward and will soon reach the village proper.

On the road to the village, the players come across the body of the thief who had been beaten to death. Given that some weeks have passed since his death, it is quite a decayed, picked over corpse. Still, some clues can be gleaned from the body and surroundings, using the right skills.

- The body, which was of an adult male, most likely human, 20-30 years of age.
- A short sword with repeatedly chipped edges.
- A tiny piece of porcelain.
- A rusted out pile of thief's tools.
- Likely cause of death was repeated, heavy blows to the skull. It is a little confusing though, because he was struck with enough force to indent the skull. Someone hitting with a proper weapon with that much force would have likely crushed the skull entirely. This suggests a very strong person using an improvised weapon.

## Confirmation

Upon arriving at the village, the players find a place gripped in mourning and fear. Another cottage was struck just the night before their arrival and there are another two dead. Anyone who does not live within the village proper is moving into it now, leaving the valuable and productive orchards abandoned. The people are

fearful, but welcome the players with enthusiasm if they had been sent for or if Robin vouches for them. Space is at a premium, but room is quickly made for them at the inn. Generally, the players should get the impression that this village is humble, but friendly, under less dire circumstances.

Most parties will want to go to the most recent crime scene while the clues are fairly fresh. Robin or another local can take them there without any problems. The scene is a cottage with multiple rooms and mostly unremarkable. There are two dead bodies out near the orchard. There is no sign of forced entry or foul play within the cottage itself.

- The husband, an older man about 45 years, was wearing his bed clothes. He has dirt on the soles of his naked feet. His head has been repeatedly pummeled with powerful blows.
- The wife is nearby on the ground. She is also barefoot and wearing her bedclothes. Tracks in the muddy ground clearly indicate she had been moving around in circles and back and forth. Her cause of death is exsanguination. She had all of her blood drained, leaving her bone white. Players checking for the typical bite marks of vampires or were-bats will find none. Countess Irena absorbs blood through osmosis and leaves no trace.
- Countess Irena left tracks in the muddy ground as well. The clues they leave are contradictory. In terms of shape they suggest a young woman wearing dancing shoes and they do follow the footsteps of the dead wife closely. This should definitely suggest the two were dancing together. However, the depth of the footprints would suggest someone much heavier, perhaps 200 to 300 pounds. The porcelain lady is quite heavy, but her rigid

skin does not allow her foot to flatten as it would with a normal human.

- The foot prints lead out of the forest and back into it. Coming out of it, it seems the intruder was moving at a leisurely stroll. Going back in, it's much the same but quickly picks up speed and moves through the forest with reckless abandon. The runner is unconcerned with branches, thorns or even poison and can run incredibly fast.

If players want to try and follow the trail directly to the mansion, you can decide how successful they are. Finding the lair will be discussed in another section.

## Reconnaissance and Research

If Count Stepka has not yet shown up in the story, now is a good time for him to appear and start making the lives of the players difficult.

Even without the interference of the Count, players have limited options for research. There are no known witnesses to the attacks and the only written records are for taxes. However, by asking around they can get some oral history and even find the only witness.

- Asking the elders of the town or hanging out at the pub long enough may net them the basics of the story. If the characters seem especially interested, they are recommended to Loren, the local elf.

- Loren will part with details of the story much more reluctantly. While he was witness, and even key to the events, they are still painful memories to him. Starving the Countess to death is also a source of shame for him. He will eventually tell all he knows if the players are persistent enough. He can even give reliable directions to the abandoned mansion.

- A known thief was found wandering, bedraggled and haggard a few weeks ago (before the killings began, if the players

think to ask) and has been jailed prior to the arrival of the proper authorities. Count Stepka definitely qualifies and intends to hang him forthwith. If the players make the connection between him and the corpse they found earlier they may want to question him. Given that he faces the noose without trial, it may take effort to convince him. Let the players decide how they get the info from him. The story teller should decide how much he can tell. He might have been the one to open the room or he might have been standing watch outside. At the very least he is able to confirm the monster's lair as the abandoned mansion and give rough directions to it. His directions will not be as reliable as Loren's though.

Without oral history, the players do have another means of investigation. A map can be drawn up showing the patterns of Countess Irena's attacks. Doing so reveals two helpful bits of information. First, the players can ascertain with relative ease the origin point of the attacks (deep in the forest). They can also make a reasonable guess as to the next target. It is another cottage at the edge of the forest, abandoned just a few days ago by fearful inhabitants.

## Trap at the Cottage

Depending on the confidence or the pugnacity of the players, they may be setting a trap or studying their enemy. Additionally, they have no reason to think at this point that their quarry has a sonic, area of effect mesmerizing attack. This scene could end in the players quietly slipping away after cautiously gathering data, or a brutal massacre of the players who have gravely misidentified and under-estimated their target.



The scene is similar to the last murder scene. It is a cottage near the forest, and has an apple orchard. There are three rooms in the cottage. It does have windows, but no glass, only shutters. The furnishings are simple but adequate. There is a small fireplace.

Countess Irena will use her typical hunting tactics. Alert players will hear the sounds of broken porcelain rubbing together before she arrives. When she is near the cottage, her mouth will painfully break open and she will begin to sing. Entranced characters will walk out to her. She will dance with her chosen one, sucking out all the blood. Then she will either dance with some more, or the club the rest to death. Countess Irena will flee if it becomes apparent she is outnumbered by hostiles, if she is seriously injured, or if it seems there is no prey in the cottage.

Storytellers looking to make a simple operation more complicated can have NPCs present fall under her hypnotic sway, forcing players to act. Count Stepka or his goons could barge in at an inopportune moment.

## Countess Irena

### Counterattacks

This event can happen either after an initial confrontation with the Countess Irena or if the Countess realizes that her prey has fled into town. The Countess will strike into the town itself. She can attack when the players are talking to an important NPC, or she can attack a player when they are alone. While Countess Irena attacking in the dark can play on the usual fears, having her launch an attack during the day can startle players significantly, especially if they had assumed that a weakness.

Consider the reaction of the town, especially if Countess Irena attacks during the day. Panic could lead to a mass exodus or people could form desperate mobs. Players may suddenly find their home base becoming very dangerous indeed. Count Stepka could flee and add to the panic, or could try to exert control through draconian methods.

## The Kill

### Finding the Mansion

Eventually the players will try to find the mansion. They have many ways to do it at this point. Interviews with Loren and the thief give directions, triangulating the sites of attacks will have helped and they can even follow Countess Irena's footsteps. Borca is known for its overabundance of poisonous flora and fauna. It is recommended that the party runs into at least some of it for theme, and more can be thrown at the party to wear them down. Countess Irena is not smart enough to set up traps, but following her is perhaps the most risky method as she will deliberately walk through the most dangerous areas and will incorporate natural obstacles like ravines.

### The Mansion

Once a grand manse, this building has fallen to decay and rot. Players can break into almost any entrance on the ground floor with minimal effort. The Countess uses the main entrance. Countess Irena does not set any traps within her domicile (not intelligent enough for that), but there are weak floors and walls which will behave much like them. The mansion is also surrounded by a sharp, rusty iron fence which could impale those trying to jump out

a window. The Countess intuitively senses these weaknesses and knows how to avoid and exploit them.

The area most likely to attract the attention of the players is the upper right wing. All the windows are barred, the blinds drawn. This was the area where the Countess was imprisoned. It is where she most likely "rests" for lack of a better term, and where more information might be found.

No map is provided of the mansion as this scene is not designed to be a dungeon. Storytellers are encouraged to either let the players wander around or find maps online they think will suit. Suggestions for additional rooms are given at the end of the scenario.

## Confronting Countess Irena

One thing the storyteller should pay careful attention to is how the players plan for the insidious song of their quarry. If they do not try deafen themselves or create silence, then they will be vulnerable to her song. She will attempt to mesmerize them or separate them, allowing her to pick off her enemies singly. If they do deafen themselves, then they are sneaking about the lair of a monster while they can't hear. Countess Irena will be quite happy to simply walk up to the last person in line. Perhaps one of the best options is to deafen themselves, but tie themselves off to one another.

One apocalyptic trick Countess Irena has involves an oil lantern. While she values her home, she is more concerned with killing her hunters. She will take a lit oil lantern, hold it above her head and crush it. This ignites the oil and spills it all over her. Countess Irena then runs towards the players attacking them while covered in flame and igniting the entire house around them. If you want a visual reference for

this scene, watch *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein*.

It is possible players decide to burn down the house themselves. This is fine. Let them do it. Then you can decide how to proceed. Either the unharmed Countess Irena comes crawling out of the flames *Terminator*-style or (perhaps more true to the horror vibe) she lies low in the wreckage then attacks the players when they feel safe or comfortable.

## Epilogue

The adventure ends with the destruction of the porcelain lady, Countess Irena. If Robin Tallowfoot is alive he is genuinely grateful to the players for their help, and may be an ally in the future, or even take up monster hunting himself. The villagers for their part will be ecstatic and will fully reward the players with the agreed upon amount. They will also hold an impromptu festival. Count Stepka is much harder to predict. Depending on how he was handled he could anything from a bitter enemy or reluctant ally.

## More Options and Twists

*There's treasure out there!*

In this variant, Countess Irena had great wealth before her imprisonment. The thieves didn't stumble across her mansion by chance. They were treasure hunters. Count Stepka isn't here to restore order, he wants the treasure for himself. Involving lost treasure can raise the stakes and bring in more interference from competitors. Is there any treasure? If there is, what form does it take? Is it cursed, or can the Countess sense its location? What do the players do with it, once the Countess is slain? The storyteller should be aware this



makes Countess Irena seem more like an ancient dead than a walking dead.

## More power for the Countess!

The original description of the porcelain lady attributes powers to her bloody tears. These form a pool around her, infecting any who touch it with confusion. It is a good way to interfere with melee focused characters or to just make things more gruesome. The original description also says that she drains blood by gaze alone, another option for making the monster tougher. The versatility of her song could also be enhanced. Rather than simply making the victims stand and sway, perhaps she can command them to do things, such as attack others or walk into a trap.

## The Countess has company

In this version, the Countess can create spawn. Only the best looking men and women are eligible for this. Upon draining their blood, she takes their bodies back to her lair, and through processes best left unknown, turns them into lesser versions of herself. They lack her special powers, but remain tough combatants in their own right.

## Room of Mirrors

The Countess has a ballroom full of mirrors. Taken from other parts of the house or stolen from outside, it is the one place where she can admire herself without interruption. This is an option that adds some ambience to the mansion but can also be used as a trap by players. They could even just take a mirror and use it against her. For an extra horrific element, she might have bodies in the room too, as a captive audience.

## Acknowledgements

I took inspiration from various sources for this project.

- First and most obviously is the book *Van Richten's Guide to the Walking Dead*. It is the source of the porcelain lady monster and a highly recommended read.
- *Ravenloft Gazetteer IV* is an excellent source for anything Borcan, and it was frequently consulted throughout this adventure.
- *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein* did provide some inspiration, especially in the concept of self-immolation via oil lamp.
- *I, Claudius* is where I got the idea of starving someone to death one mouthful at a time.
- The illustration of the Porcelain Lady was made by Paladin-Ciel of Studio Aegis.
- My posting of the art on DA. <http://fav.me/d90ilke>
- The link to see many other works by Paladin-Ciel. <http://paladin-ciel.deviantart.com/>

# THE BRIGHTWELL LEGACY

By M.H. "Rock" Bartels

*From the Correspondence Files of  
Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove.  
October 15<sup>th</sup>, 760 BC.*

To the ladies Weathermay-Foxgrove,

***Have the two of you taken leave of  
your meagre senses?***

When I first agreed to this correspondence, it was with the understanding that what personal information I consent to share with you would remain private between the three of us, and was not to be shared with third parties.

Recent events have led me to conclude, however, that you have betrayed this trust and given away the location of my safe-house in Skald! You are the only ones to whom I have entrusted this information, and yet I have been tracked down there and was forced to flee, abandoning several items of personal interest!

To say that I am outraged is an understatement!

I *demand* an explanation for this breach of trust! You will understand my not providing you with a return address; instead, hand your reply to the messenger who has delivered my missive.

-μ

*Greetings, gentle reader. I am Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove.*

*I received the letter preceding this note in the middle of October, when temperatures were already dropping below the freezing point at night, and the fog was thick around Mordentshire in the afternoons. The courier was... unique. My sister and I were already familiar with the stories about tressym, winged felines which may serve arcanists as familiars, but we had never seen one before.*

*Having read the message it brought us from the contact who prefers to be known only as μ in our correspondence and files, we were deeply startled.*

*We had first made the acquaintance of μ four years ago, due to a series of 'events' at the Asylum of Shattered Souls, near Vallaki. Although our investigation brought to light that μ was responsible, we chose to let her go due to certain extenuating circumstances – circumstances which we agreed with μ are her own concern and must lie on the conscience of the alienist who treated her there – or at least, who dignified his cruelties towards μ as treatment.*

*In the years since, we kept in touch with μ, if only to be certain that she had kept good faith with us and not continued*



causing 'events'. Until the letter above arrived, I believed we had built a good working relationship with our sometimes irascible acquaintance, who is prone to hermit-like levels of self-isolation and sudden disappearances. Disappearances, I wish to add, which she always explained by writing to us from far-flung regions where she had been driven by her singular obsession: the desire to return Home.

Our working relationship has always been based on an exchange of information. While  $\mu$  is generous in sharing the cosmological lore she has been gathering and is a fairly reliable contact when it comes to the analysis of scientific devices, she has asked that we alert her as to any rumours or lore we find which relates to journeys through the Mists to places far distant from our beleaguered lands. It was our great pleasure to provide her with one of the first copies of Van Richten's Guide to the Mists – and now this!

We immediately penned a message, informing  $\mu$  that rather than betraying her location, we had given the address of what she calls a 'mail-drop' in Kartakass to our good friend, Toret Johann Severin of Levkarest, when the latter informed us that he had been contacted by someone who offered to share a recent trove of tomes dealing with planar matters..

After handing the letter to the impatiently waiting tressym, which had refused all food and drink and would not even come inside to be warm, we watched as the creature flew off at speed.

We could only wait anxiously for what would come next. While  $\mu$  is not exactly a friend, we have benefited from her insights before – and worried what might happen if she became so agitated as to consider us enemies and came to consider herself free from the promises she had made to us to

secure her freedom after the 'events' at the Asylum of Shattered Souls.

Fortunately, the following letter reached us not too long after.

-- GWF

*From the Correspondence Files of  
Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove.  
October 30<sup>th</sup>, 760 BC.*

To the ladies Weathermay-Foxgrove,

I find myself on the horns of a dilemma.

On the one hand, I am still upset that you have given away information about my whereabouts to an individual of whom I possessed no prior acquaintance, leading to considerable discomfort on my part.

On the other, I now understand why you decided to do so, and I can find no fault with you or the gentleman in question for having been deceived. I am not perfect, after all, and have myself been gulled quite effectively over the years.

Will you consent to accept my apologies for my coarse language in my previous missive, as well as to continue our correspondence? There are matters which have come to light as a result of the deceit practised against you and the indignities practised against my own person that I feel you should know about.

Best regards,

--  $\mu$

*We were, of course, happy to agree to this offer and informed  $\mu$  accordingly, using her tressym courier.*

-- GWF

*From the Correspondence Files of  
Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove.  
November 12<sup>th</sup>, 760 BC.*

To the ladies Weathermay-Foxgrove,

I first became aware that my location in Skald, Kartakass, had been compromised when I went out to buy my groceries, at the very end of September. Such a banal way of becoming aware of pursuit...

To be precise, my usual green grocer, a gentleman whose girth I believe to be due to a love of the nearby butcher's wares and copious infusions of dark ale in the evenings, rather than his own produce, and whose garrulousness has given me cause for annoyance more than once, stopped me before I could leave his store and started babbling about gypsies and the dangers thereof.

His was a rambling diatribe, which seemed rather pointless to me at the time. Frankly, I was tapping my foot and about to deliver a remark along the lines of my need to store my purchases before they started to rot, when he finally said something that surprised me.

"What are you talking about?" I recall saying to him. "I don't have any tru – business with gypsies."

"One of them was asking for you around this very street," the green grocer insisted – and actually put his hands on my shoulders to emphasize his seriousness (a loathsome experience for me at the best of times and with far cleaner people!). "Knew you by name and described you perfectly! Please, dear lady, take my advice to heart and break ties. Vistani can only bring sorrow, as my dear old granny said. Why, I remember she sang us a song..."

I excused myself before he could start to sing, something I am sure offended him

down to his Kartakan soul. Alas, you may recall that I have no love for having people sing close to me, which might make Kartakass seem an odd choice for me to go to ground.

*Rather, this decision seems typical of  $\mu$  when one considers her desire for secrecy and her sense of caution, which betimes border on paranoia. Her dislike for what she calls 'live song' is well-known in certain circles.*

-- LWF

I made my way back to my safe-house by an indirect route; a decision I was glad of at the time, as it allowed me to spot a Vistana who was watching the house before *he* could spot *me*.

Needless to say, I high-tail – I left Skald with alacrity.

*At times, the reader may notice that  $\mu$  uses an odd vernacular. It is only due to her frugal nature that we have become at all aware of these little lapses; she refuses to write a letter anew, on fresh paper, once she has committed a significant portion thereof already. After consulting with my sister, we have decided to reproduce these bits of vernacular. If  $\mu$ 's assertions are true, that she hails from lands beyond the Mists and that others do so as well, then perhaps one of them will recognize the language of Home and a meeting might be brokered to mutual benefit.*

-- LWF

My emergency supplies were still where I had hidden them when I first acquired my safe-house in Skald, and included sufficient funds to buy a fast horse and the other things I needed for a long overland trip.



I managed to make my way to Immol, Barovia, without killing either myself or my horse.

The innkeeper of the Bolting Stag Inn was content to receive me again, and I was prepared to settle down in Barovia's most culturally diverse town for some time.

Of course I was well-aware of the number of Vistani who call Barovia their safe haven, but I erroneously believed I had shaken off my unknown pursuer and assumed that his business with me had been wholly his own, and not a matter for all his people.

I remained in this happy state of self-deception until the Vistani caravan rolled into Immol. Never underestimate the importance of making a friend of local innkeepers, dear ladies! I

had, of course, kept to my room at the Bolting Stag after I saw the *vardos* trundle into town, but the innkeeper came up to warn me that the Vistani had been asking questions around town. It seemed they were asking about a woman whose description closely resembled my own.

Since the Barovians know the Vistani to be the eyes and ears of Count Strahd von Zarovich and few natives of his realm dare refuse him the least little thing, the innkeeper was sure that the Vistani would soon know exactly where I might be found. (I admit there was probably an element of self-interest to his warning me; if I was attacked by Vistani under his roof and dragged into the streets for all to see, it would undoubtedly be bad for business one way and another.)

Again, I fled, using back roads and game trails. I regret to report that my horse did not survive long enough to see another stable; wolves attacked me as I approached Vallaki and would not be put off by bullets. I wound up having to run into town, the sound of breaking bones and rending flesh

still in my ears, and counted myself fortunate to have traded my pitiable mount's life for my own.

I did not stay long in Vallaki; by now, I was convinced the Vistani as such were after me for some reason, and I felt little desire to face them or their employer, who I assumed to be Count von Zarovich at the time, although I was puzzled as to what business the Count might have with me.

So from Vallaki I went to Krezk, from Krezk I headed across the border with the intention of travelling to Levkarest, Borca (deeply grateful not to encounter a barrier of toxic fog in my way, although I wondered why the Count would be content to have me chased by his gypsies but not seal me in his land with his black sorcery).

While I am no Ezran, I do have a few contacts at the Great Cathedral in Levkarest, and I hoped to find sanctuary there. I have found worse ways to occupy my time than by hiding in a church's catacombs, copying books until my troubles have blown over.

*Interesting, that  $\mu$  had remained unknown to Johann Severin despite being familiar with the Great Cathedral! I can only assume that her tendency to wear disguises and change names, not to mention her unfortunate self-isolation, has allowed this. Perhaps the dear Toret actually does know her, but by a different name than we did – and  $\mu$ 's insistence on secrecy has worked against her. If Toret Severin and she are acquainted under other names, they might have had a more secure channel for passing information, and her home in Skald might not have been compromised.*

-- GWF

Sadly, the saying about the best-laid plans of mice and men applies:

My relief at being more or less safely out of Barovia, where the Vistani are agents of the government, combined with the road-weariness engendered by my lack of a horse and inability to buy a replacement due to my shrinking funds, caused me to relax my guard. When I encountered a roadside inn – one I had not scouted before and which I had never encountered along the road to Levkarest until that day – I foolishly went inside instead of travelling the last few miles that separated me from the Great Cathedral's catacombs.

*The Black Boar* looked to be an inn of decent quality. Its rooms were simple but clean, the common room was pleasant and not too smoky, and the meal I ordered was of decent quality and quantity.

I dined on lamb, roast potatoes and fresh greens, drank a pot of jasmine tea, and retired to my room. I was nervous enough to place a few small wards in addition to setting up several other measures to guarantee my privacy. I will not bore you with the details of all I did in the name of security, but in the end I slept.

I slept well at first, but nightmares haunted me towards the end of my sleep; images of small animals being molested by larger in the name of competition for the same resources. As I started awake, I realized something was wrong.

Gone was the feeling of a soft down mattress beneath me, the scent of wood varnish and the comfortable warmth of the indoors. I found myself lying in dew-wetted moss in the dank shadows of a Borcan forest. Worse, I found myself restrained by leather belts, cinched around my body.

Worst of all, I found myself not alone. A Vistana woman sat nearby on a tree stump, her legs crossed at the ankles. She was laying those damnable cards the gypsies use to predict the future on her skirts, her expression amiable but smug.

"Good morning," she said when she noticed me struggling against my bonds. "You're a difficult person to get hold of."

I did not deign to reply; I only continued trying to break free until something touched the soft skin beneath my ear. Something small and sharp. A high, childish voice screeched behind my head.

"She's frolicsome, see this one! Aye, but a slice or two about the joints will see her settled for the pot!"

I froze in place; the Vistana laughed. I dare say I would have liked her laugh better had it not been at my expense.

"No, no," she said. "This is fine, this is fine. Now then, Miss –, I am here to give you a reading and to inform you of a new discovery of something old, which will interest you. Once you have heard all that we would tell you, I am going to leave you here for Fie-Fetch, and your fate is in his hands and your own."

*Note, gentle reader, that  $\mu$  herself chose to omit the name by which she was addressed by the Vistana. While it is possible that she merely wishes to hide one of her 'shell' identities, as she calls them, I can not help but wonder whether the Vistani might know her true name; something that  $\mu$  once casually confessed to not having shared with us.*

-- GWF

"I would prefer if you released me before telling me all these things I apparently must know," I said, doing my best to speak as diplomatically as I could. "Or after, if needs must."

The Vistana laughed again and shook her head so her dark curls swung to and fro. "Alas, the choice is not yours," she said. "If you had simply spoken to us when we first tried to approach you, then things



might have been different. Twice more alas, you had to be difficult, and we needed to procure the services of Fie-Fetch to trap you.

There is a price to be paid for such."

I set that final sentence apart to reflect her sudden change of tone. From whimsical, she became dead serious, even threatening.

I licked my lips, betraying nervousness. Behind me, the unpleasant Fie-Fetch cackled with mirth.

"Look," I said. "I... apologize for running, but I did not know why you were looking for me. Your people are powerful and mysterious and..."

The Vistana reached out and pressed a finger against my lips. A foul taste filled my mouth and my jaw went numb, leaving me unable to speak.

"All of this could have been avoided," she said, her voice sweet, "if you had shown good manners. Instead, you have insulted the Vistani and whatever happens next is your own fault. Understand this, and learn from it."

She leaned back and gave me a reading. I am not fond of attempts to read or predict the future by any means. Faith, I am not fond of magic of any sort. Despite this, I vividly recall the cards she showed me, though not how she interpreted them. When sleep eludes me and I lie in the dark, I sometimes see those cards when I close my eyes.

In the centre, the Raven.

One down, the Nine of Glyphs.

Two down, the Ten of Stars.

Third and final down, the Prison.

One up, on the right, the Six of Glyphs.

One up, to the left, the Four of Stars reversed.

Two up, on the right, the Two of Swords.

Two up, on the left, the Ace of Stars.

"Remember this," the Vistana said, her voice sweet again, "for it is important."

"Why is it that you give me this reading?" I asked. "I have not crossed your palm with silver."

"That was already done by someone who feels it important that you learn certain things," the Vistana told me, her smile widening.

She put down a final card, eclipsing the Raven: the Two of Coins, reversed.

When I lie in the dark watching the cards, sometimes I think I glimpse this one out of the corner of my mind's eye, but it never comes forward. It vexes me that this is so, and yet I know not why.

"Is there any chance you would tell me my mysterious benefactor's name?" I asked.

The Vistana just laughed. She pulled something out of her pocket that I at first thought was a card, but it turned out to be a photo – a daguerrograph, of the type whose use is now so popular in Paridon, but which is also spreading to Dementlieu.

For a second, I could have sworn my heart had stopped.

"Yes, your benefactor told me that this would look familiar to you," the Vistana said. How do I explain it?

Despite the claims of those idiots at the Asylum of Shattered Souls, I *know* I came from outside this world of yours five years ago. Events transpired to land me in the thrice-damned Mists and when I came out of them, I was... here.

For five long years, I have been slinking and creeping my way through these blighted lands like a crippled mouse or a wounded snake. For five long years, I have been seeking a way home, any way home, and found nothing. There have been rumours of portals that came to nothing;

there have been tantalizing hints; and there have been things – places, people, words – that reminded me so strongly of home that it smote my heart.

Imagine how I felt when I saw the daguerrograph of buildings whose architecture did not just *remind* me of my home beyond the Mists, but *was* the very architecture I had known growing up in –. (Apologies, ladies Weathermay-Foxgrove, but I dare not release too much information about my childhood home, lest it be used against me for divination spells.)

Truth, these buildings looked weathered and old, but the style was unmistakable to me. Allowing for the time-weathered look, they were identical to buildings I had walked past a thousand times and more, when I was young and still lived with my family.

I repeat: I felt as if my heart had stopped for a second. The next, it started to pound so loudly in my chest that I would not have been surprised if the Vistana or the loathsome Fie-Fetch had commented on it.

"Your benefactor," the Vistana told me as she dropped the daguerrograph on my chest, "who prefers to remain anonymous, wishes for you to know that this street is located on the outskirts of Pont-a-Museau."

Warmth was throbbing in my jaw, all of a sudden, and I tried to say something, but my voice caught in my throat and my eyes were blurry. I heard the Vistana laugh, as if at a distance.

"I can see the message has interested you," she said. "If only you had found it within you to give the Vistani the benefit of the doubt, you might already have been on your way to Richemulot."

Apologies, questions, pleas, they all thronged to get out and got in each other's way. I could not find the right words. But I was aware, underneath the painful tangle of

emotions constricting my throat, that I was in immediate danger, now that the message had been delivered; and so I sent out a silent call for help.

"Well then," the Vistana said as she rose. "With this thought, I leave you. Fie-Fetch, you are free to claim your payment in full."

"Aye, 'tis pay she will though pay would fain not," Fie-Fetch cackled. "Be on yer white horse with ye; our time toge'er is done."

Something cold, clammy and horribly *wrong* caressed my cheek as I heard the Vistana's laugh recede into a great distance. The sense of her presence dwindled and was gone – and a slight weight landed on my chest. Something sharp poked my cheek, just below the eye.

"Paid 'tis I shall be," Fie-Fetch said, "for serving yon wench with glamer and trick. But for taking her coin I am readily paid in full by he who both we know, know not, and yet shall have known again for e'er and e'er. So shall ye walk away from here, verily on yer ain two feet – but might not look as ye do now when part we do, for Fie-Fetch shall be paid in full!"

I tried to blink the tears out of my eyes, to clear my throat, but Fie-Fetch's sharp object pricked my neck at once, restraining me. Through the lens of unshed tears, I saw Fie-Fetch's silhouette standing on top of me like a hunter with one foot on a dead animal. He was small of stature, whatever he was – and I could just make out that he wore a red cap.

I cursed in thought and redoubled my silent call for aid.

"Wait," I finally managed to croak. "Wait. Who? Who is paying you?"

"Ye'll fain know his name, as ye knew it afore, and he knows yours," Fie-Fetch cackled, raising high something that looked like a spear. "Aye, and know again and



ne'er while ye scream yer way down to yon city and the screams of all who see – "

My help arrived, yowling at the top of more than a dozen voices. Some of those voices were angry, others were gleeful. All brought with them furry bodies, sharp claws and sharp teeth. Fie-Fetch was knocked off of me by a calico streak and others followed. I heard the vicious little brute scream, heard cats yowl in pain and outrage, and then there was a buzzing of wings, followed by the sound of cats running in pursuit.

I called out to my own Tom-Cat, my companion, and heard him yowl to the others to make them return.

I had need of those keen teeth to get me out of the bindings that prevented me from getting up off of the dew-soaked ground...

Best regards,

--  $\mu$

*From the  
Correspondence Files  
of Gennifer  
Weathermay-  
Foxgrove.*

*November 21<sup>st</sup>, 760 BC.*

To the ladies Weathermay-Foxgrove,

I travelled through Borca at breakneck speed and entered Richemulot, using every means at my disposal – including some which I would not otherwise use, such was

my hurry. I called in favours I had built up over those five years; I tapped hidden caches I had squirreled away for emergencies; when night found me, I communed with Tom-Cat, drawing in arcane power to help speed and secure my journey.

(And had to endure his feeling of satisfaction with my filling myself with

power daily, instead of when bitter need forced my hand.)

Whenever I settled down to sleep, I set every trap and barrier I was capable of. When I travelled through populated areas, I wore the best disguises I could come up with in a hurry. You see, I knew now that someone had their eye on me. Someone who had already paid the Vistani to track me down to deliver this message of the buildings in Pont-a-Museau.

Besides my 'mystery benefactor', there was the unpleasant Fie-Fetch. I had no guarantee that he was dead and he struck me as the

vindictive type.

All in all, I felt hunted and feared I was rushing to put my head in a noose – and yet I could not refuse the bait that had been dangled before me. So while I rushed in, I also made preparations.

Yes, I rushed to Pont-a-Museau, but I did not immediately go rushing *about*,



showing my daguerrograph to every blackguard on the streets. Rather, I sought lodging at a modestly reputable inn and collected some money from one of the accounts that I maintain in Richemulot.

(Modern banking has been a great boon to me, dear ladies, I don't mind telling you. The funds I took from the Asylum of Broken Tears have not gone to waste over the past four years.)

For a week, I spent day and night going from certain specialized shops to certain libraries to my inn room and around again. The time I did not spend collecting supplies and information, I put to use constructing a couple of devices and brewing several potions. You may recall the time I spent in Lamordia and the blueprints I sent you for a 'shock-glove' after I completed my studies there?

(It never ceases to amaze me that some of your world's scholars have access to such refined technology when – apologies for the insult – so much of it languishes in circumstances I can only see as primitive from the perspective of my education.)

Please find enclosed my upgraded design for that weapon, as well as the blueprints for what I shall call 'microscopic goggles' and the 'ripple glass'. I trust on your discretion and your wisdom not to divulge these designs to anyone who can not be trusted to use them responsibly.

*These blueprints now sit in our archive, gathering dust, I fear. While we know people who can be trusted to use such items responsibly, none of them have the skills to make or repair them – or else they prefer to rely on magical items, instead. Of those we know who have the scientific skills required, few are of an inclination to join the Hunt – or have dispositions that make*

*us hesitate to give them access to μ's designs...*

*-- LWF*

Faith, I would have crafted even more useful items, but I was already highly anxious and becoming moreso.

During my stay in this fetid city, I have had enough unpleasant encounters to suit anyone's tastes, but none of these appear to have been at all personal. Which is to say, no one was out to inconvenience me, specifically; it was all random malice, such as one might expect of a Richemuloise city even at the best of times. This should have eased my mind with regards to the pursuit I suspected, but it did not. It made me feel that the trap set for me had been constructed by someone of great patience and organisational skill, and that made me more nervous.

I dithered between the need for action and the need for greater caution – and was galvanized into action when I opened the curtains of my inn room and spotted odd petroglyphs, scribbled in the corners of my windows in ash. My room, I should point out, was two stories up. My inn, I would add, possessed commendable security, including an absolute rule that all sewer access was to be locked and barred after sundown.

So I had no doubt in my mind as to who was responsible for these scribbles, and had applied them without tripping the wards I had placed on my room. Fie-Fetch had come to collect his pound of flesh...

I put on my boots, readied my goggles and glove, cranked up the clockwork, packed the scientific and magical equipment I thought most useful for my first foray, stowed my weaponry, and actually managed to walk out of the inn without falling over from the collective weight. I daresay I got a few odd looks from the



people who had noticed me going about in the days leading up to my first foray, but this did not concern me at the time. After a brief stop-over at the fish market, I proceeded on my way.

By an indirect route, of course.

You may recall my mentioning that I had visited various libraries in Pont-a-Museau. To cover the exact nature of my interest, I had studied numerous subjects, in order to confound anyone who tried to trace my steps and thoughts. I must admit that some of the side-lines I pursued to cover my true interest proved quite interesting, and I duly added them to my notebooks on magical and planar lore. In addition, I found some fine samples of poetry and botanical lore imported from Borca, their quality such that I paid for copies of both.

My main interest, however, had been in paintings. And not just any paintings, but paintings of the streets of Pont-a-Museau. It is by studying this subject that I found the object of my interest, conveniently painted by an artist of middling talent some thirteen years ago, after which he had submitted a copy of his work to the library – probably in hopes of generating a greater interest in his work.

(I researched the artist in question a bit, and must conclude he never found the audience he desired in Richemulot, causing him to migrate to Port-a-Lucine in search of more free-spending art-lovers. The last mention I found of him said he had contracted pneumonia... Alas.)

Out I went, to see the street of my desires – and I did not go alone. Locating the street had not taken too much of my time, and I had ordered Tom-Cat to set up a steady surveillance. As I came closer to my target, Tom-Cat's agents came slinking out of alleys and leapt out of garbage cans,

mewing and crowding around my ankles, then following after as I proceeded.

(You see now, dear ladies, why I took an indirect route with as few people around as I could find.)

By the time I arrived at the street, the cobbles behind me were packed with meowing, purring bodies, and I was the object of rapt attention. I dutifully shared out the fish I had bought for the occasion, paying the eyes-and-ears that Tom-Cat had recruited and securing their loyalty – such as it was – for future services. While my furry agents gorged themselves and squabbled over the choicest bits, I cast my eyes on the street for the first time.

Truth, I had to interrupt my scrutiny several times to wipe the tears from my eyes. Apart from the fact that this street lay on one of Pont-a-Museau's wretchedly fragrant canals and was weathered by time, the elements, and Richemuloise grime, it was the spitting image of a street I used to take on my way to school... Even the numbers affixed beside the rotting doors were exactly the same! Needless to say, the street sign proclaiming this to be the *Rue d'Absinthe* was in High Mordentish and considerably newer than the rest – all due to the Reniers' efforts to ease navigation around Pont-a-Museau, I expect – but still filled me with a shudder of recognition.

You see, the street from my memories was known as *Wormwood Street*.

How it was possible for this street to be here, and to fit so seamlessly into both the surrounding city and my memory, was a matter which filled me with dread. Regardless, I had to pursue my investigation. Who only knew what hints of the way Home might still linger here?

Best regards,

--  $\mu$

*From the Correspondence Files of  
Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove.  
November 23<sup>d</sup>, 760 BC.*

Dear ladies Weathermay-Foxgrove,

Your world has a decided knack for throwing wrenches – for fouling up even the best-laid and simplest plans.

Having discreetly removed my belongings from the inn and relocated my base of operations to an abandoned house opposite the street so reminiscent of the one of my acquaintance, I took several precautions.

I filled all the rooms I did not need to use with Tom-Cat's army of spies, paying them with regular portions of fish. This way, my temporary lair was surrounded on all sides with alert predators, which I hoped would be enough to dissuade the odious Fie-Fetch from causing me any trouble.

(Naturally, I doused the lot of them with flea-bane as soon as I could.)

I wrapped the entire building in such protective magics as I could muster and set up other spells to warn me of any approach by a creature that was not a cat.

When I was satisfied with the state of my 'lair', I set up various monitoring devices, which I have crafted over the years, and activated them to passively receive data. After one day of this, when I was satisfied that there were no immediately harmful emanations coming from the street, I moved to active reconnaissance.

I was fortunate in that this neighbourhood is wholly abandoned, dear ladies – fortunate, yet also made cautious, hence my taking passive readings for a full day before I moved in myself. With Tom-Cat at my heels, I started exploring the abandoned houses, starting at the westernmost terminus, going through them

from top to bottom, room by room, leaving not an inch unexplored.

All the time I was exploring, I felt tense, ready for an attack that never came. I was prepared for wererats, for ethereal entities, for brigands – and none of them materialized. There were no old traps laid by the inhabitants, no structural flaws that threatened to tumble the gently decaying houses on my head or send me plunging to a hideous death. All was quiet, all was peaceful – and what few items I found left were surprisingly well-preserved.

Oh, I do not doubt that vagrants and looters – or explorers, if you prefer – had combed this street when Pont-a-Museau first appeared and in the years since, but I found little treasures that had apparently escaped their notice. That, or Tom-Cat and some of his companions – females all, of course – ferreted them out and brought them to me. Little bits of jewellery with designs not native to your world but mine, fossilized candy in wrappers I recognized from my childhood, clockwork toys now too broken to move, a poetry diary crumbling with age but still mostly legible – and filled with bad poems written in one of the languages of Home. Nothing completely earth-shattering, yet all so very precious to *me*, personally.

So much for the purely physical finds. Thanks to my newly-minted goggles and various minor spells, I discovered other things. Not more of those wretched petroglyphs, thank – thank the Heavens, but fading echoes of frequent and profound acts of power that had taken place over a long period of time, until the auras had sunk into stone and mortar and lingered there.

On the one hand, this made me feel cautiously hopeful. On the other, it filled me with dread as it fit rather too well with my memories of this street, and I was



becoming certain that the source of these echoes would prove to be house number **14**.

I was debating going there while still scouting out the attic of number **6** when I heard a noise coming from downstairs. My eyes went immediately to Tom-Cat, who was dashing down the stairs with his little harem – a harem whose membership had changed over the course of the day, but whose number remained fairly constant – and I heard a cry of alarm and a loud crash.

I dashed down the stairs myself, sword cane in hand, and came upon a scene that was both comical and tragic.

Tom-Cat and his females had cornered a young woman, who I judged to be of Valachani descent, though she wore Dementlieuse fashions, in the living room. She was fending them off with an old chair, her eyes wide with shock but one hand going for a pistol at her belt. A great cedar-wood cabinet I had noticed when looking in through the front window, once used to display a rather fine collection of crockery, had somehow been knocked over and now lay facedown, surrounded by shards of porcelain. A single plate with a periwinkle design around its edge was spinning to a halt on the floor, miraculously and comically unbroken.

"What have you *done*?" I cried out before I could catch myself. "It's ruined!"

My anger set Tom-Cat hissing at the stranger, his females following suit, but they held back from attacking – for the moment. Fortunately, the young lady was not of an overly fearful disposition and she refrained from discharging her pistol at any of us.

"*Me*?" she protested. "I just walked in and suddenly I was neck-deep in cats, trying to take my eyes out!"

(Now that she mentioned it, there *were* indeed some scratches on her left cheek.)

Grudgingly, I called Tom-Cat off. He gave me a look of disgust, but did obey and called off his companions, who flounced after him when he trotted back up the stairs to hunt for more treasure.

We stood facing each other, the young lady and I, and both slowly lowered our weapons.

She surprised me by smiling, exposing salt-white teeth. "So, are you a Paka?" she asked, without any hesitation. "I've heard of them – you – but I never thought I'd meet one knocking around an old street in Pont-a-Museau."

"I am not a *Paka*!" I denied, furious. "I am... I... cast. Magic. Sometimes. A little."

(Here you see how allowing your temper to get away from you gets you in trouble and causes you to divulge secrets you should keep close, dear ladies. Beware your own temper!)

I am no social butterfly, dear ladies, as you well know. Having seen that this stranger was not in immediate danger of keeling over dead, I silently called for Tom-Cat and made my way for the door, intending to disappear into the streets and later circle back to the 'lair'.

Unfortunately, the stranger had other ideas. She followed me.

"I'm Sula," she said without preamble. "So, who are you with? The University of Mordent? Brautslava? The College d'Art in Karina?"

"What?" I asked, mystified.

"I'm here for the University in Port-a-Lucine," she said, grinning. "Go on, no need to be shy. Who are you working for?"

"No one," I said, and I started walking faster.

Annoyingly, she kept up. "You've got a bit of an accent," she said. She did not even sound out of breath. "You sure you're not working for the folks up at Brautslava? I've been; it's quite good for the size."

"No," I said. I started jogging.

Again, she effortlessly kept up. "You could be Darkonese," she insisted. "You don't look Invidian, not with *that* colour hair. Then again, you could be Mordentish, or... Tepestani? There're a lot of redheads in Tepest, aren't there? Hold on... No! You're not from that horrible little college in *Kantora*, are you? I hear nothing but bad things about them! Are they making a move? That's *amazing*! Good for you!"

"I am not Tepestani," I grumbled. "I am not working for anyone. Leave me alone."

"Can't do that," she said, cheerfully. "You're poking around my patch, and I doubt you're going to stop doing that just because we ran into each other."

"Your *what*?" I demanded, stopping and whirling to face her.

She backed up, hands raised in a disarming way – and glanced at the cats that were running up to us, ears folded back and tails fluffed out.

"Hey, easy now," she said, still smiling. "I understand, this place is going to be important and the rush is on to be the first to find... well, whatever."

"*What* are you *talking* about?" I demanded. In my anger, I actually grabbed her by the collar, although I managed to refrain from shaking her. "Important? How is this street going to be important? Why are the big universities interested all of a sudden?"

"That really isn't why you're here?" Sula asked, surprised. "Why are you here, then? President De Casteelle got an anonymous letter that said there's a secret laboratory somewhere on this street, one founded by an actual apprentice of the Alchemist of Mordentshire. You know who that is, don't you? I'm just the advance scout. This place will be crawling with researchers as soon as President De Casteelle has reached

favourable terms with *la Renier*, and the other universities won't be far behind, I'm sure. The President thought the *Paridoners* might even be coming soon! Isn't that just *amazing*?"

All I knew to say at that moment was, simply: "*Confoundment!*"

Best regards,

--  $\mu$

*From the Correspondence Files of Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove.*

*November 24<sup>th</sup>, 760 BC.*

I reached... an accommodation with Ms. Sula, representative of the University of Dementlieu, where she is one of the top students at the Department of the Divinities.

When I asked her what a student of theology was doing researching a site supposedly rich in alchemical lore, she talked my ear off about Zherisian alchemical philosophy and its spiritual aspects. The short version is, she was hoping to glean a deep spiritual insight, or at least enough information for her upcoming term paper.

After we established that I had no interest in alchemical lore but was independently researching latent planar emanations – it really hurt, having to reveal even that little – we came to an agreement.

Rather than work at cross-purposes and delay one another while other 'researchers' (Academic looters, more like!) were moving in, we agreed to work together, keeping an eye out for the other's interests as well as our own while canvassi – scouting the same houses.

While reaching this accommodation was not too strenuous, there were some... challenges to the arrangement.



"I do not understand why you see the need to room here as well," I told her while she was unpacking her suitcase in one of the rooms in my lair.

"Trust is a beautiful thing," she said, flashing me that brilliant smile. "But as my Papa said, trust needs to be earned over time by actions, not just words. Do forgive me, but ours is still a young alliance. I need to keep an eye on you. Oh! Can you take this one?"

This was in reference to a cat that had settled down on her sleeping bag, and was none too happy about being removed from the room. Fortunately, I had iodine to treat the scratches.

I found Ms. Sula to be an infuriating housemate. Rather than stay in her own room during the hours of the night, she came to my area and insisted we share a meal.

"Sharing a meal is one of the most important parts of social behaviour, isn't it?" she said, winking at me while sneaking bites of her meal to the cats that surrounded us – or rather, her – on all sides.

"Besides, it's damn' boring, sitting in that pokey little room and studying by myself. Might as well be in finishing school again!"

She giggled after saying "damn"...

Next, she insisted on 'regaling' me with her life's story in a rather transparent attempt to wheedle mine out of me. Please see my attached notes – you may wish to keep an eye on this family as a source of information on Valachan, or as allies in your Hunt.

*Apparently Ms. Sula's late father had decided to leave Valachan after his baby sister was taken for Baron Von Kharkov's and made it all the way to Mordent. Through an admirable mixture of bloody-minded determination and skills he had*

*learned in Valachan, he managed to gain a position as a merchant guard and eventually worked his way up to guard captain, after which he met his wife, the heiress of a small trading company.*

*Ms. Sula was the eventual result of their happy union, and both her parents agreed she should want for nothing, yet must also apply herself in all ways. Hence, the University of Dementlieu – after finishing school and a string of private tutors. She has apparently managed to make the Dean's list twice despite being looked down upon for reasons of her gender and mixed heritage.*

*While  $\mu$ 's attitude appears dismissive, she has done well to point this young lady out to us.*

-- LWF

I found the intrusion on my privacy quite vexing and considered relocating while Sula slept, or perhaps dousing her with a solution that would keep her harmlessly asleep at the 'lair' for a few days, thus allowing me to complete my investigation in peace.

Fortunately, I managed to refrain from doing either of these things; the next day, I found my unwanted companion to be a great asset. While she was overly personable and showed a lack of respect for my boundaries outside work hours, she turned out to be a dogged and meticulous researcher. Between the two of us, we managed to clear the houses between **2** and **12** in record time (fairness obliged me to assist her in seeking out alchemical minutiae in the houses I had already investigated).

Unfortunately, our findings proved to be abysmal.

I must admit that I had not truly expected to find any alchemical

abnormalities, but we did find a locked cabinet at number **8** which turned out to contain a few items that at first excited Sula – until she realized that their function was virtually indistinguishable from those of items well-known to alchemists of the Core, and which are even thought of as outdated by the Alchemical Philosophers of Paridon. Number **10** was more fruitful for her, as it yielded an object she found significant.

(I managed to refrain from laughing. The object in question is basically a glass vase containing a liquid and a lump of greasy material. If the vase is heated from below, bubbles of the greasy material rise to the top of the vase, cool and drift down again, and so forth and so forth, ad nauseam. Back Home, such items are made and kept purely as a visual diversion.)

Apart from this, we found nothing of... *scholarly* value. Is it possible that whoever searched through these houses started in the middle and worked their way outwards, only to then be disturbed?

In order to confirm this theory, we went back to number **8** and went over everything again. To my personal chagrin, we located a door which had previously escaped our joint attention, hidden behind the wallpaper. Having ripped this flimsy covering away and opened the door, we were greeted by a stench of stale death. Beyond the door lay a small room, its walls and floor covered in disquieting brown stains. Scattered and shattered crockery indicated someone, or several someones, had been eating a meal here when they were *terminally* surprised.

I found some markings that seemed reminiscent of wererat tracks, but could not make sense of it. Wererats are not known for their wallpapering skills. Or did a wererat killer pay someone to paper over the site of its crime? Why? These beasts are

utterly shameless within Richemulot, as you well know.

Our spirits much subdued by our gruesome discovery, we might have missed out on a last item of interest. Fortunately, Tom-Cat was more attentive and drew my attention to a torn piece of paper, half-hidden beneath a bowl stained by food, which had first spoiled, then congealed over the course of many years.

Sula is most excited over this scrap, as it still holds part of an alchemical formula. As I write this letter to you, dear ladies, she is poring over her notebooks in an attempt to decipher it.

I have no problem with yielding this find to her. My own investigation suggests that the page radiates a small, but constant magical aura, and the page header reads '*Grammaire des Ombres secrètes*'.

More on this later; I must renew the wards.

Best regards,

--  $\mu$

***From the Correspondence Files of  $\mu$ .  
November 25<sup>th</sup>, 760 BC.***

Confoundment, dear ladies.  
Confoundment and perfidy.

We went over each of the houses we had visited already, knowing what we did of number **8**, and discovered hidden rooms in each.

Each hidden room was a scene of old carnage. And ritual.

At number **6**, we found a shattered altar, marked with a circle of thirteen serpents.

At number **4**, there was a whole altar, set with two candles made of a black fat,



which neither Ms. Sula nor I needed an alchemical analysis to identify as corpse-fat. The walls were covered in papers with the sigils of various spirits of unwholesome aspect.

The secret room at number **2** had a ritual circle drawn on the floor – in the same blood that had splattered the walls and ceiling. Blood-stained crystals lay on the four points of the compass.

After discussing the matter, Sula and I agreed not to probe too deeply into the mystery of these ritual chambers. We took initial soundings and then re-sealed the rooms, lest we stir up something beyond our control; while nothing actually happened, there was a... pressure in those rooms that neither magic nor science could explain, but which seemed to be purely emotional.

More and more, it appears that the deaths that occurred there were not the result of monster attacks, but may have been crimes committed by the houses' inhabitants – which also explains why they were wallpapered over. In addition, the planar vibrations I measured in those hidden chambers is... dark and troublesome. Even using a purely scientific device to seek out vibrations, I could tell there was a decidedly negative slant to the echoes of planar displacement. I must wonder and worry – was this street truly displaced from Home, or is it a copy transplanted from some far less wholesome place and set up here as a trap just for me?

But who would go to that much trouble? That wretched Barovian alienist? The foul Lamordian *Schult?* The Doctor? One of the others? Who among them would even be *capable* of doing such a thing?

Sula's attitude irked me. While seeing the state of the rooms initially rendered her silent, she gradually regained the spring in

her step and became intrigued upon seeing the broken altar.

"That's the symbol of Hala," she told me, "goddess of witchcraft and the Weave! This is very interesting; I've never heard of a Halite cult that engaged in human sacrifice before. You think there might have been an anomalous offshoot here?"

I refrained from commenting, despite all her attempts to draw me into conversation on the symbol we had seen. There was a dull ache in the back of my head from my effort to repress... certain memories.

I used to walk past these houses every day – or houses that looked identical to these, saving for the wear and tear. I was acquainted with the people who lived there – who used to live there when I was still a child – knew their names, talked to them frequently. Was something like *this* actually going on behind those peaceful façades while I walked past?

Number **12** was, against all expectations, firmly locked. I had Sula stand cavy – keep watch while I busied myself with a crowbar. The lock was just starting to give way when Sula hissed with alarm. I turned around, one hand on my pistol.

"What is it?" I asked. "Something in the river?"

"The river?" Sula gave me a surprised look. "No! No; I thought... I was so sure I saw someone looking at us from one of the empty houses. Number nine, I think."

I looked at those empty houses and saw nothing, but I did not discredit Sula's warning out of hand. The truth was, anyone *could* have moved in and set up surveill – started keeping watch. After all, *I* had done just that. I reached out to Tom-Cat, who was lurking around nearby with his feline army, but he had nothing to report. He did come trotting up, however, alarmed by my feelings of disquiet.

"There does not appear to be anyone there now," I said after a few tense moments. "Keep watching; I shall continue work on the door."

The door yielded to my crowbar – and my *ripple glass* started beeping.

"Hold up, back up, back *up!*" I ordered both Sula and Tom-Cat. The latter obeyed; I had to push the former quite hard before she would yield.

"What's wrong?" she asked, looking over my shoulder as I brought the *ripple glass* out and looked into it.

(I allowed this; you know from the blueprints I have sent you that the display of the *ripple glass* does not show words, but equations, designed by myself and that insane Lamordian two years ago. It seemed unlikely in the extreme that Sula could read any of them.)

To be succinct, the *ripple glass* was warning me that number **12** was soaked in the same aura that suffused those hidden rooms. Except where the aura in the rooms was an echo, here it was active – and causing a planar distortion effect. Not a powerful one, but still.

Despite my disquiet, I felt a brief stab of hope.

"What is it?" Sula asked jostling me.

Almost, I dropped the *ripple glass*! I snarled with anger – and Sula leapt away from me, yelping with shock and pain. Tom-Cat was hanging from her leg, yowling angrily, and more cats were incoming.

"*Don't* do that again," I growled at Sula, while I mentally ordered Tom-Cat off. "This machine took me more than a year to make! Some of the components need to be imported from Sri Raji!"

"Sorry, sorry!" she said, looking put-upon. "Ugh, do you have any of that iodine with you...?"

I was about to say more to chastise her, but I caught a flash of movement from

the corner of my eye. Immediately, I looked at the façade of number **9**, on the other side of the river. Was that a twitch of the mildewed curtains behind the upper window...?

"So what did your magic mirror tell you?" Sula asked.

"It's not magic, it's science," I corrected her, feeling distracted, watched. "There is a powerful aura in there. It is causing... distortions."

My attention was on number **9**, and so I had no warning other than Tom-Cat's sudden yowl of protest and the sound of a door opening. I turned around just in time to see Sula disappear into the gloom inside number **12**. I tried to rush after her, but Tom-Cat and his henchmen – and yes, henchwomen – immediately blocked my path, meowing pitifully.

'*Bad*, 'Tom-Cat sent to me. '*Bad getting worse!*'

I stepped over them and hurried into the house, stowing the *ripple glass* as I went. Tom-Cat yowled in protest, but I had to go. The stupid girl was rushing in like a fool where wiser heads would have waited and observed a bit longer – so now I had to do the same before she utterly ruined what traces were there for my quest for Home.

Again, Tom-Cat yowled – and his voice was cut off, as if with a knife, as soon as I was over number **12's** doorstep. My awareness of him was cut off just as cleanly, and I turned on the spot, horrified, certain that someone had killed him – but there he was, surrounded by his furry minions, watching me with an expression of deep-seated distress.

I stepped back outside and our connection returned, our feelings of distress mirroring each other perfectly.

"Wait for me here," I finally managed to say. "Be careful."



*'Bad getting worse!'* he replied, and then slunk out of sight.

I went back inside, feeling on edge and angry with Sula. I found myself clutching my pistol while I looked for the idiotic girl - an instinctive response to the feeling of pressure that neither my magic nor my science had been able to explain. There were subtle currents in the air that should not have been there, a feeling of... inconsistency to everything. At times like these, a prayer would be a great comfort.

I found the little wretch in the basement, kicking at a door in the wall that separates **12** from **14**. The sound had not carried beyond the basement at all.

"What are you doing now, you idiot?" I snarled at her. "This is not scholarly behaviour, this is barbarism!"

"It's here!" she shouted back at me. "The laboratory! I know it is! You just want to keep it for yourself, you greedy..."

She stopped talking, so I never found out what kind of greedy creature I was. Instead of talking, she screamed and hopped back on one foot, holding her kicking-leg. The wooden door in the separating wall had disappeared, and in its place stood a large, iron cupboard.

"What... what is this?" Sula asked, clearly angry, while sitting down on a crate. "There was door there, I know it!"

"I saw it as well," I told her.

I did not descend the stairs; I cast spells of detection from where I stood. There was an aura about the cupboard. Some form of illusion magic unknown to me.

"Someone played a trick on you," I said, while I carefully scrutinized the basement.

It looked ordinary enough; it was a dark, dank room with a wine rack against one wall and old crates stacked against the other and standing haphazardly in the

middle of the floor. The only light came from an alchemical trinket Sula had brought, a glowing glass cylinder filled with a gold-coloured liquid.

"Rotten sort of trick," she said, sulkily. She tested her ankle and made a face, but she was able to move easily enough and came back up the stairs, looking sheepish. "Did I just call you a greedy... Never mind," she said. "That was mean of me. Sorry."

"I was... undiplomatic as well," I said, without taking my eyes off the room. "The aura is strong here, I told you. Our minds may be affected."

"Then I'll watch you and you'll watch me," she said.

I looked at her, and she was grinning.

"It may not be that simple," I said.

"We're both reasonably smart people," she said, "and you've got your... thingamabob that tells you when the emanations are getting stronger, right? And we can't give up now, can we? We're close to *something* here, aren't we?"

That was true enough. Just to be on the safe side, I cast a minor spell that reinforces willpower on Sula, and we continued our investigation.

We did as we had done in all the previous houses, except now we did it together instead of each of us tackling rooms separately.

There was another hidden room, fully equipped with an altar marked with a circle of thirteen snakes, set inside a magic circle. Two ceremonial daggers, a goblet, and a brass bowl marked with a pentagram stood on the altar in addition to those foul black candles. Sheets of paper with magic seals on them were nailed to the walls, and there were robes hanging from a hook on the inside of the door.

There were no ancient blood splatters.

"Well, this is better," Sula said in an encouraging tone.

I was not entirely sure of this. For one thing, the *ripple glass* told me the aura was stronger here, concentrated. While the effect was not so strong that I needed to worry about this room becoming divorced in time and space, the feeling of inconsistency was even stronger. The walls seemed to move slightly, as if the room was expanding and contracting rhythmically.

As though it were *breathing*.

Sula walked inside without warning – again.

"Look at this!" she said, picking up the brass bowl. I blinked – and she was not holding a brass bowl marked with a pentagram, she was holding a book.

I rubbed my eyes vigorously and looked at the room again. Nothing else appeared to have changed. Sula was eagerly thumbing through the book's pages – and her face fell.

"Mildew!" she complained. "But the room is dry! Most of the words are illegible, but... but there are bits and pieces here, alchemical formulae! Yutow preserve me through this trial! So much has been lost!"

She looked close to tears, and she insisted I look at the book as well. Sure enough, there were bits and pieces of alchemical formulae in the book, but there were other things as well. Things I was surprised Sula had not noticed – but then again, I was not sure at the time whether she had any training in the arcane arts at all. To be succinct, dear ladies, there were bits and pieces of arcane annotation in that book, but these were not Wizardly writings.

They were Witch-spells, written down.

I was getting a bad feeling about this, a feeling of familiarity even stronger than that engendered by the sight of the street.

*'But that was not possible!'*

My head was *pounding* with the effort to hold back memories and I took a step back, bumped the wall with my pack.

There was a '*click*' as my pack pressed against something hidden under one of the sigils on the wall.

Another section of wall swung outward behind the altar – a secret door, leading into number **14**.

My headache *exploded*, causing me to cry out and grab at my temples. At the same time, Sula cried out and grabbed at her throat. The *ripple glass* screeched its warning, spat sparks and audibly broke.

*'Confoundment! Some of those parts really do have to come from Sri Raji!'*

The room on the other side of the wall was virtually the same as the one we were standing in. Altar. Robes. Candles. Sigils. No book, though, but there was another door.

It swung open as I looked at it, revealing... darkness. A gust of... not wind, but displaced air, blew in my face. It made me gag. A stench of mildew, incense, decay, power, rolling around in my head. I must admit I fell to my knees and threw up.

In contrast, Sula surged forward, tearing at her collar and chanting in Old Vaasi under her breath. Chanting prayers. I heard the word 'Yutow' again and again.

*'Confoundment!'*

"Stop," I tried to say, but my throat was choked with power. "Don't!"

The words would not come out and I doubt she would have listened to me if they had. On she charged, pulling a metal amulet on a chain out of her collar. It started to glow; a shard of the full moon, blazing a path through the darkness.

*'Heaven save me from heroes!'*

I pulled my cane from its loop on my pack and struggled to my feet, pain rolling through my head in great waves. Sula had already disappeared into the darkness... where I must now go.



I knew what was there, you see, dear ladies.

I knew and I was ashamed, so terribly ashamed.

To my even greater shame, I took a moment to crank up the clockwork on my shock-glove, bringing it to full power, before I muttered a cantrip that should have caused little faerie lights to appear. In the current of decayed power, the light flared to four miniature suns, their glow burning against my skin. Wonderful.

I staggered forward, trying to ignore both pains and keep my balance at the same time. What made it all even more difficult was the feeling in the air. Where my magic met the decaying aura, they kindled each other. My little magic was bringing the dead power to life – and that was not a good thing.

I staggered through hallways festooned with more of those sigils, nailed to the wall, and they started to glow with power as I passed. Something was happening, something I had no control over and could not understand. Whatever it was, it was bad juju – seriously evil magic.

I called out for Sula as I went, but she did not answer. My only lead was a faint shimmer in the sigils where she had passed.

But that was not a reactive shimmer, as the building glow in my tracks was. It was a defensive response to a magic inimical to what was coming to life in these dead and dusty hallways. The magic of Yutow, the dead god, patron of Valachan, who teaches his followers that arcane magic and the undead are equally foul perversions of nature.

*'Wonderful. Confoundment, confoundment, confoundment!'*

The little priestess had gulled me very effectively. Staying close to me all this time, suggesting a partnership so I would not walk off with whatever had left its taint on

this whole street. Again, I found myself groping for my pistol – and found a shrivelled-up carrot, instead. I paused for a moment I did not have, staring stupidly at the inedible root vegetable, then threw it from me and moved on.

I found Sula in the library, where I had expected her to be – and hoped she would not be. She was standing in front of the glass case I remembered from my childhood, when the old people who lived in this house had invited me in. Tricked me in. Lured me in.

*'Dear Heavens, forgive me!'*

She turned on me, her eyes blazing like those of a great cat, the holy symbol of Yutow blazing around her neck.

"I knew there was something here," she said, her smile radiant. "I *knew* it!" Her smile faded. "But I can't open it. There's a mark on it – the sign of Hala."

"Leave it," I managed to say – to croak, really. "It's no good. It's bad. Leave it, for pity's sakes! We need to run!"

She leapt on me.

I struggled, but I am not – never have been – a great fighter, in spite of all my training to become at least passable at it.

Sula overpowered me, knocked the cane out of my hand and pulled me towards the glass case. Towards the ancient-looking book that lay waiting there. The leather cover was not the original one, of course. Neither were the pages. The old people had periodically re-written everything in that book on loose pages of vellum, and then sewed those into a new cover. But the book looked virtually the same as it had when I was first lured in here; just as it did when I last left this place behind, vowing to myself that I would never come back.

Occult runes and protective devices, burned into the leather with irons.

A title in gold leaf, the script heavily gothic and in one of the dead languages of Home:

**'Grammaire des Ombres secrètes.'**

I struggled harder, but the fool girl pressed my hand against the glass.

There was a flash of light, a burning sensation in my hand. I screamed and was hurled back, crashed against the wall. I heard glass shatter and Sula cried out, exultant.

"I've got it! I've *got* it! The alchemical lore of the ancients!"

I could not speak. The power *roared* off the book, now that the case was gone. I could not speak, I could barely breathe.

Sula ran past me, whooping with joy.

My hand hurt. My head pounded. I was on the verge of wetting myself. I was afraid. I was so afraid. And I could hear the book, whispering in my head even while it moved away from me:

*'I contain the spells that can take you Home.'*

That... was too seductive. It was spot-on. It sang in my blood, vibrated in my bones, tugged at my *soul*. I failed myself. I reached out for the power with my mind before I could stop myself from doing so – and the power reached back to me.

Power, roaring through me. I heard myself cry out. I smelled burning flesh. I did not care; the pain was gone, the dull throbbing was gone. I was healthy; I was strong; I was a healthy animal, a predator on the hunt. Snarling, I cast the pack from me – *'Useless weight!'* – and took off after Sula, my gloved hand curved into a claw.

I heard her running down the stairs to the living room and tore down after her.

"Stop!" I shouted. "It's mine, you little wretch! Mine, you hear me?! *Mine! MINE!*"

"Mine!" she yelled over her shoulder while she ran across the dusty, decayed

living room, heading for the door. "You can't have it, it's *miiiii~!*"

She fell through the floor, through a hole in the floor that had not been there a moment ago. Preservation overrode greed; she let the book go so she could grab the edge of the hole with both hands. The book thumped down heavily, quite close to her. The glow of her holy amulet flickered and went out. Her expression went from dull shock to realization. I saw her look down – and she shrieked like the young woman she was, struggled to pull herself up.

"Help me!" she pleaded. "Help!"

I skidded to a halt at the edge of the hole. The book was within reach, the competition was out of action, I could *savour* the final approach. Power thumping in my chest, I glanced at the defeated woman – and let myself drop to the ground so I could grab her wrists.

Beneath her feet, there was another room. Like all the others in number **14**, it was dusty and ruined. My Witch-lights illuminated the horrid scene in cruel detail.

You see, the house's residents were down there. They were visibly dead, but they were... animate. With slow, methodical movements, some of them were setting up pieces of broken furniture, sharp ends pointing upward. Others were preparing a dinner table with stained crockery and a rotten tablecloth.

I hauled on Sula, but she was too heavy.

The undead who were not holding up the impaling tools creakily sat down at the table and started to thump their tarnished silverware against the table.

*'Hurry up and drop her, we're hungry!'*

I could understand them, with the power thumping in my head. I did not want to understand them; their voices crawled in my head like worms, chewing at my sanity,



allowing those horrible memories to slip free from the wall I kept them locked behind.

*'Merciful Heaven, forgive me! I'm so sorry!'*

It hurt, but I started to fight the power. Bit by bit, I pushed it out of my head, struggling not to hear its song, its sweet promises of Home, of freedom, of never being a victim again. Push. Push like you're giving birth, only this is unclean, filthy, something to be resisted, to be endured until you can fight it off, not to embrace, *never* to embrace...

The undead were growing restless. I tried to ignore them.

*'Push, damn you, PUSH!'*

"Please don't let go!" Sula begged me, tears rolling down her cheeks. "Please! I'm sorry! I don't know why – I don't *know* why I did that! I swear! Please! *Please*, help me!"

"Be quiet," I begged back, squeezing my eyes shut against the sight of her. "Don't distract me. please. I need to... focus."

Sula stopped talking, but she kept sobbing. That actually helped. I rode the waves of crippling pity and shame, pushed harder, forced the last dregs of the book's power out of me and slammed shut the doors of my will. And then I screamed, because a purely physical pain lanced through my rump.

"Aye, ye bulge-bottomed beast, how ye like that, ye wallowing sow?" I heard Fie-Fetch crow behind me. Again, that pain lanced through my backside – higher this time, closer to the tailbone. "Take yer legs, I might. Ye'll not walk out on any legs, then, but crawl like a worm! Fie-Fetch will be paid, after all his efforts!"

*Glamers.* The vicious little bastard had spun glamers throughout this house and number **12**. The iron cabinet. The brass bowl. The floor. Just like that bloody inn

where the Vistana had caught me. It all made sense. Glamers.

*'Bastard!'*

"Wait, wait, wait!" I gasped, pleading. "Wait... I'll pay you! Pay you willingly!"

He stabbed me in the rump again, but further away from my spine now. "Aye, you'll pay! But will ye pay freely or will Fie-Fetch *take* his fee?"

"Sula," I gasped. "My left hand. Let go. Take my right hand in both of yours."

She cried, she shook her head. I had to repeat my order twice before she obeyed, and then I stuck my left arm out to the side, hand palm up. My right arm felt as though it were being pulled from the socket. It might be.

"My left hand," I said to Fie-Fetch. "Take it. Take it. Oh, Heaven have mercy, just hurry up and *take it!*"

"Aye, well and done!" Fie-Fetch crowed. I felt him walk over my back, felt the swagger in his step as he marched down my arm. "Bulge-bottomed, bulge-chested scatterwit shall pay what is owed to Fie-Fetch in full, and all shall be well and all shall be well and *all* shall be *well*."

He stood on my wrist.

I felt the minute shifting of his weight as he raised his weapon.

I twitched my wrist slightly, just enough...

... to activate my shock-glove.

Something metallic rang against my glove and there was a blast of light, an electric crackling and the stink of burning flesh. Fie-Fetch screamed, and something small and blackened fluttered into my range of sight, cockroach wings fluttering while they burned. Fie-Fetch rolled and struggled, mewling with pain, and finally sprawled to a halt.

Facing me.

His face was half-melted from the discharge of electricity, arcs of electricity

were travelling over his body, but his eyes were wide and full of hatred.

"Bulging schemie," he managed to gasp. "Offers payment and gives foul trickery. Fie-Fetch thy foe for *eternity*, bulger! Fie-Fetch's *currrse* upon thee for offering false pay!"

Then he died, his little body turning to black dust that sparkled as though it were mixed with diamond dust.

And I must admit, I did not care.

I returned my attention to Sula, dangling from my arm. I started to edge my left back to her, to offer her more support – and I heard the door opening in the hall. Footsteps approached.

And I knew terror.

This was not the same fear I had known from the sealed rooms, caused by the lingering aura of the **Grammaire**. This was a sick, crawling fear that paralyzed me completely, made me lie still like a rabbit that sees oncoming headlights – the fog lights of a – hypnotized by a snake.

I was back in that foul cell in Vallaki, my tears turning to ice on my face.

I was lying on the floor of that manor house in Leidenheim, choking on every breath.

I was standing in that laboratory, my pistol against the temple of a woman who could not defend herself.

I was about to let a young woman fall to her death for the sake of that *damned* book.

I was cold and I was afraid.

My worst memories, rampaging through my mind while my body lay paralyzed and shivering.

There was someone standing behind me. I heard him chuckle. Heard the sound of rustling cloth. Felt and heard him sink to his knees – and then he lay down on top of me.

I started to whimper and could not stop. The cell in Vallaki. The floor of the manor house in Leidenheim. Cold stones beneath me. Dusty carpets stained with mould beneath me. Which did not matter. A familiar weight on me, pinning me down, crushing the air out of my lungs. Cold breath in my ear, a tongue-tip tracing its whorls between words. Was I crying? Yes. Yes, I was.

"*Evil*," he whispered, "*is not an enemy for you to fight. It is not a burden you must endure. It is a gift.*"

A sigh as cold as a walk-in freezer – the Lamordian winter wind in my ear – hands like ice touching me – a kiss like frost burn against my cheek. I whined like a whipped dog and heard him laugh. Softly, so softly.

"*I am glad you are using your gift so well.*"

He got up off me, pausing momentarily to pinch me where Fie-Fetch had stabbed me. Again, I heard the rustling of cloth and the little *snap-snap* of buttons being closed. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a hand gloved in black leather, attached to an arm sleeved in black silk, pick up the book. Amazing, how the feeling of power had just disappeared when this stranger walked inside. No more magic in the air, only cold. That, and the stranger's soft chuckling as he walked out of the room.

The door slammed shut.

I started to feel life in me again.

Enough life to finally vomit up a spell I had prepared just in case – a spell that doubled my strength and allowed me to slowly, painfully drag Sula up out of the hole and then carry both of us out the door. Out. We had to get *out*, before the undead decided to come claim their meal. Out of here and *away*...!

**I can not possibly write this to those two sisters.**



**They mustn't know, I can't LET  
them know!  
I can't.**

*From the Correspondence Files of Gennifer  
Weathermay-Foxgrove.  
November 30<sup>th</sup>, 760 BC.*

Dear ladies,

I regret that I must report utter failure  
to you.

Sula and I have found an item of vile  
power, hidden at number **14** in the *Rue  
d'Absinthe*, just as my instinct told me we  
would. In my own world, there was a  
similar item there, a book, a grimoire of  
superlative power and utter moral paucity.  
Note its title – *Grammaire des Ombres  
secrètes* – and if you should ever come  
across it or a copy, **DESTROY IT AT  
ONCE!**

I am ashamed to admit that I studied  
that book in my youth, misled as I was by  
the Brightwell Coven, the group of deluded  
fools that guarded and maintained the  
book.

Many are my flaws, dear ladies, but I  
turned away from that group and the book  
in the end. Despite this, I fear some spots  
never wash off; the book was sealed away  
in a case of magically reinforced glass,  
which only opened when I touched it. The  
hand I laid against that glass is scarred  
now, the scar bearing an uncomfortable  
resemblance to the mark of Hala – and yet I  
do not recall her among the gods,  
goddesses, spirits, and fiends worshiped by  
the Brightwell Coven.

I am still left to wonder whether the  
*Rue d'Absinthe* is the actual street I knew in  
my youth, or if it is an imperfect copy,  
twisted by some unknown agency. Then  
again, I have repressed my memories of the

Brightwell Coven for years. Maybe Hala *was*  
one of their many patrons, I cannot be  
certain.

Having retrieved the book, both Sula  
and I desired to leave that house, whose  
atmosphere was thick with the feeling of  
fear. We were beset by two enemies as we  
tried to leave number **14**, however; the  
horrid little Fie-Fetch, who set traps for us  
using *glamers*, illusions to make one thing  
appear to be another, and one other  
person.

I seem to have managed to put paid to  
the little wretch, however, and he should  
not bother anyone again. Unfortunately, his  
last trap temporarily immobilized us, and  
that was when the second enemy struck.

I do not know the identity of this  
second person, though he seemed... familiar  
somehow. My instinct tells me this is the  
'mystery benefactor' who originally sic –  
sent the Vistani after me. Did I not say that  
I have been gulled before? It was done to  
me again, dear ladies! My 'benefactor'  
ensured that I, likely the only person in this  
world with a connection to the Brightwell  
Coven, would go to the *Rue d'Absinthe* and  
release the lock, which could only be  
opened by someone with a connection to  
that deluded brood. No doubt he guided  
Fie-Fetch in his setting of traps, to allow  
him to seize the book without having to  
worry about resistance.

Whoever the 'mystery benefactor' is, he  
knew a quote from the *Grammaire des  
Ombres secrètes* which has haunted my  
dreams since that day. Faith, I had been  
content not to think of it for years, had tried  
to keep it out of my memories. I have  
trouble doing so now, knowing as I do that  
the book is now abroad in these troubled  
lands.

Note, also, the quote; it was a mark of  
recognition among the Brightwell Coven and  
its appearance anywhere might be a clue as

to the location of my 'mystery benefactor' and the *Grammaire*:

*'Evil is not an enemy for you to fight. It is not a burden you must endure. It is a gift.'*

(This is not to say that the members of the Coven were devoted to the cause of Evil, but rather that they were... phenomenally stupid and deluded people, who believed that morality was not a concern to them, that they were above society's norms and values, free of all restrictions. You can see that they are not like the faithful of Hala at all. Or at least most of them were not. One or two – no, enough of this. I am done with the Brightwell Coven forever.)

### ***Forever!***

Please excuse me for that outburst.

Sula and I discussed the matter and agreed that the *Rue d'Absinthe* is far too dangerous to allow the Universities to go over it and drag its festering secrets out into the light. I myself should have been forewarned and forearmed due to my knowledge of the Brightwell Coven, and yet when I read back my preliminary notes for our correspondence, I note several glaring lapses of judgment on my part.

Whatever effect suffuses the *Rue d'Absinthe* is subtle and dangerous, and so... we fire-bomb – we hurriedly brewed up a series of incendiaries and set the empty houses on fire. Just to be on the safe side, we did the same to the houses on the other side of the river, thoroughly obliterating any traces of our own occupation that might remain.

I could tell that it smote Sula's heart to do it, due to the loss of scholarly treasures still hidden within, but we were in full agreement that the evils from my past should not be allowed to breed in this

world. It has enough native horrors to be going on with. You see, despite the removal of the book, I confirmed that the aura that suffused the street remained in place, stable for now – and with faint hints of increasing strength.

And so we shook hands and parted ways – rather quickly, as the fire was sure to draw undesirable attention and uncomfortable questions. To the best of my knowledge, Sula has returned to Port-a-Lucine, carrying with her a few minor souvenirs that I bore with me when I left Paridon last year, and which I hope will help her in the writing of her term paper. I myself have no further use for them, anyway, so she might as well have them.

As for myself, I regret to inform you that I am going into seclusion. I need to think on what has happened and I require time to reconstruct my *ripple glass*, which was broken during the attack. If you wish to contact me, please send your messages to my mail-drop in Mordentshire. There is a gentleman there whom I trust and who will know where to contact me.

At the risk of seeming churlish, I request that neither you nor Mr. Johann Severin give anyone else the address of this mail-drop. I require solitude.

The deep forest of Verbrek, mantled in the deathly embrace of winter, feels like just what I need right now.

Dear ladies, it grieves me to burden you with my own problems, but for the sake of innocent people who might suffer, I must ask you to keep an eye out for that foul book and to inform me at once if you catch even a whisper of a rumour of its location. I know your way is to work with the aid of many people, but I implore you to make the existence of the *Grammaire des Ombres secrètes* known only to those people whom you trust implicitly. There are temptations in



that book for anyone and everyone. I can not stress this enough.

The *Grammaire* must be destroyed before it can cause even more harm than it already has done – and I fear that the only text that contains the instructions on how to achieve this is the *Grammaire* itself. Never underestimate the danger of this text, nor its ability to survive harm.

I admit, the book has seduced me, even corrupted me, in the past, but I intend to use my time of seclusion to reinforce my will and make of my mind a fortress against its taint. I am familiar with it now, you see, and so I believe I have a better chance of eluding its snares than anyone else might.

Who would have thought, when first we met four years ago, dear ladies, that we would ever be linked together in a Hunt? The irony would make me chuckle if the danger were not as absolute as it is. I assure you that I am not engaging in hyperbole.

May fortune favour you and merciful Heaven grace you, dear ladies. May it look upon all of us with mercy, in this shrouded world of yours.

As always,  
Best regards,

--  $\mu$

*From the Correspondence Files of Gennifer Weathermay-Foxgrove.  
November 16<sup>th</sup>, 760 BC*

*The letter above reached us a week ago, delivered not by a marvellous – an unsociable – tressym, but rather by a road-weary merchant who insisted on putting it in my hand. He seemed puzzled as to why he had gone to all the trouble, but appeared to remember ' $\mu$ ' with great fondness and*

*confessed that he had promised to bring us her letter in trade for a kiss.*

*I detected the lingering traces of an enchantment about him, and suspect that kiss may have been laced with a spell to ensure safe delivery.*

*I feel moved by the confidence given to us at the end of  $\mu$ 's letter. It may not seem much, and her letter was encrypted with a fiendish cipher, but she actually told us where she plans to stay for the winter. Of course, it is entirely possible that this is a trick on her part, telling us she will be in Verbrek when she actually plans to winter elsewhere – it would be in keeping with her desire for secrecy and her constant fear that our correspondence might be intercepted. No matter, however. The very gesture is appreciated.*

*My dear sister and I have opened a new file on the Brightwell Coven and the Grammaire des Ombres secrètes and have sent out requests for knowledge and warnings to our most trusted friends. So far, no useful information has come our way and I suspect that the 'mystery benefactor' may also be in seclusion this winter, studying his acquisition.*

*There has been a disturbing development, however.*

*This morning when we woke, we found our windows had been scrawled upon with a mixture of ashes and snow. While these pictures melted away over the course of the day, we managed to sketch most of them and compared them to various tomes in Dr. Van Richten's library.*

*Having never seen such imagery before, we had not known what petroglyphs' were. Now we do.*

*No harm has befallen either my sister or myself since, nor has any sinister activity occurred in the rest of Mordentshire that seems connected to the primitive-looking drawings - or indeed, to the Grammaire.*

*None of our security measures appear to have been activated or bypassed, either, so I must assume this was not meant as a threat against us, but rather against  $\mu$ , wherever she might actually be wintering. Either the unidentified Fie-Fetch was not as dead as she believed, or else someone – or something – intends to avenge his demise. Or is this a warning for her that Fie-Fetch might return? It is impossible to be certain; our best efforts have failed to wring sense from the petroglyphs.*

*I worry; Laurie and I are in disagreement. For myself, I wished to send a warning by means of  $\mu$ 's "mail-drop" at once, but Laurie cautions me that if Fie-Fetch yet lives, he might seize the opportunity to track  $\mu$ 's trusted contact to where she lairs and attack her while the winter snows hamper travel. I cannot dismiss the wisdom of my sister's counsel, and yet I worry.*

*None of our efforts have managed to track the individual who scrawled on our windows, nor have we been able to ascertain whether Fie-Fetch yet draws breath. If he does, he must be a master of stealth as well as illusion magic; a dangerous combination in an enemy.*

*We have not received any new letters from  $\mu$ ' since she entered her voluntary seclusion in the hostile forests of Verbrek. She might yet live, labouring on the recreation of her ripple glass, or she might have fallen prey to the werewolves who call that troubled forest home. Or worse may have befallen her still.*

*Laurie has convinced me not to send a warning through the "mail-drop", and so I can only wait to hear from  $\mu$ ', just as we can only wait for information about the Grammaire des Ombres secrètes to come to us.*

*The winter seems colder for all this waiting.*

*Gennifer  
Weathermay-Foxgrove  
Mordent,  
Mordentshire  
760 BC*





## μ

**CN female human Witch 9 / Bard 4**

**HP** (9d6+18) + (4d8+8): 98 hp

**Speed** 30 ft

**Initiative** +2

**AC** 18 (+2 Dex., +4 armour, +2 natural)

**Saves** Fort. + 6, Ref. + 9, Will + 11

**Abilities**

**Str** 10; **Dex** 15; **Con**

14; **Int** 18; **Wis** 12; **Cha** 23

**Attack/damage**

**Melee:** Alchemic-kinetic cane +9 for 1d6+2; x2. Claws +7 for 1d4; x2. Dagger +9 for 1d4+2; 19-20 x2. Alchemic-kinetic shock glove +7 for 1 – 10d6 electricity; Sword cane +9 for 1d6+2; x2.

**Ranged:** +8 Pistol for 1d8+1; x4. +8 Musket for 1d12+1; x4.

**Base Atk.** +7

**Combat manoeuvres**

**CMB** = +7

**CMD** = +19

**Skills** Bluff +15, Craft (alchemy) +12, Craft (clocks) +11, Craft (gunsmith) +11, Craft (paintings) +9, Craft (sculpture) +10, Disguise +10, Fly +9, Heal +5, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (nature) +12, Knowledge (planes) +20, Linguistics +17, Perception +7, Perform (dance) +14, Perform (comedy) +10, Perform (oratory) +10, Perform (sing) +10, Ride +7, Spellcraft +12, Stealth 13, Use magic device +17

**Feats** Alertness (B), Brew potion (H), Craft construct, Craft magic arms and armour, Craft wondrous item, Dance of kindled desires (R), Exotic weapon proficiency (firearms), Martial weapon proficiency (sword cane), Scribe scroll

**SQ** Bardic knowledge, bardic performance 10/day, cantrips, countersong, distraction, fascinate, inspire competence +2, Hex (Cauldron, Evil eye, Flight, Healing, Ward), inspire courage +1, Path of the concubine, versatile performance, well-versed, Witch's familiar (Cat), Witch's patron (Strength)

**Languages** Akiri, Ancient Greek, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic, Dutch, English, Grabenite, French, German, Japanese, Latin, Lamordian, Luktar, Mordentish, Rajian, Sithican, Sumerian, Tepestani, Vaasi, Zherisian

## Appearance

Mu appears as a young human woman, in the flower of her twenties, with a curvaceous but elegant body kept fit and healthy by dancing exercises and a rigorous diet – and which she prefers to cover in drab dresses meant to protect against the elements and deflect stares, and are all too often accompanied by a wide cloak of pale leather, whose hood Mu prefers to keep down. Her hair is bright red, falling down to her shoulders in natural waves, where it curls up. Eyes of dazzling green stare out of a creamy pale face with flawless skin – but the look in their depths is all too often one of hard mistrust or fear bordering on animalistic panic. Even when she is obliged to wear more fashionable attire, Mu is rarely if ever seen without a pair of leather bracers and gloves. A necklace carrying several silver amulets and one made of the same leather as her bracers is almost permanently around her neck.

## Magic

Bard spells / day: 5 / 3

Bard spells known:

2 – *Cat's grace*, *Piercing shriek*

1 – *Anticipate peril, Hideous laughter, Play instrument, Silent image*

0 – *Flare, Ghost sound, Lullaby, Mage hand, Open/Close, Prestidigitation*

Witch spells / day: 4 / 5 / 5 / 4 / 3 / 1

Witch spells known (Patron spells marked with \* ):

5 – *Major curse, Mind fog, Rest eternal, Secret chest*

4 – *Arcane eye, Cape of wasps, Cure serious wounds, Divine power\*, Lesser age resistance, Locate creature, Mass daze, Neutralize poison, Vermin shape II*

3 – *Anthropomorphic animal, Deep slumber, Dispel magic, Greater magic weapon, Lightning bolt, Remove blindness/deafness, Remove curse, Remove disease, Seek thoughts, Sleet storm, Speak with dead, Spit venom, Strangling hair, Witness*

2 – *Blindness/deafness, Blood transcription, Bull's strength, Burning gaze, Cure moderate wounds, Daze monster, False life, Fog cloud, Ghostly disguise, Haunting mists, Masterwork transformation, See invisibility, Share memory, Summon swarm, Vomit swarm, Web shelter*

1 – *Burning hands, Cure light wounds, Dancing lantern, Diagnose disease, Divine favour\*, Ear-piercing scream, Frostbite, Fumbletongue, Icicle dagger, Mage armour, Mask dweomer, Obscuring mist, Remove sickness, Shadow weapon, Sleep, Vocal alteration, Youthful appearance*

0 – All

## Equipment

Mu usually carries at least the following items with her: Alchemist lab; +2 Amulet of natural armour; +4 Bracers of armour; Lesser rod of Still Spell; +1 Musket; +1 pistol; Scroll case; Ripple Glass (unique item); Silver holy symbols (crucifix, St. Anthony, St. Jude, St. Michael); Spell component pouch; +2 sword cane (dagger

in the hilt); Various scrolls containing Witch spells useful only under specific circumstances, as well as useful spells from other classes.

Note that while Mu is capable of crafting stat-boosting items and has a small supply of these for emergencies and sale, she distrusts and reviles the use of any and all magic that affects her essential nature, equating it with the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

## Background

Born on a world she will only identify as Home, apparently during a time period equivalent to Earth's twenty-first century, the woman who identifies most often as Mu does not believe she was destined for greatness. No one did; she grew up in a normal neighbourhood as part of a normal family, went to a normal school – where, admittedly, she showed a knack for languages – and engaged in fairly average hobbies, like drawing and listening to music. Then one day, an old couple called out to her; the couple that lived on Wormwood Street, a street she had passed numerous times on her way to school. They seemed like normal, kind old people, who handed out candies to the children on their way to school, but they were anything but normal.

The Brightwell Coven had selected the child at the urging of the omens it read. She was a good choice; Mu was innocent and free of spirit as only a child can be, with a child's yearning for magic and wonderment, but she also had the knack for languages that the decaying coven desperately needed. In their possession was a magnificent book of witchcraft, the *Grammaire des ombres secrètes*, but many of the spells within its leather covers were now incomprehensible to the coven because they were written in languages both foreign and dead. First, the coven's elders beguiled



and charmed the child by teaching her the little tricks they were still capable of. Next, they encouraged her gift for languages and heaped praise on her whenever she managed to translate another ancient spell. As the child grew more knowledgeable, the Brightwell Coven's strength started to return...

... and then they grew careless and allowed the child to translate unsupervised. Mu stumbled on the ancient catechisms of the Coven, texts of oath and pact that she should not have been allowed to read yet. In those texts, Mu discovered the Brightwell Coven's ethical and moral sterility, its towering ambition and hubris. Young as she was, she was not prideful enough to accept such motivations for her own, and she fled Wormwood Street, turning her back on the coven and assiduously avoiding its members.

Years passed, and Mu grew to young adulthood. She carried deep mental scars due to her experiences; possessed of a talent for magic but deeply mistrustful of it and its effects on the world around her, Mu constantly doubted her own actions and motivations. She hid and suppressed her gifts, both magical and artistic, and lived a life that was much greyer and gloomier than it need have been. Her life was an endless cycle of work, self-denial and guilt, as she worried what the Brightwell Coven might be doing with the spells she translated... and it all came to an end on a day when she found herself irresistibly drawn to her old hometown of Brightwell. Without knowing why, Mu wandered near Wormwood Street – and saw the fire begin. Flames burst out of windows and people fled into the streets, coughing and retching, heedless of what they left behind. Even the Coven members Mu still recalled from her youth, and who seemed strangely blind to her presence now. The only ones she did not see were

the elderly couple who guarded the great book, the *Grammaire*, but their house was certainly on fire as well.

To this day, Mu is unsure whether she ran into the burning house to save those two old people, who despite their failings first introduced her to real magic, or out of greed for and a misguided belief that she could claim for herself the *Grammaire des ombres secrètes*. What she does know is that she staggered through a burning building, smoke stinging her eyes and throat. So much smoke, blinding her, stealing the breath out of her lungs – and then the smoke changed, became cold and cloying, its touch somehow toxic and vile beyond belief. In the end, Mu staggered out of a bank of unnaturally dense fog. Stained with soot and sweat, dishevelled and confused, she found herself in Barovia, quite near a primitive-looking city that she would later learn was named Vallaki.

Regardless what she might have believed up until that point, her torment had only just begun.

Unable to speak Balok, dressed in strange clothing and clearly shocked and appalled by everything that she saw around her, Mu was seized by locals and dragged to the Asylum of Broken Souls so she could be "treated for her delusions". It was far from uncommon for "outlanders" to be "cured" there, after all.

At the Asylum, Mu was remanded to the care of Dr. Emilio Hochhausen. As soon as she was able to speak and understand a little Balok, Mu reasoned out her best chances of release from the Asylum lay with feigning that she believed what the therapist told her, that she was merely a native of the Land of Mists who had become 'confused'. And so she lied. She lied as best she could – all to the great frustration of Dr. Hochhausen, who saw his own plans for the girl thwarted. In an effort to maintain his

hold on Mu, Dr. Hochhausen attacked not her possible status as an Outlander, but her retiring, introverted nature – and Mu will to this day not freely speak of what the doctor had some of his orderlies do to her in order to “get her used to interpersonal contact”. Driven to extremes of emotion verging on madness, Mu found herself forced to do the unthinkable; for the first time since she had fled the Brightwell Coven, she called on her magic.

Soon enough, a red tomcat snuck his way into the Asylum and managed to insinuate himself into Mu’s cell. Barely had their eyes met before power started to well up inside the tormented young woman, more power than she had ever felt before.

Mu escaped the Asylum, but she did not flee. Her mind wracked by a mixture of rage and self-loathing, she lurked nearby and inflicted terrors on the Asylum’s staff with her magic. While she refrained from physically assaulting the staff, she caused them enough fear and dismay to make them doubt their own sanity. If the Weathermay-Foxgrove sisters had not been called in, however, it is anyone’s guess what her anger would have driven her to. Meeting the sisters probably saved Mu’s soul at that time; they were kind to Mu once they understood the reason for her actions and mediated between her and those members of the Asylum’s staff who were blameless of what had been done to her.

In the end, Mu was paid an extremely generous sum of money in compensation for her suffering, and she was assured that the guilty would be brought to justice. She went on her way in the Land of Mists, creeping from place to place and forever seeking a way Home, either through means available or through her constant studies.

For a time, she thought she might have found a haven in Lamordia, which displays a

keen interest in the sciences, and even might offer her a way home; she hoped to find a scientist capable of translating knowledge she carried from her home world into mechanical truth. In the end, Mu had to flee the land ahead of the Schultebott of Leidenheim. She did carry with her knowledge of alchemy and clockwork mechanisms which she has continued to put to good use. Seeking a deeper knowledge of magic, Mu tentatively made contact with the Vistani and sought an apprenticeship with a *raunie*. This episode ended in Hazlan, where Mu’s hands were stained with murder, first through cruel coercion by her teacher, second of her own will as she visited her wrath on the one who had betrayed her. These have not been her only misadventures...

## Current sketch

While she puts a good face on it, Mu exists in a near-constant state of paranoia, mistrust and self-loathing.

She hates the lands of the Core, which she has found harbour evil in many shapes and sizes, and which are entirely too primitive for her liking. Nevertheless, they are the most stable region she has been able to find that provides her with the resources for most of her research.

She continues to travel and study, working feverishly to create items and spells that might help her find Home, but hates herself for using magic, which she has come to see as innately tainted, and for her inability to achieve her goals through pure science.

She has invested the money she was paid by the Asylum in various companies, among them the Boritisi Trading Company, and the annual dividends have allowed her to finance her studies and buy houses in several countries, Verbrek, Sithicus and Kartakass among them. All of these safe-



houses are outfitted with hidden laboratories. When her investments do not suffice to fund her work, Mu supplements her income by crafting magical and exotic clockwork items for specific customers, the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins among them. Mu does not sell the fruits of her alchemical research; her greatest invention, **kinetic gel**, could potentially revolutionize many aspects of life in the Land of Mists, but she does not trust people not to widely abuse its properties.

Mu has taken to corresponding with various people with similar interests in Mordent, Hazlan, Darkon, Graben, Dementlieu and Sri Raji among other places, but her paranoid tendency to flee from safe-house to safe-house at the slightest disturbance often disrupts such correspondence. She equally loathes and craves the company of others; her retiring nature wars constantly with a soul-grinding sense of isolation in the Lands of Mists and she has taken to creating various constructs, most of them fantastically-shaped homunculi, to keep a handle on this inner conflict. Unfortunately, this is not her only problem.

Following the death of *raunie* Mariuschka at her own hands, Mu fears she is living under a curse. She has discovered powers in herself that she cannot explain with either science or magic, and which fill her with an instinctive fear and loathing, similar to the instinctive revulsion she feels whenever she encounters the Mists or its creatures. Deep down, in spite of her endless efforts to escape the Land of Mists, Mu fears that she may have become tied to them by certain acts which continue to fill her with shame. Worse yet, there is a reason for why she refuses to mention her true name and the name of her home world. Following her stay in the Asylum of

Broken Tears, she simply cannot recall either...

## Dread Possibility: Un-Chosen

*Mu is familiar with the existence of Hala's faith and even found shelter in one of its hospices shortly after her first departure from Barovia. She immediately departed once the priestesses recognized her as a Witch and offered her a place among them; to her own knowledge, that was the last time she had dealings with them. Unknown to Mu, there are some Witches of Hala who have maintained a keen interest in her affairs.*

*Sister Anya, a Falkovnian Witch, considers Mu to be an insult to and desecration of what it means to be a Witch; her scientific work runs counter to nature and her use of Witch magic is aimed at crafting pseudo-scientific gadgetry and piercing the border between worlds. As a result, Sister Anya is urging her fellow priestesses to do something about Mu before she falls into complete corruption and becomes a Hag with unique and terrifying abilities.*

*Sister Lettice of Mordent, on the other hand, believes that Mu is pushing back the boundaries of witchcraft and should be enticed to join the flock – by enchantment if persuasion will not work. In order to lay groundwork, she has been corresponding with Mu, sending her scrolls containing new Witch spells and bits of lore as they come to her.*

*In the aftermath of "the Brightwell Legacy", Mu now bears a scar patterned after Hala's own holy symbol on the palm of her hand. Should word of this ever reach the priestesses of Hala, it is anyone's guess which way the argument between Anya's and Lettice's factions might tip.*

### ***Dread Possibility: Poison Pen-Pals***

*Mu does not personally know all the people she corresponds with, just as she keeps her identity hidden from most of them. She has refused to go anywhere near Darkon since she learned of its 'residential curse', and she found Graben so intolerable that she has only been there to see to her business interests with the Carlysle Trading Company. Since her correspondence mostly runs through intermediaries, some of whom are not entirely trustworthy, it is perfectly possible that she has been exchanging scholarly lore with some very bad people. For instance, at least one of her Darkonese contacts can be under the sway of King Azalin; her Grabenite contacts may serve Meredoth. She is almost certainly exchanging letters with members of the Red Academy in Hazlan, not to mention the Department of Arcane Sciences of the University of Dementlieu. Any of these people might try to entice her into visiting them openly, offering special items or the opportunity to lecture in front of eager young students, but intending something considerably worse. Should they ever succeed, Mu's skills and powers, harnessed to the will of a Darklord or slightly less powerful mastermind, might tip several precarious balances in the Core. In a way, Mu's paranoia and misanthropy are keeping a potential disaster at bay.*

## **Path of the concubine**

Failed Powers Checks have granted Mu special abilities – none of which she finds at all pleasant, and which may end up transforming her into something vile if she does not manage to find her way back from the abyss.

**Fatal manicure** – Mu's hands have become weapons, allowing her to deal claw damage in combat. Her fingernails retain an eternally flawless manicure in public, but

become curved and inky black whenever Mu is alone. In response, she has taken to obsessively painting her nails or wears gloves when such paints are not available.

**Dance of the succubus** – After the events in Hazlan, the Dark Powers granted Mu the power of the *Dance of Kindled Desires*. While the dance functions normally, one of her other powers has been affected adversely; every time she uses her Flight Hex, she sprouts visible, demonic wings, which stay with her for a number of days equal to the number of rounds she spent in flight. Mu has managed to disguise these wings as a hooded cloak of pale leather so far, but a careful enough inspection could lead to very erroneous conclusions as to her nature.

**Beguiling beauty** – Mu's beauty has been enhanced well beyond what nature granted her, allowing her to easily trick those susceptible to her physical charms. The downside to this 'gift' however, is that any creature attracted to her and in conversation with her must make a Sense motive check against Mu's passive Bluff score, or else becomes convinced that the interest is mutual and that Mu is actively flirting with them. Mu's loathing of physical proximity has only been worsened by the results of this power, and she frequently uses disguises and avoids making eye contact or talking more than a few minutes.



# DIE KAISERREICH

The Role of Falkovnia

By Mikhail "NeoTiamat" Rekun

## Tropes

Falkovnia taps into a rich vein of military horror, going back to at least the First World War, and especially Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, on through countless Vietnam movies, and into the present with film series like *Aliens* and *Predator*. The specifics may change, but the emphasis is always on the brutal, pointless nature of war, fighting against a superior foe, while your own chain of command is some unwholesome combination of evil and incompetent.

## Purpose

Falkovnia is best used to inject a military element into a campaign. Falkovnian PCs are likely to be soldiers fighting in one of Drakov's many military campaigns, while rebel PCs, or PCs outside the country, will see the Falkovnians as the iron fist of a dangerous military state. Alternatively, the country can also be used for an examination of evil as it in fact occurs in the real world -- exploring both the utter banality and the utter heinousness of man to man.

## Theme

Falkovnia can be run with any *one* of the following themes at the head.

- Military Horror: Falkovnia is a society embroiled in constant, never-ending warfare -- against the Fey of the east, against the



dead of the north, against the aberrant creatures of the southeast, and against a variety of rebel groups ranging from the admirable to the terroristic. Militaristic or not, the Falkovnian soldier is just a mortal man, trying to face off against inhuman horrors... and in some ways, his own superiors are just as terrifying and troubling as his enemies.

- The Depravity of Man to Man: Death camps. War crimes. Slavery. Mass executions by impalement. The evils of Falkovnia are such to trump the more personal horrors of other lands. Here, hatred and xenophobia, death and despair flow in the streets, reducing the entire society to a festering swamp of hate.

- The Banality of Evil: The most subtle approach to Falkovnia, emphasized in the civilian life, is how easily horror and evil becomes normalized. Falkovnians are not really any different from people anywhere else, with their own hopes, dreams, ambitions, petty complaints, and their own lives, really, but they've accepted and internalized the evil of their society to the point that it doesn't seem to be evil

anymore. Falkovnia is about how easy and natural and *banal* evil can be.

## The Land

### Environment

Falkovnia is a large and fertile land located in the western foothills of the Balinok Mountains, stretching to the banks of the Musarde. The climate is temperate and the environment forested, though many of Falkovnia's forests have been cut down to make way for fields and farmland. Larger than any of its neighbors save Darkon, Falkovnia may be divided into a number of distinct geographic zones.

The western half of the country, from about Lekar, Morfenzi, and Aerie west, is

where the great bulk (80%) of the Falkovnian population lives. It is an area of rolling hills and fields, with patches of old forest still standing, and a profusion of slow-moving rivers and large lakes (especially near the Lamordian border). It is a very *tame* land -- dangerous animals have been extirpated from the forests, many rivers have been widened to render them navigable, the swamps have been drained, and the landscape is generally marked by walled towns, fenced farms, and rural fields. Though not especially fertile compared to the lands further south, Falkovnian engineers have installed elaborate and extremely effective irrigation systems to make Falkovnia one of the breadbaskets of the Core.

### The Trouble with Falkovnians and the Importance of Choosing a Theme

In previous versions, Falkovnia was a fairly transparent copy of Nazi Germany by way of Vlad the Impaler's Wallachia. Unfortunately, actually using crypto-Nazis in a role-playing game like this lends itself to problems. On the one hand, treating them as flat, uniformly evil villains fit only to be killed is neither hugely interesting nor very Gothic (if one wants disposable mooks, zombies are generally preferable). On the other hand, trying to get into their heads and making them three-dimensional characters, without trivializing their quite enormous crimes, is both very difficult and for most people, not terribly fun.

As such, this write-up of Falkovnia goes in a different direction. They're an evil dictatorship, but so are half the countries of the Core -- they are militaristic, but not genocidal, and are presented as having at least a measure of reason on their side for why they act as they do. Players can make patriotic Falkovnians with no more qualms than they can make patriotic Hazlani or Darkonians, confident that they'll usually be facing more malign foes. That said, two other themes are presented for GMs and players interested in really exploring what a fascist society would be like. This is not recommended for any but the most masochistic players with a fondness for moral ambiguity.

Our advice? Pick one theme and stick with it. This write-up will focus on the first theme of Military Horror, but the difference will be primarily a matter of emphasis.



The remainder of the country is... less pleasant. To the north, along the Darkonian border, the land is predominantly old growth forest, ancient trees that have resisted the efforts of Falkovnia's engineers to tame them and render them into usable farmland. To the east, the Balinoks are just as heavily forested, but add the joys of traveling in mountains to the matter, with countless sudden gorges, treacherous slopes, deep ravines, and a maddening profusion of tiny valleys and passes. To the southeast, near northern Borca, the foothills of the Balinoks are marked with swampland, pestilential bogs that threaten to swallow the unwary.

Falkovnia is also known for having some *decidedly* uncanny wildlife. The most infamous are the pseudonatural creatures of the southeastern swamps, normal animals

(or people) afflicted with heavy, cancerous growths that grant them greatly increased strength and stamina, but also drive them rabid with rage and hate. Some have even been seen with strange extra limbs or venomous bites. As one goes north, the wildlife becomes less hideous but no less dangerous -- the wolves of the eastern Balinoks seem unusually large and unusually aggressive, likely the result of Teg manipulations. Along the Darkonian border, meanwhile, undead are common enough to be counted as part of the local wild-'life', with rogue zombies a fact of existence, and more deadly things such as Mohrgs or ghosts unfortunately common.

## Social Geography

Falkovnia is a large and heavily urbanized country, and at fifteen million its population is the second largest in the Core, with only Darkon's being greater. Some twenty-percent of the population dwells in the cities and towns of the country, with the five main cities being Lekar (the capital, with some 400,000 people), Morfenzi, Silbervas, Aerie (at about 200,000 each), and the fortress-city of Stangengrad. Falkovnian cities are large, orderly, and well-defended. They are primarily industrial/commercial -- Falkovnia itself is a heavily industrialized country, with the foundries of Lekar and the slaughterhouses of Morfenzi producing a significant amount of the Core's steel and leather respectively, while Falkovnia's position and good roads make it a nexus for trade. The towns are smaller (averaging some twenty to fifty thousand people), but are all over the countryside. They serve as collection posts for the agricultural produce of the countryside, or as centers for the logging and mining trades (both of which are, unfortunately, mostly located in the eastern part of the country). There are relatively

### The Zweifalk

This large, two-headed eagle is the national symbol of Falkovnia, and as such is present absolutely everywhere in Falkovnian iconography and state insignia. The actual bird is much rarer, being found mostly in the Balinoks of east-southeast. Quite likely the bird was originally either some pseudonatural mutation or fey construct, but they breed naturally and are generally recognized as an actual species (their two brains work more like two lobes of one brain, connected by some very heavy nerve endings in the necks). Some Falkovnian officers keep them as pets, as they're fairly docile by raptor standards, and look impressive as anything. They're also popular familiars among the Radiant Tower.

few villages, and even those that do exist tend to be fairly large and advanced (usually close to a thousand people). This entire network is kept together by a large collection of roads crisscrossing the land, which are maintained by the Falkovnian military. Travel in Falkovnia, at least in the western regions, is safe and quick.

By law and necessity, Falkovnian towns and cities are all fortified -- most have stone walls and surrounding fortresses, while even the smallest towns and villages have at least a palisade. Towards the east in particular, Falkovnian settlements bear a strong resemblance to an armed camp.

With that in mind, two particular elements of Falkovnian society deserve mention. First is the military. Falkovnia's military is *huge*, even relative to Falkovnia's large population. The military is essentially a society-within-a-society, with its own living areas and economic services. Most towns will have at least a barrack for the local soldiers, and the five cities all have large and prominent fortress-complexes. Other parts of the military dwell in forward bases along the northern and eastern borders, conducting military operations for months or years at a time. Falkovnian military camps are built with palisades, a universal street pattern (no matter where it is, all Falkovnian camps have the same layout, which keeps soldiers from getting lost), and are essentially small, or not so small, towns in their own right.

The other element is the work camp. The Falkovnian government is a great believer in making people useful, and so criminals and POWs alike are dispatched to work camps scattered across the country. There they have the dubious 'honor' of doing the most dangerous and thankless work, most commonly mining or logging in

dangerous regions, while under heavy guard. Though the Falkovnian government takes efforts to keep its prisoners healthy and able to work, the mortality in these camps tends to be ruinous.

## The Folk

### Social Classes

Falkovnians sometimes claim that they live in the most egalitarian society in the Core. This is true... from a certain point of view. Falkovnia lacks the aristocracy and nobility that are found in other lands in the Core, and at least in theory, the government and military are both meritocratic institutions where a man can rise as far as his talents. In practice, nepotism and string-pulling turn the higher ranks of the Falkovnian military-state into a largely family business, but the idea is there all the same.

Excluded from Falkovnia's egalitarian promise are **Prisoners**, sometimes called slaves outside the country. These are an unruly mix of prisoners-of-war (Darkonian primarily), actual criminals, and political prisoners who are put to hard labor in various work-camps scattered around the country. Many prisoners are demihumans, especially Darkonian elves, and the concept of a 'free' elf or other demihuman is rather peculiar in Falkovnia, though they do exist. In general, prisoners are kept out of sight and out of mind of the main population, though on rare occasions they are 'loaned' to high-ranking Falkovnian officials as, essentially, slaves.

The bulk of the Falkovnian population consists of **Civilians**, which is essentially anyone who is not working for the state in some fashion. Civilians include all farmers, most townsfolk, artisans, and service types. Basically, these are the common people



who keep the country going. In theory, being a civilian is considered a perfectly respectable, honorable occupation, but the truth is that there is only so far that civilians can rise in Falkovnia without affiliating with the military-state in some fashion.

All Falkovnian men and women -- unless granted an exemption for health reasons or some other *very* convincing rationale -- are conscripted for two years following their eighteenth birthday. Such **Conscripts** serve in the army, receive military training, and are usually put to work manning garrisons or building roads and canals, though some see combat all the same. At the age of 20, most muster out, but a sizable proportion remains in the military, signing up as twenty-year men. Conscripts are mostly treated as being young, not overly intelligent, but bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. They aren't respected much.

On the other hand, those who stay and become **Professional Soldiers** are given considerable status and prestige, lionized in rhetoric and art, and are given better pay, legal privileges, and a host of other small favors by the state to make up for the fact that most of them are going to die fighting undead, fey, or aberrant horrors. Falkovnian barracks that are occupied by professional soldiers tend to resemble rather nice communal dwellings, and though it's always a military environment, the standard of living is reasonably good. Those who survive their term will usually become civilians at the age of forty, though a handful will sign up for *another* twenty years. Anyone who finishes a 'double-term' of active combat duty alive is basically treated as a living embodiment of the Falkovnian nation and accorded immense prestige to account for the suffering they've gone through. Medals and dinner with Drakov usually follow.

Other conscripts join the Falkovnian state, and become what is called an **Apparatchik**, that is, someone who dwells in the state 'Apparat' or state organization. This is actually a broader category than it seems at first, because several classes of people are basically integrated into the Falkovnian state. All merchants are technically attached to the Ministry of Trade and have a rank in that organization, most intellectuals will be affiliated with the Ministry of Science, the Radiant Tower, or one of the military academies, and many artistic types receive a salary from the Ministry of Culture. Furthermore, given that Falkovnia is a thoroughly militarized state, all of these people have military ranks. Only in Falkovnia does one have the strange experience of meeting a louche poet who is also an active-duty Hauptmann. That said, apparatchiks are usually not granted the sort of respect that professional soldiers are, though there are exceptions (such as the *Polizei*), and rank tends to trump 'branch' here.

At the higher ranks (Lieutenant and higher), both professional soldiers and Apparatchiks enter into the ranks of the **Rankers**, the high-officials who are the real lords of Falkovnia. Military-state officials govern all aspects of society, and occupy a position broadly equivalent to that of aristocrats in other lands. In theory, all are hard-working servants of the Falkovnian state who rose to their present ranks on merit, and to a considerable extent this is so. At the same time however, it's also commonly and cynically observed that being related to a senior officer, or sleeping with one, are both forms of merit that earn many rewards. Still, the system does tend to weed out *rank* incompetents (usually by giving them jobs where they can't do much damage... or on the front-lines), and so

most Falkovnian officials have at least a basic level of competency.

## Gender and Falkovnia

Officially, Falkovnia has perfect equality. Every Falkovnian can be as good as any other Falkovnian, if they simply apply themselves hard enough and work their way up the ranks. This extends to gender relations -- women have the exact same rights and opportunities as men in the Falkovnian system. Of course, reality often fails to match rhetoric, but not always, and the idea is an important one.

A final, unique category is that of the **Talons**, who form a state-within-a-state in the Falkovnian system. Patterned after a knightly order and recruited from the cream of Falkovnia's military academies, the Talons raise extreme nationalism and militarism to the level of a religion. Talons are enormously feared and somewhat respected, and most of them are violent fanatics in service to the Falkovnian state. By law, they can hold no permanent rank outside of the Talon's order, and are merely 'seconded' to other organizations such as the *Falkpolizei* or the military. In some cases, this is just a polite fiction -- the Talon serves in the same post for twenty or thirty years. Others are moved around as required. They are most often Drakov's elite enforcers and bodyguards, as well as secret shock troops.

## Ethnic Groups

Falkovnians are a Lamordic people -- that is, they draw their roots from the same cultural-ethnic well as the people of Lamordia, and to a lesser extent, western

Darkon. They're the most populous of the Lamordic peoples by a good margin. The typical Falkovnian is tall, with a heavy build and broad shoulders, a distinctly square cast of face, fair-skinned and with hair that ranges from dark brown to dark blond and eyes that are usually brown or hazel in color. Falkovnians idealize a sort of muscular build as their standard of beauty, with even the women tending towards the Amazonian. Clothing tends towards black, blue, and grey, and even civilian Falkovnians ape the military in their choice of fashion.

Though all are of the same ethnicity, Falkovnians display a fair amount of variation between different parts of the country. Towards the north and west, they grow taller still, with blue eyes and blond

## Rank Obsession

For a society so egalitarian in theory, Falkovnians tend to be rather rank-obsessed. Theirs is a military society, and so it is vitally important to know who can order you about and whom you can order about. On the front lines, this tends to be straightforward enough, but in Falkovnian civil society, there are "minute" variations in status between military officials of different regions and branches, between different Ministries, and between the profusion of often-unique titles that Falkovnians use for their specialists. Figuring out whether an Oberst outranks a 3rd Degree Magus of the Radiant Tower, and how they compare to the Senior Deputy Minister of Trade, requires the same sort of skill that deciphering noble heraldry needs.



hair appearing more commonly -- by the time one reaches Lekar, telling a Falkovnian from a Lamordian is basically impossible. Black hair and somewhat darker skin occurs to the south, and Falkovnians of the eastern, mountainous regions tend to be slimmer and with narrower faces (suggesting that an eastern Falkovnian has Elven blood is grounds for a fight).

The most interesting variation is towards the southeast, where quite a lot of frankly peculiar mutations crop up near the swamps. Falkovnians with naturally white or green hair are not uncommon, as are people with black, violet, or even clear grey eyes. Rates of albinism are very high all over the country (about five or six times that of neighboring lands), but especially along the northern border (where the ratio is closer to ten times).

### The Hawk Brand

...is gone. While some Falkovnians, especially Talons, will have hawk tattoos, mass branding with a hot iron is not a thing anymore.

There are very few ethnic minorities in Falkovnia. Most are Darkonians, who are captured and shipped to labor camps, and reflect the ethnic mix of Falkovnia's neighbor. Lamordians also represent a decently-sized minority, though most Falkovnians and some Lamordians basically consider themselves to be the same people. The Vistani are here as they are everywhere in the Core, and are officially tolerated but generally unwelcome. The handful of Dementlieuse, Richemuloise, and Borcan expatriates living in Falkovnian are usually disdained, though officially they have the same rights as anyone else, and some can rise to very high ranks (the current ambassador to Dementlieu, Marcos

Vedarrak, is in fact ethnically Dementlieuse, and is the most powerful man in the Foreign Ministry).

Falkovnia does have two native demihuman populations, both located in the mountainous and forested east. The elves are primarily Darkonian 'High' Elves, though their society is rather smaller-scale and rural compared to that of their northern cousins. They live in isolated villages up in the mountains and forests, on and along the Tepestani border. The kobolds meanwhile are small, blue-skinned lizard-people who live in the deep mountains underground, often in tunnels far too small for larger humans to travel through. Formally, elves are considered to be Falkovnian citizens and are equal in status to any human, though in practice they tend to run into "considerable" discrimination (most Falkovnians consider elves to be inveterate criminals and rebels). That said, at least a few elves have managed to rise to respectable ranks in the Falkovnian state, especially in the Radiant Tower. Kobolds, meanwhile, are much more rarely encountered (given that they live underground) and usually only deal with the greater Falkovnian society through intermediaries. Most people don't consider kobolds to be 'civilized' or even (demi)human, though a few are able to get formal Writs of Citizenship which entitle them to full participation in Falkovnian society -- which mostly means they get discriminated against even more than the elves, though a few have made a decent living as clockmakers and machinists in Falkovnia's cities. The Falkovnian state has a somewhat schizophrenic relationship with their demihumans -- on the one hand, it often leaves them somewhat alone, since it recognizes the difficulty of enforcing its will in the very harsh environments where they both dwell, but on the other hand, the idea of pockets free from the state is intolerable

to the Falkovnian government. Thus, the day-to-day reality will vary greatly depending on who's in charge. Some officials will look the other way in exchange for token obedience, while others will attempt to enforce full Falkovnian law, usually with disastrous results. Elves and kobolds both make up for a larger-than-expected share of Falkovnia's dissidents, and in some extreme cases villages of demihumans have been known to make pacts with uncanny fey or aberrant creatures to defend themselves against the state. This usually ends in tears.

## Religion

The Falkovnian state is officially secular, and allows religious freedom. Anyone can worship anything they like, so long as they don't fall afoul of the sedition

laws -- the catch being that the Falkovnian government is "enormously" suspicious of anything that whiffs of a large church hierarchy that might exist outside the government. Preachers that become too popular have a heavy risk of being accused of sedition and carted off to the labor camps, and any religious organization will run into a thousand petty harassments. Falkovnians who are publicly religious soon find their upward advancement grinding to a halt.

Most Falkovnians are Ezran, usually following the Port-a-Lucine or Home Faith branches of the religion. The Halans, being unobtrusive and apolitical, are generally approved of by the Falkovnian government and run a network of hospices in the country, and there are small pockets of Lawgiver worshippers, especially in Lekar.

## Education in Falkovnia

Falkovnians are among the more highly educated peoples of the Core. Schooling is compulsory between the ages of six and fourteen, with state-run schools found in all but the smallest villages. At that point, most of the lower classes finish school and go to work, while the middle classes and higher attend a further four years of education at a secondary school. Afterwards, most Falkovnians are conscripted for two years' service, unless they manage entry into one of the state's special academies – attendance at which is counted against one's service to the state. Four years of education at these academies is all but required for anyone hoping to gain entry to the upper ranks of Falkovnian society, and competition for the limited places (determined by entrance exams) is fierce. The academies are arranged by focus, so that the Radiant Tower maintains a mage's academy in Lekar, the Ministry of Trade maintains an academy in Morfenzi, and the most prestigious of them all is the Stangengrad Military Academy, which prepares young, elite Falkovnians for leadership positions in the state.

Falkovnian education is quite good – particularly in the technical sciences – but is also very heavy on indoctrination and glorious patriotic histories of the state. All academies and most of the secondary schools are boarding schools, and conditions in them tend to be brutal, particularly the sports practices which result in a few dead children every year. Hazing practices are also viciously severe, and there are veteran Falkovnian soldiers who will face waves of undead without fear, yet wake from



## Falkovnian Science and Technology

People who live around Falkovnia's borders regularly frighten one another with stories of Falkovnian super-science, where mad doctors produce abominations against all that is just and good to fight their endless wars. The truth, as the truth tends to be, is more complex. The Ministry of Science is one of Falkovnia's more powerful and well-funded governmental organizations, and it is able to shower immense resources on any scientist who catches its attention. The problem comes from two angles. First, it simply doesn't care about most scientists or inventors, since their work can't be rendered into the service of the state. Secondly, the scientists who do attract the Ministry's eye are characterized more by their ability to sell themselves than by their actual scientific knowledge, meaning that the ranks of the Ministry of Science are populated by more than their fair share of unscrupulous con men and fools. Most of Falkovnia's day-to-day technology, in the realms of agriculture or consumer products, tends to be stolen from neighboring lands then, and in some areas of science they are very far behind due to the actions of con men.

That said, sometimes the Ministry of Science comes across a true genius, and the results of such a union are often terrifying. Falkovnia has the most advanced biological program in the Demiplane, fully rivaling anything Paridon produces -- formulae to induce lycanthropy, methods to create artificial humans, super-strength serums, and some very successful anti-aging drugs. The fact that Minister Vjorn Horstmann is a biologist has something to do with this.

Most curiously, the Darkonian Eternal Order has a significant following in the military city of Stangengrad, whose worshippers hope to appease the dead and keep the monsters of Darkon from overrunning the country. One result of the generalized Falkovnian persecution of religion is that Falkovnian faiths are usually very ecumenical, united by opposition to a secular authority. Only in Falkovnia does one run into an Ezran congregation meeting at the home of a prominent and wealthy worshipper of the Lawgiver, all of them protected by a sympathetic military official who worships the Eternal Order himself.

## Culture

In modern days, Falkovnia is characterized as a thuggish country bent on militarism and extreme nationalism, and this

is a fairly accurate representation of Falkovnian culture. Nationalist propaganda extolling the virtues of the Falkovnian state is everywhere, as are screeds against Falkovnia's many deadly enemies. What outsiders tend to miss is that Falkovnian propaganda is actually "very good". The Ministry of Culture is an expert at making people believe what they should.

Their list of tricks is a long one. The Ministry of Culture puts out several newspapers with content ranging from the stodgy to the *almost* but not *quite* disloyal (the better to let people cool off a bit). They organize rallies, celebrations, and festivals that are the equals of any spectacle in the Core, with pillars of light, vast flags, or arcane performances. They maintain museums, theaters, and libraries, all of them providing offerings that are subtly

tilted to the Falkovnian nationalist bent. They commission novels, poems, and plays with approved themes. The Ministry basically believes in a light but ever-present touch. They also tend to come down like a wall of bricks on any unofficial expressions of culture, of which there are plenty as well. In the old days, before Drakov, Falkovnia was sometimes called "Das Land der Dichter und Denker", The Land of Poets and Thinkers, with a powerful and vibrant culture no less than that of Dementlieu. There isn't quite so much of that anymore, but there's still a strong underground literary tradition in Falkovnia, with people writing books and copying them out by hand in 'Samizdat' format. The works of early Falkovnian philosophers or poets tends to be, while not exactly repressed (even the Ministry of Culture would have a hard time doing that), certainly made scarce.

## The Realm

### Economy

Falkovnia is a wealthy land, but one struggling with an inefficient economic system. On the one hand, Falkovnia is blessed with plentiful natural resources (good farmland, numerous mineral and metal deposits, large forests), with a highly educated and urbanized population, and with a solid proto-industrial base and a very advanced infrastructure of roads and canals. Falkovnians export a great deal of food, textiles, and metalwork all across the Core, and they have a network of trading enclaves that stretches from Paridon to Nova Vaasa. Falkovnian currency is known and accepted throughout the Core, and the standard of living is fairly high -- certainly comparable to that of Dementlieu or Richemulot.

### Falkovnia's Roads

One minor peculiarity of Falkovnia is that the government absolutely "loves" building roads, bridges, and canals. Building them keeps the conscripted troops occupied, it helps the Falkovnian economy, and it helps move troops rapidly from place to place. As a result, travel in Falkovnia, or at least in the developed areas outside of the northern and eastern borderlands, tends to be very quick and easy. Falkovnia is a popular transit zone for merchants as a result, as they can shave weeks off their trips.

The problem is that Falkovnia's government is always meddling in economic matters. All major industries (steel works, for instance, or the mines) are owned and managed by the government outright. Smaller-scale operations, like individual farms or potteries, are in private hands, but the government is continually inspecting them, regulating them, and otherwise keeping an eye on anything that even whiffs of people gaining power outside the umbrella of the state. The result is that while the state has incredible control over where Falkovnian resources are invested (if the government wants a canal in this place, it gets a canal in this place), it also introduces artificial shortages of goods into the economic system. Thus, one sees even high-ranking Falkovnian officers occasionally having to go without cheese, or a steel foundry without iron ore, because of some screw-up in how merchants were assigned or goods ordered. The system isn't a fully planned economy -- small scale economic activities are basically free, and even



though all merchants are attached to the Ministry of Trade, they have considerable independence, but it has leanings in that direction.

A special word should go out to Falkovnian food. Falkovnia is one of the Core's agricultural centers, and Falkovnian food is common even in places that are virulently opposed to every other aspect of Falkovnia. Falkovnian bread -- brown and made with whole grain -- comes in about three hundred varieties, all falling under the term "Schwarzbrot" (Black Bread). Falkovnian sausages, called "Wurst" come in "fifteen hundred" varieties, to the point where 'sausage eater' is a common insult among Falkovnians and by their neighbors. Most sausages are made in Morfenzi, though almost every town has its own special sort, and Falkovnians take the purity of their sausages *very* seriously. Adulterating one with cat meat is an imprisonable offense. Finally, Falkovnian beer must meet an extremely restrictive purity law called the "Reinheitsgebot" (the Purity Law), which allows only clear water, barley, and hops to be used. In Falkovnia, food is a serious business.

## The Falkovnian Black Market

One of the things that keeps Falkovnia running as well as it does is the black market. A zone of unfettered private enterprise, the black market provides the grease that keeps the machinery of Falkovnia's economy running. To continue from the above example, if a foreman at a steel plant runs out of iron ore, he can simply have the foundry idle, and receive a severe reprimand or even a demotion from his superiors, *or* he can talk to his second cousin who's a 'fixer' in the black market, and a few cart-loads of iron ore will quietly appear a few days later. The foreman just needs to turn a blind eye and tweak the

books when a load of steel walks off two months later. *Everyone* participates and uses the black market, from Drakov's private staff and the leaders of the Ministries down to the poorest peasant. The *Polizei* occasionally go after prominent black marketeers, especially those that dabble in arms or people smuggling, but they mostly leave the lower-level types alone.

## Law

The Falkovnian legal code is largely derived from old Lamordic law, but with two key changes. The first is that Falkovnian law is *harsh* -- even petty offenses can earn lengthy sentences in the work camps. Generally speaking, very minor crimes are punished by fines, with more serious offenses (or those for which the person is unable to pay the fine) being punished by a sentence in labor camps of ascending severity. Your basic pickpocket will get to spend a year or two building roads in the south, while a murderer is likely to be dispatched straight to the eastern border to mine in dangerous conditions, though labor demands can cause criminal sentences to be upgraded or downgraded as needs arise. Despite their reputation, the Falkovnians are not fans of corporal punishment, since it deprives them of labor -- but they are great believers in setting examples with hideous brutality. Thus, a small but noticeable number of criminals are sentenced to death or extreme physical punishment, and these sentences are always torturous in the extreme, with public impalement being the most famous.

The second major deviation is that of 'sedition' which the Falkovnian legal code defines broadly as any action taken against the state. Basically, any act of disloyalty, or even insufficient loyalty, can be labeled sedition and can earn a sentence in the

camp. People have been sent to the work camps merely for making political jokes.

In practice though, most of the *Polizei* have bigger problems than political jokes, because Falkovnia has one of the worst crime problems in the Core – not quite as bad as Nova Vaasa’s but not very far from it. Their large, urbanized population allows for organized crime to flourish, and the militaristic and repressive society results in numerous dark spaces. Falkovnia suffers from major rings of human slavery, arms smuggling, drug rings (mostly importing from Borca), and a viciously high and stubborn murder rate. Something about Falkovnian society leads people to snap, and there’s usually at least one or two serial killers operating in Falkovnia’s cities at any one time.

Compounding the problem are various rebel groups. While some of Falkovnia’s various rebels are idealistic, admirable people who focus on spreading pamphlets or non-violent sabotage, others are less fastidious, linking arms with criminal groups and engaging in what are essentially terroristic activities, both assassinations and bombings.

Another problem is that Falkovnia’s hyper-stratified, military system lends itself very easily to abuse and corruption. Military officials have immense power and authority and, being human, are tempted to abuse that power and authority. Most corruption takes the form of embezzlement, bribery, and some petty extortion, but some are guilty of more severe crimes – human trafficking, sexual assault, or even murder, using their status to get away with it. The Falkovnian state is constantly trying to get this problem under control, and has a few officials burned alive or impaled in public every year, but the problem remains.

Falkovnian law enforcement is handled by the *Polizei*, who are divided into three

groups. The **Landespolizei** (usually called the *Lanpo*) are the most common, and are basically beat cops who keep order and handle minor law enforcement tasks. Every town or village in Falkovnia will have a single Landespolizeimann at least, and they are roughly analogous to the town sheriff of other countries. The **Kriminalpolizei** (usually called the *Kripo*) is the Criminal Police, and they handle serious crimes – murder, arson, human trafficking, and similar nasty business. They tend to be highly trained professionals and are based out of the five cities, with squads being dispatched to smaller towns as necessary. Finally, there are the **Falkspolizei** (usually called the *Falkpo*), or the State Police, who handle political crimes (sedition, treason, and so forth), enforce loyalty, and are generally led by the Talons. They also handle corruption in the government, and are considered answerable only to the Kaiser.

Something to note is that all three branches of the *Polizei* loathe each other passionately. The Kripo considers the Falkpo to be political hacks and ideological nutbags who couldn’t solve a crime if it bit them on the nose (which is sometimes accurate but not always), while the Falkpo considers the Kripo to be overly casual toward political reality and too corrupted by Lamordian and Dementlieuse investigative techniques (again, somewhat accurate). Both look down on the Landespolizei as petty *Polizei* who should get out of the way when the real policemen are investigating, and the Lanpo returns the favor with resentment and complaining about their ignorance of actual reality among the people. The constant struggle between jurisdictions and the thousands of petty acts of sabotage that all three branches of the *Polizei* carry out against each other only makes the crime problem of Falkovnia *worse*.



When a criminal is actually caught, they're brought up before a Magistrate, who reviews the evidence and assigns a sentence. The accused has no rights and no chance to defend themselves save by pulling strings. At higher levels in Falkovnian society, there is a tendency to ignore the legal system in favor of quietly sidelining troublesome officials, usually by assigning them to some dangerous post along the northern and eastern borders.

### GM's Note

Of all the agents of the Falkovnian government, the Kripo are the closest to legitimate 'good guys' -- they investigate serious crimes that everyone can agree are bad (like murder), and do so despite the obstruction of the rather less sympathetic Falkpo (though even they can have their moments on the right side of things when investigating severe corruption). A PC Kripo agent is entirely possible.

## Government

Falkovnia is a military dictatorship with the barest trappings of a legitimate monarchy. At the very top is Kaiser Vlad Drakov I (Kaiser meaning Emperor), and the Falkovnian state is sometimes called the Kaiserreich (the Empire). That tends to be it for monarchical trappings, however -- there is no nobility, no ancient lineage, Drakov never wears either crowns or ermine cloaks, nothing of that sort. In theory, Drakov is the embodiment of the Falkovnian nation and his will is law, but in practice, even he has to maneuver against the various entrenched interests of the Falkovnian state. Beneath Drakov are the Ministries and

the Heer -- Falkovnian society is much more vertically organized than most governments, and while there are provinces (Länder) and sub-provinces (Stadts), they lack independent leadership (Drakov has no desire to let any of his ministers get territorial backing).

The Ministries are the main governance in Falkovnia, and there are many of them. The most prominent and powerful are the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Interior (which controls the police and most of the bureaucracy), the Ministry of Culture (in charge of propaganda), the Ministry of Science (which controls Falkovnian technology), the Ministry of Trade (the economy), and the Radiant Tower (magic and arcane matters). The Talons and the Militärgeheimdienst (Military Intelligence) are lower ranked in theory, but are considered equal to the great ministries in practice, and each of the four armies (the Heer) are explicitly equivalent in rank. Each Ministry is led by a single Minister (still called a Minister), and then flows downward in a bureaucratic chain.

On the whole, Falkovnian society is *extremely* bureaucratized. There are clerks and officials for every matter, and there is a swamp of regulations for every imaginable activity. The kind of omnipresent state machinery that is the Falkovnian state requires a great deal of manpower to actually operate, and it is these armies of clerks, no less than the real armies, that provide Falkovnia with its control over its own population. They *also* give an enormous quantity of young men and women entry into the state machinery, and thus a first step on the ladder towards personal self-advancement.

## Military

Falkovnia has, bar none, the most powerful military in the Core. To begin with,

it is simply *huge*. Falkovnia has a population of fifteen million, and twenty five out of every thousand people are in the active military, meaning that Falkovnia's generals have almost four hundred thousand troops at their disposal. The various reserves and paramilitaries (including the various police forces and the many local militias) bring those numbers up to over one and a half million troops that can be mobilized in the case of an emergency. Furthermore, these are all fairly well-trained and well-equipped soldiers, backed by the industry of Falkovnia and the brilliant wizards and scientists of the Radiant Tower and the Ministry of Science, and by a vast corps of military engineers -- artillery is a particularly well-developed science in Falkovnia. Falkovnian officers, meanwhile, while generally very unpleasant people, are also generally very *competent* people, as life in Falkovnia's higher echelons tends to weed out the fools.

Why then, hasn't Falkovnia conquered the rest of the Core? Simply put, it's stretched too thin. The campaigns against pseudonatural horrors in the southeast and Fey in the east are a constant drain of men and resources, and Darkon to the north is the only state in the Core truly capable of fighting and possibly defeating Falkovnia -- Darkon is twice the size of Falkovnia, and while its armies aren't quite as impressive they are nothing to sneeze at either, especially when one includes the hordes of undead or the might of the wizard-king Azalin himself into the equation. Moreover, Falkovnia's paranoid neighbors have signed the Treaty of the Four Towers against it. Thus, while Falkovnia could easily crush Dementlieu or Borca, it can't do that while also keeping the Fey, aberrants, and rebels down, guarding against a Darkonian invasion, and holding off small invasions

## The Falkovnian Campaign

The quintessential Falkovnian campaign is a military one. The PCs begin as soldiers in one of the Heers, who encounter some kind of monstrous horror (zombies, redcaps, a Mind Flayer). They defeat it, and are commended for it, and in the classic example of 'the reward for a job well done is a harder job' are made military troubleshooters. For the rest of the campaign, the PCs can be shuttled around Falkovnia's three main war-zones, fighting undead in the north, fey in the east, and Aberrations in the Southeast, with a range of possible plots. Zombie apocalypses, Escape from Innsmouth scenarios, Faustian bargains with Fey, ghostly hauntings, cosmic horrors, the Wild Hunt, full military operations against Darkonian troops... for variety, they might be seconded to a Kripo investigation in one of the cities, hunting down serial killers or terroristic rebel groups. And all the while they rise in ranks, getting a better sense of the malevolence of the Falkovnian state (with its own horrors, not least of which might be the ruins of some super-weapon program run amok). Ultimately, the PCs will have to decide whether to defect or rebel, or whether to try and change the system from the inside.

from the other Four Towers at the same time. They're good but not *that* good.

Falkovnia's military is divided into the four Heer (Armies). The massive **Heer des**



**Nordens** is the largest of the armies and is located in the north, centered out of Stangengrad. They fight a constant, low-level brush war with the Darkonians, and patrol the northern border against undead of all sorts. The smaller **Heer des Ostens** is the Army of the East, which patrols the eastern Balinoks and fights the elves and fey there. The **Heers des Südens** is the Army of the South (strictly speaking the southeast), and fights the pseudonatural aberrations of the swamps near the Borcan border. Finally, the large **Heer des Westens** is the garrison force of the main Falkovnian land, and is charged with keeping down rebels there and with guarding against the Four Towers. All of the four armies have their own chains of command and their own support networks, and are basically independent of one another. A General Staff in Lekar keeps them organized if it so proves necessary.

Falkovnian ranks are as follows:

- Generalfeldmarschall = The General Field Marshal, the leader of the Falkovnian armies. This is Drakov.
- Generaloberst = 'Colonel-General,' the leaders of the four Heers.
- General = General
- Oberst = Colonel
- Hauptmann = Captain
- Leutnant = Lieutenant
- Feldwebel = Sergeant
- Soldat or Jäger = Enlisted men

## Politics

Official rhetoric has politics as something that happens to other people -- the decadent nations bordering Falkovnia have politics and intrigues, but all of Falkovnia is united towards a single goal. This, even more than the usual official rhetoric, is balderdash. Falkovnian politics are as nasty and conspiratorial as any to be found in the rest of the Core, and with an

added level of violence as well. Falkovnians don't go in for poison or lone assassins so much as they prefer bombings and entire military raids on their political foes, which are then blamed on 'rebels'. Personal level politics tends to be a competition of officials jockeying for position, and sometimes rising in ranks atop the corpses of their fallen superiors.

At a higher level, all of the Ministries and Heers are in constant, ruthless competition with one another. A saying of the Heer des Nordens can summarize it ably: "The Darkonians are our adversary. Our enemy is the Heer des Ostens." Falkovnians raise inter-service rivalry to an art-form, as all four armies compete with one another, the Radiant Tower and the Ministry of Science are constantly one-upping each other, the Foreign Ministry and the Militärgeheimdienst foster intrigue all across the Core, and the Ministry of Interior is at constant odds with the Talons. These struggles tend to be vicious, internecine, and bloody, and people have lost their lives over the annual budgets. Drakov encourages this as a matter of course, since, if everyone is too busy fighting each other, no one can seriously consider overthrowing him -- so he subtly encourages the fighting by appointing officials to overlapping jurisdictions, gives imperfectly clear orders, and generally makes sure that all of his Ministers and Generalobersts have their knives aimed at one another.

The other political element of note is the rebel and dissident groups. There are basically very few outlets for legitimate political discussion open to the Falkovnian public, and this lack of safety valves has resulted in a wide range of groups with attitudes ranging from the benign to the homicidal. Some of the more prominent groups follow:

- **The Circle** is a venerable knighthood lead by Gondegal, and operates as a paramilitary force, mostly towards the northeast. Though too few to engage in proper military actions, they do lead occasional raids on lightly defended targets, and generally try to behave as a guerrilla army. Also called the Knights of Shadows.

- **The Spawn of the Dragon** are a Kobold organization in the southeast, led by a powerful sorcerer-kobold known as the Basilisk. Like the Circle, the Spawn of the Lizard engage in guerrilla actions against the Falkovnian military, but they tend to be a bit less fastidious about civilian casualties.

- **The Freeman of Falkovnia** are the single largest dissident group in Falkovnia, focused on spreading seditious literature, smuggling out political prisoners, and aiding more militant groups like the Spawn of the Lizard or the Circle. They tend to be non-violent, and this helps keep them sympathetic to the larger Falkovnian population -- though it's also often said that they're nothing more than Kargat puppets. This is *partially* true. The Freeman are organized into a cell structure, and at least some cells are actively aided by the Kargat, but the organization as a whole has all types.

- **The Memento Mori** are a small group centered in Lekar and composed of people who have lost relatives to the state, which leads them to engage in acts of assassination and terrorism against the state.

## Foreign Relations

Falkovnia's Foreign Ministry is a large and well-funded organization, and the Ministry of Trade maintains trading enclaves throughout the known world. And of course, there is the endless threat of war between Falkovnia and all of its neighbors. As such, Falkovnia is a very engaged country on the

world stage, although the multitude of actors involved in figuring out Falkovnian foreign policy gives it a somewhat schizophrenic attitude at times. Situations where the Falkovnian ambassador and the trading enclave's representatives are at odds are not uncommon, especially in more remote areas about which the Falkovnian state cares little. Falkovnia's prominent foreign engagements are as follows:

**Darkon:** Darkon is the national blood enemy of the Falkovnian people. They've fought numerous wars over the years, ranging from full-scale conflagrations to minor brush wars, and between the two of them have rendered their borderland into a desolate waste where they trade off pieces of territory for little permanent advantage. The two are *very* evenly matched, which is what keeps them fighting, never able to defeat the other. As it is, the presence of the Darkonian enemy is likely the only reason that Falkovnia hasn't conquered half the western Core, as most of their troops are required to guard the northern border.

**Lamordia:** Falkovnians claim descent from the Lamordic peoples, and Lamordia has the best relations of any other nation with Falkovnia. The actual situation is a bit sticky.

The Falkovnians share a genuine cultural affinity for their northern cousins, and the Lamordians are usually quite happy to have the most potent military force in the Core as their friends... but at the same time, Falkovnia is about ten times larger and far economically superior to Lamordia, and so the Lamordian state makes a point of not actually becoming a client-state of their neighbors. That said, there is a great deal of trade going on between the two nations, Lamordians often emigrate to, and even rise to high ranks in Falkovnia (often as military engineers or in the Ministry of Science), and many of Falkovnia's most



## The Falko-Darkonian Pact

If a GM would ever like to greatly shake-up the politics of the Core, all that's necessary is for Azalin and Drakov to come to some kind of non-aggression pact. Perhaps Drakov is finally persuaded by his Ministers to turn elsewhere, or perhaps Azalin gets tired of bothering with raising zombie hordes on the border. The result would suddenly unleash Falkovnia's armies, allowing them to turn their attentions to the Four Towers. How things progress from there could make for some interesting campaigns. Perhaps there's a sudden surge in diplomatic activity and espionage as everyone maneuvers for advantage. Perhaps the PCs get involved in vicious military campaigns in the swampy Borcan borderlands or are stuck in urban fighting in Pont-a-Museau. Or perhaps they come to play in Occupied Dementlieu, organizing a Resistance against the Falkovnians. Drakov is cursed to fail eventually, but he can cause quite a lot of damage before then... and Azalin, should he decide to do some military adventuring himself, is under no such limitation.

secret compounds are actually located in the Lamordian mountains. Lamordia also serves as an intermediary between Falkovnia and Darkon, keeping a route of communication open between those two states.

**The Four Towers (Dementlieu, Mordent, Borca, and Richemulot):** Some years past, the Falkovnians invaded

Dementlieu, and were only pushed back due to a Darkonian invasion that coincided with unexpectedly stiff Dementlieuse resistance. Nevertheless, this turn of events put a scare into all of Falkovnia's neighbors, and Jacqueline Renier of Richemulot later organized the Four Towers Alliance, a mutual-defense pact in case of further Falkovnian invasion. Currently, the Four Towers have never been properly tested in battle against their dangerous neighbor, and no one is entirely sure how effective the alliance will be. But at the same time, no one wants to bet on continued Falko-Darkonian antagonism for their national security.

### **The Iron Pact (Invidia, Nova**

**Vaasa**, and the Falkovnians hope to add **Barovia** to this list): Though not quite as fondly thought of as the Lamordians, the Invidians and Vaasi are Falkovnia's two main allies in the Core, having signed the Iron Pact just a few years ago. Invidia is essentially a client-state, with trading enclaves in both Karina and Curriculo, and with Falkovnian troops having been lent to Malocchio Aderre in exchange for certain political rights. The Falkovnians don't value their Invidian allies very highly, and tend to be dismissive of them as 'amateurs,' though potentially useful ones for Falkovnia's economy, and as spoilers in case of a conflict with Borca. Nova Vaasa is a different story. Vast, militarily powerful, and economically important, the Falkovnians have put a great deal of effort into securing the aide of Othmar Bolshnik, and the trading enclave in Kantora is the largest anywhere in the Core. Nova Vaasa shares a significant border with Darkon and has the military to do something with it if Bolshnik could ever be persuaded into a war. In recent years, the Falkovnian Foreign Ministry has also made overtures to the Barovians about joining the Iron Pact, on

the basis of mutual antipathy to Darkon, but so far such efforts have foundered on the fact that the Barovians feel much closer culturally to the Borcans than to the Borcans' enemies, and because Strahd XII thoroughly disdains the upstart Drakov. Whether this state of events will continue is anyone's guess.

## Kaiser Vlad Drakov I

Falkovnia's neighbors tend to portray the Falkovnian Kaiser as a bloodthirsty, small-brained thug. Falkovnian rhetoric has Vlad Drakov as the Father of the Nation and a superhuman hero in all ways. The reality is somewhere in the middle. Drakov was a former mercenary captain who managed to found the present Falkovnian state decades ago, and who is primarily responsible for turning Falkovnia into the very efficient, very militaristic nation that it is today.

Drakov looks to be in his fifties, hale and vigorous, but distinguished looking.

What surprises people the most about Drakov is that the man is *enormously* charismatic. It's a bluff, soldierly sort of charm, emphatically populist and working-class, derived from years of leading gruff mercenary troops. Drakov has an encyclopedic memory for names and details, a very good sense of what sort of things people want, and an ability to make people feel at ease. Furthermore, the man is a war hero, and his courage in battle is unquestioned. Even people who have every reason to hate him, such as foreign diplomats, find themselves charmed by his earthy good nature and self-deprecating sense of humor -- Drakov does not buy his own hype. A true story is told about the latter, how Drakov made a sarcastic toast at his own birthday celebration: "Friends! I want to propose a toast to our patriarch, life

### On Drakov

Drakov in the classic version of Ravenloft has been stereotyped as a brain-damaged idiot who manages to be less sympathetic than Hitler (no easy feat that). This version is designed to pull him back from that, making him a primarily Napoleonic figure with a few stylistic elements of Stalin. The key with Drakov is that he's *likable*. If the PCs meet him, they ought to be charmed, or at the very least impressed. The man is very, very good at what he does. The darkness comes from the fact that he's also a murderer, on a significantly larger and more mechanized scale than other Darklords like Strahd or D'Honaire. Where those worthies will kill a single man, Drakov will give the order for the obliteration of an entire village, and not lose a wink of sleep. He *isn't* a sadistic psycho, but the embodiment of a ruthless, uncaring state. He should be terrifying.

Drakov's Darklord curse is that he is fated to never truly win what he wants, but this shouldn't be taken to make him a failure as a general. The point of a Darklord's Curse isn't to make the Darklord weak, but to make his life a misery, and so while Drakov's campaigns will never achieve total victory, he can still accomplish a great deal so long as it isn't enough for *him*. His campaigns may be marked by last minute reverses (perhaps due to the PCs?), or there will be genuine victories that are either Pyrrhic, or rendered hollow by some previously-unknown fact.



and sun, liberator of nations, architect of the Falkovnian Nation [he rattled off all the appellations applied to him in those days] – Kaiser Vlad Drakov the First, and I hope this is the first and *last* speech made to that genius this evening."

As a leader, Drakov is intelligent but not terribly educated. He tends to leave the science and magic to the specialists, and his knowledge of literature or the arts is rather poor. What he does have is significant social intelligence -- Drakov understands how people think, and he's able to utilize that, both in his politics and in his military campaigns. The man is quite likely the best military leader in the Core, because he has an uncanny talent for predicting what his opponents will do.

Of course, there's a dark side to all of this. Charming, brave, intelligent, and self-aware, yes. "Moral" is a different story.

Drakov has two sayings he is greatly fond of, "Death solves all problems — no man, no problem" and "A single death is a tragedy; a thousand deaths is a statistic." Drakov isn't sadistic and doesn't derive any pleasure from violence, but he sincerely believes that death and violence is the best way to solve any and all problems, and that repression and war will get him what he wants (power, respect, prestige). If someone or something is causing trouble, then Drakov has them killed, and that is the end of the matter. If *many* people are causing trouble, then that just means that much more death is required. Drakov places no intrinsic value on human life whatsoever, only on what people can do for him. If they stop being useful or helpful, well then...

# DOMAINS THAT CAME BEFORE

## Lost Domains Of The Black Box Core

By Matt White

Portraits by Talon Dunning, 5th ed stats by Andrew "alhoon" Pavlides, Cartography by Stanton Fink and Kris Thomas

*"The mortals lay down and decided well to name two forms (i.e. the flaming light and obscure darkness of night), out of which it is necessary not to make one, and in this they are led astray." - Parmenides of Elea*

Before the Grand Conjunction, there were lands that appeared and just as quickly vanished from the Core. However, remnants of old maps and lore proved that they had existed, despite our memory not recollecting them.

### Bileplate

We all seek to satisfy needs, while avoiding pain, and are rewarded with pleasure. But when pain and pleasure occur at the same time, confusion occurs and the lines between both become blurred.

### The Land

This small domain once bordered the Nightmare Lands and Bluetspur before the Grand Conjunction, but eventually vanished. Where Bileplate resides now is not certain, evidence shows three possibilities - one is that it is a pocket domain of one of the

dreamspheres in the ring of dreams of the Nightmare Lands, the second is that it is an Island of Terror lost in the Mist, and lastly, it may be both.

What stands out about Bileplate is that it consists of two overlapping realities that are far different from our own: The Wastes (physical reality based) and Otherworld (mental reality based) which can only be entered by those afflicted by madness. The objective of the denizens is to drive people insane so as to draw them into Otherworld to feed the Darklord's appetite.

Both realities look somewhat similar; both are deserts within a huge crater and both realities are unnatural. Otherworld is chaotic and dark, its city is full of strange life. The Wastes is quiet and carries the air of emptiness under a never-setting sun.

The domain's physical reality, "The Wastes", is a windswept desert within a huge rocky crater, which has a ruined city in its heart. The sand swirls with colour, mostly red, blues and purples, and moves on its own accord rather than be stirred by wind. Rocks are orange, with specks of colour that change randomly. The sky is green, with blue clouds drifting by at a fast pace, even in the absence of wind. A purple



sun erratically moves across the sky, but never sets. This reality is unnaturally quiet and feels like something is swallowing the sounds; this makes Move Silently checks gain a +10 bonus. Everything tastes and smells stale, even stuff brought into the domain. Those newly arriving must adjust to the air of Bileplate as if it was high altitude air with low oxygen.

Water can be found in caverns or the stone buildings built on the sides of the cliff, which are called the Stone Galleries, and can also be found in shadowed spots in the city ruins. All of these sources replenish to stay at a certain amount of water by unknown means, for it rarely rains. Rain in The Wastes is rumored to drive those caught in it insane by its touch.

The cliffs have old stone staircases leading to the depths of the crater, where the ruins and desert lie. The stairs are chiseled out of the stone of the cliff itself, though some are safer to traverse than others. Cacti can be found at the base of the cliffs, which also contain life-sustaining water. There is not much native life, but most of the present life consists of those travelers that are trapped here; most seek shelter in the city ruins or the caverns in the cliffs.

The ruins in the crater are the remains of a city whose buildings come from various culture levels, mostly reduced to rubble or buried under sand. The area is littered with the bleached bones of those who got trapped in the other reality while their physical body starved. In the heart of the ruins lies a white stone temple with classical architecture, dedicated to an unnamed god of wine and pleasures, with painted murals of love, wine and joy. This temple is the only original building of this land.

Most people are brought to Bileplate either through the misty border or drawn into the domain by the sight of extreme madness. The possibility of whole buildings drawn in with their inhabitants is not so uncommon. The building gradually fades into existence in the ruined



city of The Wastes, but as soon as it appears, it starts to sink into the sands like the other buildings that rest in the city.

Any reflective surface can be used to see into Otherworld and even enter it, though usually they cannot be used to exit it. Those who view Otherworld in this way must make a Madness check (DC15) or be pulled in by the madness created by the check. A successful save allows them to escape before being drawn in. On a failure,

they suffer a painful transition, for example being sucked through a small mirror or drowned in a reflective pool. When drawn in, their physical body left behind is but a empty shell, which continues to wander the wasteland of the physical reality aimlessly.

The character's physical self's eyes turn inky black and he or she just babbles when talking. They mimic the movements of what they do in the Otherworld reality half the time, and otherwise stand trance-like. They slowly dehydrate; instead of the usual subdual damage by starvation, they take 1d3 Wisdom damage on a failed Will save, this Wisdom point lost will affect their Constitution in the other reality. They start to waste away in the Otherworld, and when brought to zero Wisdom, they fade from existence when the physical body dies. Damage done in Otherworld does subdual damage on the bodies in physical reality. The sight of this can cause a horror check for those viewing such attacks.

In the Otherworld, it is always night and cloudy and the city inside the crater is intact and no longer in ruins. Most of the buildings are Renaissance style. Victims entering Otherworld from The Wastes will usually appear in a similar position to where they disappeared in the other reality. The sands above the crater are crimson and black, and flow into the crater. Fighting against the flow causes victims to sink into it. Those falling off the edge of the crater do not take any damage if traveling with the sand but must escape quickly before getting buried under the rushing sand. The sand volume in the crater never increases, despite the falling sands from above. Winds above the crater also push victims in, as if the crater is drawing a breath. These winds cannot be controlled or resisted.

The survivors trapped in Otherworld fight against the abominations of the Darklord in the city. If they escape

Otherworld, they will have their madness cured. Survivors group together for mutual safety and spend most the time fortifying against the horrors. In the middle of the city, there is an immense black stone temple that connects to the Labyrinth beneath the city. The temple is dedicated to Lorenth Fyirenn, and contains painted murals of torture, blood and painful agony.

Under the city is a great labyrinth that can change at the will of the Darklord and has few exits to the surface. The Labyrinth's core is the lair of the Darklord of Bileplate, Lorenth Fryirenn himself, though he is free to roam anywhere in Otherworld. Rooms in the Labyrinth usually contain elements of a type of madness or suffering. Any rumoured way to escape from Otherworld likely lies in the Labyrinth's ever-changing halls.

**Cultural Level:** Savage (0).

**Major Settlements:** Ruins

**The Folk:** *Population* - unknown and ever-changing number; Human 98%, Other 2%  
*Language* Vaasi, Balok, Darkonese, and many others. *Religions* - None

The population are all those who traveled here, or were drawn into and got stuck in Bileplate. Many are already possessed; the rest usually have gone insane and been taken to Otherworld.

Those still in the physical world with intact minds seek shelter in the cliffs, trying to root out the possessed and scavenge for food. They make small groups for mutual survival and hope to escape the domain or save a loved one from Otherworld.

The city in the Otherworld reality, is just a hunting ground for the creatures to prey on those who have been recently trapped, but also a place for those who have accepted their madness and the Darklord's rule.



These twisted souls are allowed to leave the Labyrinth and try to create a mimicry of life for themselves, in exchange for servitude. They plot and plan an escape from Bileplate, but will not disobey the Darklord unless he and his minions are not in sight. They are by far the most dangerous of those that can be found in the city. *Detect alignment* always detects everything and everybody as chaotic, even the caster themselves.

## Law

No formal government. Those trapped form mutual protection agreements, though the chances of betrayal is often high. Those possessed or having their souls twisted serve the Darklord of Bileplate's will.

## Trade and Diplomacy

Resources (not exploited) -Iron, gypsum, salt. Coinage - None. No sane traveler will seek out this place. Most folks who found themselves in this place when it was part of the Core, found it no better than its neighboring domains. Those trapped in Otherworld are twice as doomed.

**Realm Magic Rating:** The Wastes (physical Reality) 3, Otherworld (Mental Reality) 4 to 6

## Darklord Of Bileplate

### Lorenth Fyirenn

*CN Medium Outsider (Otherworld)*

**Hit Dice:** 16d8+112 (192)

**Initiative:** +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** (Low-ground Levitation) 30

**Armor Class:** 24 (+4 Dex, +10 natural)

**Attacks:** Touch +16

**Damage:** Touch of Madness

**Space/Reach:** 5ft./5ft.

**Special Attacks:** Touch of Madness

**Special Qualities:** Random Regeneration 1-6, Damage Reduction 10/+1, SR 17, Presence of Fear, Disguise of the Flesh, Blood knowledge

**Saves:** Fort +25, Ref +20, Will +25

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 19, Con 24, Int 18, Wis 24, Cha 17

**Skills:** Bluff +22, Concentration+23, Craft (special), Disguise +22, Gather Information +23, Hide +23, Intimidate +22, Knowledge (special), Listen +26, Profession (special), Search +23, Sense Motive +26, Spot +26, Use Magic Device +6

**Feats:** Improved Initiative, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist.

**Challenge Rating:** 18

## Appearance

Lorenth is a tall, gaunt figure with white hair, although his true age is uncertain. He keeps a trimmed beard and mustache, but the rest of him has a manic feel. His eyes are vivid and wild, and so is the way he carries himself. He wears dull white clerical robes with gold trim that cover most of his scarred skin.

## Background

Lorenth Fyirenn was high priest of a deity of wine and earthly pleasures. When Lorenth tired of the pleasures of women and drink and those of love and art, he began a descent into morbid and forbidden pleasures. He would torture people and even use self-mutilation to give him new delights. Soon he and those of his followers who did not turn on him started to preach that the temple should include the other, and to them more truthfully pleasurable, pursuits of agony and madness.

Soon the whole kingdom was but a mad gallery of Lorenth's sick idea of the true pleasures and delights. When the curiosities stopped holding his interest, he demanded his god let him experience the pleasures in a more fulfilling way. He became cursed to only dully feel through his minions. This lets him feel their pleasures, both those of joy and pain, but he is never satisfied, always craving more, becoming more of a monster as he loses knowledge of his past, unable to discern his original thoughts from those of what he has become.

His temple and city was drawn into the Demiplane of Dread, resting in a crater in a domain that is as chaotic and insane as his

mind. His domain has split realities: the physical plane that feels as stale and used-up as the pleasures he discarded, and The Otherworld, the mental reality that is his insane paradise of the perverse, where he can create new levels of pleasure through agony and madness and feel them through those that suffer them. Lorenth feels that he is a god himself now and with his powers many would agree. He has the need to be

always self-conscious, needing to explain that what he does is not insane, but exploring the truth of the world, pleasures and emotions, and the mind. How would you understand the pleasures if you do feel them all?

## Curse of the Darklord

Lorenth is constantly trying to prove himself and his ideas sane, and takes great offense if accused of being such. He just wants to enlighten the people for their own good, to the wonders

they strive to escape from. He always takes the role of being a leader of men or preacher of the truth, and believes this completely.

He can only feel pain and pleasure through his minions. Minions themselves barely register to him but the pain they inflict is like a drug to him. He tries not to go as far as killing a victim but keeps a status quo, retreating from them so he can





savor once again. He believes that by inflicting pain, his victims will see the pleasures from it.

Because most of his memories are lost to him, finding relics in Otherworld that remind him of his past may be his undoing. If he ever regains his memories, he would switch his alignment to chaotic evil and also be vulnerable to being forever destroyed. He used to be a good-aligned priest and still believes he is such; once he learns the truth, he can be pulled back into reality and then destroyed.

Killing the Darklord without collecting all the relics first just causes him to disappear for a day as he reconstructs his consciousness to reappear once again. His minions will retreat into the labyrinth and wait for his return.

## Current Sketch

Lorenth is trying to start a religion to the ideals he preaches; he is not a god but he believes perhaps he was awarded as such to replace the gods. He seeks out those who would make good disciples, and also those who need a guiding hand deeper into madness. He plots to find a way to affect the realities beyond Otherworld.

## Combat

Combat does not satisfy Lorenth, and he only attacks if he is indeed threatened. He would rather let his servants do his fighting for him, or trick the opponent into volunteering to give up his or her soul in trade for the endless pleasures he can offer. Lorenth would rather talk about the knowledge he possesses and the favors he can grant. He is happy to let his guests explore his world, and if they keep him entertained, he may offer escape for only a small price. He likes despair, greed, lust and jealousy, and his world is created around these feelings. Driving someone to

madness, in his view, is opening their eyes to the truth of the world.

**Touch of Madness (Su):** Each time Lorenth strikes the same victim with this attack, the effects become stronger. On the first strike, the victim takes 1d8+5 damage (Fort DC18 save for half) and must save versus Fear (DC21) or be Shaken, (-2 morale penalty on attack, rolls, skills, ability checks and saves). On the second strike, the victim takes 2d8+10 damage (Fort DC19 save for half) and must make a Will save (DC20) or be under the effects of a confusion spell for 16 rounds. On the third strike, the victim takes 3d8+15 damage (Fort DC20 for half) and must make a Fort save (DC21) or be wracked with pain, reducing Dexterity by 2 and imposing a -4 penalty on attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks that lasts for 2d10x10 minutes.

On the fourth strike, the victim takes 4d8+16 damage (Fort DC21 save for half) and make a Fort save (DC21) or be polymorphed into a humanoid that symbolizes pain or a guilty pleasure; the victim's alignment shifts to chaotic neutral and he or she cannot take actions for 1d4 rounds except move actions and free actions (other than quickened spells). On any more subsequent strikes they take 4d8+16 damage (Fort DC21 save for half) and a Fort Save (DC21+number of strikes) or become a spongy, amorphous mass. Unless controlled through the act of will, the victim's shape melts, flows, and boils. The afflicted creature is unable to hold or use any item. Clothing, armor, rings, helmets, and backpacks become useless. Large items like armor, backpacks, and even shirts hamper movement, reducing Dexterity by four.

Soft and misshapen feet and legs reduce speed to 10 feet or 1/4 normal, whichever is less. The searing pain is so strong that the victim cannot act coherently. It cannot cast spells or use magic items, it attacks blindly, unable to discern friend from foe (-4 to hit, 50% chance to miss regardless of attack roll).

Each round the victim spends in an amorphous state, deals one point of permanent Wisdom drain. If the victim's Wisdom score drops to zero, they become a puddle. A victim can make a Charisma check (DC15) to hold their normal form for one round. Shapechange and stonewall spells keep the victim's state stable for the duration of the spell. A restoration, heal or greater restoration cures the victim from this affliction. If struck by the touch of madness while in amorphous form, the victim must make a Fort Save (DC21) or take 3d6 Constitution damage from system shock.

**Presence of Fear (Su):** Those viewing Lorenth's mad form must save versus fear (DC21) or act as though under the effects of a confusion spell for 5d6 rounds.

**Random Regeneration (Ex):** Each round, Lorenth heals 6 points of damage from piercing weapons, heals 4 points of damage from slashing weapons, heals 3 points from cold, lightning and acid, heals 2 points of damage from blunt weapons, and heals 1 point of damage from fire. He takes normal damage from blessed weapons and holy water.

**Servant Control (Ex):** Lorenth can communicate with his servants all at once, and is able to communicate separately to each with his alien mind, an extraordinary feat of Multitasking. More

direct control of its minions can take up a full action. The Darklord of Bileplate can feel the sensations that his servants feel at all times; this causes no harm to the Darklord.

**Telepathy (Su):** Lorenth can communicate telepathically with any creature within a 100 feet that has a language.

**Disguise of the Flesh (Ex):** Lorenth can take on the appearance of anyone trapped in Otherworld, appearing as that victim. This acts like polymorph self but when in combat, he must make a Concentration check against any damage inflicted to himself or change to his true form. This ability grants a +10 to Disguise checks.

**Blood Knowledge (Ex):** Lorenth uses a Gather Information check in place of Knowledge, Craft or Profession checks, as this information is drawn from his victims' or minions' knowledge. If he touches a victim's blood, he can use the same skill level as the victim on his next check.

**World Control (Ex):** As a free action, Lorenth can change and shape the Labyrinth of his lair. Walls take time to shift, move, shrink, and elongate, and cannot be used as an attack but can be used to separate or block opponents.

## Closing the Borders

In the physical reality, the borders, if closed, just make the PC turn back towards the domain, an endless desert each way, where tracks are eaten by the sand. They will eventually find the crater and hopefully some more respect for the salvation of not being lost in an endless desert. In Otherworld, the border is an endless maelstrom of sand which cannot be penetrated, and the only escapes from



within Otherworld are rumored portals or by the Darklord's will.

## 5th edition stats:

### Lorenth Fyrinenn

*Medium fiend, Chaotic Evil*

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**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 152 (18d8+90, above average hit points)

**Speed** fly 30 ft, cannot hover more than 20' over surface

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**Str** 10 (+0) **Dex** 19 (+4) **Con** 20 (+5) **Int** 18 (+4) **Wis** 20 (+5) **Cha** 17 (+3)

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**Saving Throws** Con+10, Wis+10

**Skills** Deception+13, Empathy+15, Intimidation+8, Perception+10, Persuasion+8, Stealth+14

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons

**Senses** Darkvision 120', passive Perception 21

**Languages** Balok, Darkonese, Primordial, Sylvan, Vaasi. telepathy 120'

**Challenge** 13(10000 xp)

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**Legendary Resistance (3/day).** If the darklord fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

**Magic resistance.** Lorenth has advantage on all saving throws against spells and magical effects.

**Regeneration.** The darklord regains 20 hit points at the start of his turn if he has at least 1 hit point. If he takes damage from blessed weapons or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn.

**Use device.** The darklord can ignore class requirements for magic items.

**Blood knowledge.** If the darklord touches the blood of a creature he is considered to be proficient at the same skills as the creature, drawing knowledge from the blood. The effect lasts until the darklord makes a skill check or until the next long rest.

**Disguise of the flesh.** As an action, the Darklord can assume the form of any creature trapped in his world or return to his own form as a bonus action. Taking damage requires Lorenth to make a Concentration check or return to his own form.

While in a different form, the darklord takes the AC, natural attacks, speed, strength, Dexterity and Constitution scores of the creature imitated but keeps his mental stats and powers. He cannot use his presence of fear ability while in a different form.

**Powerful voice:** As an action, Lorenth can use his enchanting voice to try and influence everyone within 90' radius that can understand him. Every target in the area must make a Charisma saving throw (DC 16). Failure: The target is charmed and can repeat the saving throw at the end of each its turns. While charmed the target either suffers from effects similar to a *confusion* spell or is crushed by despair, having disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks or is enthralled (disadvantage on Perception checks).

**Servant control.** Lorenth can communicate with every one of his servants at once, giving simple instructions to each one separately. He can give direct orders or take control of his servants by using an action. The darklord knows what his servants feel at all times.

**World control.** The darklord can use his action to change the labyrinth of his lair. Walls shift and transform at his command. While the transformation isn't usually fast

enough to damage someone, it can be used to separate and isolate targets, cut off escape routes, or confuse trackers.

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### Actions

**Touch of madness.** *Melee weapon attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

*Hit (first strike):* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage and the target must make a Wisdom save (DC 18) or suffer the frightened condition for 1 minute. Each round the target can repeat the save at the end of its turn.

*Hit (second strike):* 21 (6d6) necrotic damage and the target must make a Wisdom save (DC 18) or be placed under effects similar to the *confusion* spell for 1 minute. Each round the target can repeat the save at the end of its turn.

*Hit (third strike):* 36 (8d8) necrotic damage and a living target must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 18) or be wracked in crippling pain suffering disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks for 1 minute or until *greater restoration* or similar magic is used to dispel the effect.

*Hit (fourth strike):* 44 (8d10) necrotic damage and a living target must make a Constitution saving throw DC 18 or start transforming into a humanoid symbolizing pain. The target cannot take actions or reactions during the transformation. At the end of the creature's next turn it must make a second Constitution saving throw with the same DC. Success stops the transformation. Failure means the transformation continues, and the character becomes charmed by the darklord at the end of the target's next turn. If the character leaves the Otherworld, they get a Wisdom saving throw (DC 16) to break free each day.

*Hit (fifth and subsequent strikes):* 44 (8d10) necrotic damage and the target must make a Constitution saving throw with a

DC of 18. Failure means that target's form melds to a nearly amorphous goo. In this state, the victim cannot use items, has a movement speed of 10' and cannot act coherently; it's considered to be under the effects of a *confusion* spell. The random attacks it makes are made with disadvantage. Each round in this state, the creature takes 3d6 damage, becoming a puddle if it dies.

*Greater restoration* and similar magic can cure this affliction. *Polymorph* spells, *stoneskin* or similar magic cast on the victim negate the affliction for the duration.

**Suggestion:** Magical attack, range 90', one target that can understand the darklord. Wisdom saving throw (DC 16). Failure: Lorenth can implant a suggestion similar to the *suggestion* spell.

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### Legendary Actions

The darklord can take 3 legendary actions from the options below. Only one action can be used at a time and at the end of another creature's turn. The darklord regains his spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

**Move.** The darklord moves up to 30' without provoking attacks of opportunity.

**Use item.** The darklord can take the use an object action or activate magical item action

**Regain Reaction.** The darklord replenishes his spent reaction and can use a reaction again if needed.

**Suggestion (costs 2 actions).** The darklord uses his suggestion action on a target within 20'

**Attack (costs 2 actions).** The darklord makes one touch of madness attack.

## Home

The Labyrinth under the Otherworld city is Lorenth's home, though he is free to



travel anywhere in Otherworld. He plays spectator or verbal tormentor, letting his minions fight their own fights, for death is never final for his servants as long as Lorenth exists.

## Tricks of the Darklord

When drawn into Otherworld, the mad are at the mercy of the twisted Darklord, as he tries to break down an opponent's will and sense of reality. For example, when a PC kills a creature of Otherworld, the Darklord may release the PC to the physical world, where possessed people have crafted a scene using a dead person to appear to be the victim of the PC's last act. The Darklord may allow the PCs in and out of both realities, until they do not know which is real, if such a concept is true, and whether those traveling with them are just minions of the Darklord trying to trick them further into madness.

## Rules For Otherworld

Madness lets you travel to the reality of Otherworld. Upon entering this reality, the victim stops perceiving the other reality. Their madness now becomes their weapon against the beings of this chaotic place, though its only small consolation. Those trying to physically enter a gate into Otherworld really only enter it mentally, leaving their physical body behind, as their Otherworld-self gains the Horrified Madness effect without any save, unless they are suffering from another madness.

## Ability Scores

Only non-Otherworld subtypes are affected by the rules below:

While in Otherworld, Strength is considered the same value as the character's unmodified base Charisma, their force of personality becomes actual

personal strength, not merely how one is perceived by others in a social setting. Creatures who drain Strength in Otherworld are draining away personality; those who are drained to zero believe they no longer exist, and are but a dream of some dreamer.

Dexterity is considered the same value as the character's unmodified base Intelligence; unlike in reality, actual Dexterity has no bearing here. As this is a world of the mind, mental dexterity is reflected by reasoning. Creatures who drain Dexterity in Otherworld are draining away reasoning. Those who are drained to zero, believe that they are not so different as the creatures that are draining them and will give in to the delights and pleasures of Otherworld. The world is insane, and so are they, thinking, "does it really matter anymore, why not take on the fruits of this madness?" They become a thing of instinct with no thought, no conscience.

Constitution is same value as the character's unmodified base Wisdom score, as willpower is in essence the reason to keep fighting to not lose oneself and one's soul to Otherworld. The longer a person remains in Otherworld, with their body wasting away in the Waste, also wastes away their Constitution in Otherworld. Those drained to zero lose hope and give into the madness, thinking, "why keep fighting? The end is always the same. It just comes sooner to the fortunate ones."

Wisdom and Intelligence become equal to their base scores, unmodified even by the madness, wisdom is now just the awareness of surroundings and intelligence just reflects learning.

Charisma is unchanged, this stat now signifies how the character perceives his or herself and how good he or she is at manipulation of people.

Draining of Strength, Dexterity and Constitution usually let the creatures of Otherworld assume their victim's place in physical reality, sending their soul to the Darklord of Bileplate to appease him. Scores drained in Otherworld are returned at a rate of 1 per hour unless stated otherwise.

## Alignment

Alignment remains the same, but due to the chaotic domain, all lawful characters receive -1 on all die rolls, and chaotic creatures receive +1 on all die rolls.

## Armor Class

Characters usually carry the same equipment but their new Dexterity score is adjusted into their Armor Class. Having low Dexterity means it is harder to perceive what is real and makes one slow to react due to slow reasoning.

### **Movement Rate, Attacks, Equipment**

Usually the same.

### **Hit Points**

When they first enter this reality, victims are at their full hit points. Damage done in Otherworld is subdual damage, going down to zero hit points results in going unconscious. Going below it is considered the belief that one is surely dead and causes them to let go of their will. Creatures of Otherworld are more interested in draining ability scores; they typically prevent a zero hit point individual from dying, for the sake of prolonging pain as destroying their mind is their usual goal. If someone is killed by going below -10, it's up to the Darklord whether to consume their soul or keep them from dying to play in his world a bit longer.

## Special Abilities For Classes

### Barbarian/ Fighters/ Rangers/ Paladins

These classes can choose to lose a point of Constitution to gain the Strength score they had in the physical world; this effects ends in an hour.

### Rogue/ Bards

These classes have the same option as fighters but it affects Dexterity instead. Bards gain a +2 competence bonus to all rolls, and a +1 bonus is added to any bonuses from bardic music. In Otherworld, bards can use bardic knowledge to find the history of why a person went mad. This drains a point of Strength or more per use, as the Bard receives the thoughts of the creature he is interested in, and then must keep them in check or become overwhelmed by the creature's past, causing the bard to have aftereffects and a hard time discerning which past thoughts are not his own.

### Monk/ Psionicists

These classes can lose a point of Constitution to regain their Strength and Dexterity scores at the cost of one Constitution point. In addition, they can exceed their original scores in these abilities by sacrificing an additional Constitution point per point above the original physical scores.

### Clerics

Clerics cannot not turn or rebuke Undead in Otherworld, instead it becomes the ability (3/day+Charisma Modifier) to halt Otherworld subtype creatures (Ex), range 50ft+10ft/level, Targetting up to 3 creatures, no two can be more than 30 ft. apart. The effect lasts 1 round/level, and is broken if the affected creatures are



attacked or take damage. Otherworld Subtypes creatures are considered double their actual hitdice for this purpose.

## Magic-using Classes

These classes can lose a Constitution point to gain a metamagic feat for a spell they are about to cast, they can add another metamagic feat for each additional Constitution point drain, as they sacrifice their will to unleash a devastating effect.

## Spell-Use in Otherworld

Abjured, Summoned, and Conjured creatures do disappear after their summoning expires, only because they are really a figment of the caster's mind put into this reality. Divination usually fails due to the two different realities. Besides the Attendant Creature, teleportation cannot be used to exit Otherworld, neither can a wish be used to exit Otherworld or to affect its Darklord. Anti-Magic Barriers and items cannot be used in Bileplate and they cease to function when brought there.

## Madness as a Weapon

Characters entering Bileplate won't recover from their madness unless they do so in Otherworld. All those with madness get +2 to Fear and Horror saves and are immune to gaining another madness; instead, when a Madness check is rolled and failed, they receive 1d6 Intelligence damage as their reason is hit by a blow to what they perceive as reality. Each type of madness bestowed a spell-like ability that can be used in Otherworld. The caster level of these abilities is equal to the character's level.

**Blackouts:** *If you do not remember yourself moving, neither will those around you.* Giving up a point of Strength activates the ability to cast *blink*.

**Denial:** *A powerful ability, you believe so strongly that this is not real that creatures are no longer aware of you.* At the cost of a Strength point per hour, the character is granted *Invisibility to Otherworld Subtypes* 1/day. The user of this ability cannot even be detected by a Otherworld Subtype. This has odd effect of the creatures not remembering their existence as well, the creature's memory will come back when the user reappears.

**Horried:** A Horried character can lose a Constitution point to gain a reroll of a Fear or Horror check in Otherworld. The sight what originally horrified the character paralyzes him or her for 1d4 rounds. If this was caused from being in drawn into Otherworld, the character gains a vulnerability to reflective surfaces. Those with Horried madness roll a 1d10 for what type.

1. **Fearstruck** - When a fearstuck character stands agape for 1d4 rounds, enemies ignore the them and go after their allies. If the character is alone, the enemies are instead under the effects of *slow* spell for 1d4 rounds starting at the first round of battle.

2. **Aversion** - Once per hour, a character suffering from aversion can mentally push away enemies, 1d6x10 feet for an additional 2d10 damage on a successful attack roll.

3. **Nightmares** - A character suffering from nightmares can cast *phantasmal killer* on a target that is not the source of the nightmares, at the cost of one Constitution point. The *phantasmal killer* takes the shape of what originally horrified the character.

4. **Revulsion** - A character suffering from revulsion can spend a Constitution point to make a sonic scream attack for 2d10 damage (30' cone).

5. **Obsession:** An obsessed character can sense the object/creature that horrified

them when within 100 feet. If it is a creature, the obsessed character treats it as a favored enemy. The obsessed can ignore the paralyzation effect it has on them at the cost of a Constitution point but must then go directly towards it.

6. **Rage** – An enraged character can ignore the paralyzation effect of what horrified them. Instead, they go into berserker rage but can determine the target of the rage.

7. **Mental Shock** - Once per day at cost of one Dexterity, characters suffering Mental Shock can return to The Waste as a poltergeist. Each hour spent there costs 1 Constitution point. Time passes differently for in Otherworld and only 10 minutes pass per hour spent on other side.

8. **Fascination** – A fascinated character can sense the object/creature that horrified them when within 100 feet. They can ignore the paralyzation effect it has on them at cost of a Constitution point but must then go directly towards it. The character gains a +2 morale bonus to attack and damage while near it. If the object/creature is destroyed in sight, the character loses 1 Constitution, Strength and Dexterity.

9. **Madness** - The character gains a different madness as well.

10. **System Shock** - Characters under this affect gain the Cold One feat. Upon leaving Otherworld, they must make a system shock roll at -10% or die. If successful, they keep the feat. Characters that already have this feat suffer an additional -10% chance to the roll to live.

**Unhinged:** *You believe this is your true self. Anything else was but diversions and curiosity you played around with; this is what you were meant to be in life.* An unhinged character's alignment has changed and he or she is considered a different class (if multiclassed, all levels

become just a single class. They can exceed the base stat of their class by sacrificing a Constitution point per point above their original; this lasts 12 hours.

**Delusions:** A deluded character is able to *shapechange* to another form (equipment is mundane, they gain abilities and weakness but not ability scores, must be large-size or smaller can be humanoid, undead, monstrous humanoid, beast, or shapechanger. They shift to a class of level equal to their total) and/or gain a weapon or armor with bonus equal to their Wisdom modifier or one item that has certain powers that are not usually consistent in Otherworld and are usually more chaotic in its use. Other effects of delusion are up to DM, but shouldn't be used to infuse superpowers, all such powers come at a cost, including chaotic elements. For example, a character who believes he was turned into a vampire gains its weakness, its abilities, but also its thirst for blood. Indulging or use of special abilities can do damage to the character's Strength or Dexterity ability scores. Item uses may use the character's Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity as costs for each use or each combat situation.

**Depression:** *You just want to be left alone.* A depressed character can cast *dimension door*, choosing to enter alone or bring along anyone holding onto him or her. This leads to a safe spot that the character remembers as a safe haven or sanctuary in childhood; it is only a pocket dimension that contains no intelligent life except those that travelled there. For each hour spent here, the character loses a Constitution point, and no one can regain ability scores while here. Character appear to be at a younger age, still innocent to the evils of the world, wearing only mundane clothes (a favorite suit or dress or larger versions of childhood clothing, perhaps even pajamas) and have



no other equipment. Any writing in the sanctuary is ineligible. The characters can return to their original spot or another random spot by opening another door.

**Hallucinations:** *Which world is the real one, and which are you hallucinating?* A hallucinating character can cast *sanctuary* (this ability also lets them see into the other reality temporarily, but not interact with it). It costs a point of Strength each time the ability is used.

**Paranoia:** *You were quite right about what is out there.* A paranoid character receives a danger sense that grants a +2 bonus to Spot and Listen checks. Each time the character reacts to this danger sense ability, they are not surprised. It is taxing to be always paranoid, and takes twice as long to regain lost ability scores.

**Amnesia:** *You are going to be okay, this is but a dream and you are just going to get through it like any other nightmare and forget all about it in the morning.* Damage done to an amnesiac in Otherworld only affects ability scores and hitpoints of their mental self. Their physical self just lays in a coma or standing in a trance. If the physical self dies, the mental self loses Constitution at one point per hour, if shown proof that he or she is dead in the other reality. If they escape Otherworld, they have no memory of what happened there, nor any experience points, having these memories brought back will cause the character to make a Fortitude save (DC21) or take 3d6 Constitution damage from system shock.

**Multiple Personalities:** *You are not alone, but if you can work together you can accomplish anything.* The character becomes a party of characters, all with their own goals and personalities, all missing something that the other may have as a strength. (They are considered 2 points higher in the ability score that reflects that

personality, with a minimum of 12 for that ability score. For each ability that is the strength of one personality, the other personalities have it as a weakness, and have a maximum of 8). Those that escape Otherworld without their counterparts may be missing these parts of their personality, as an after-effect, unless *modify memory* is used to restore it.

**Schizophrenia:** *Two people share the same body, but which one is the real you, if such a real person still exists?* The character's alignment changes and the player must choose a different class. The character can use their real Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution to substitute for their score in Otherworld to fit the class. The character can change to his normal self, but this costs a Strength point per hour. When he reverts back to his Schizophrenia personality he loses a Constitution point to make the transformation, plus takes 1d6 subdual damage from the change. All points lost from either personality's ability scores are kept even if the base score replaced by another.

**Suicidal Self:** *One world does not exist to you, you just have to find a way to see which one it is; if it's a dream, you will wake before you die, you are pretty sure that's how it works..* A suicidal character loses a Constitution point each day. Upon death, either in Otherworld or by starvation/death of physical self, the character will resurrect at full health in Otherworld but their Constitution maximum score is halved permanently., The person is placed somewhere outside of immediate threat but within Otherworld. If the character leaves Otherworld, he becomes a ghost until his body can be revived. If the character died first in Otherworld, the possession of their body has to be expelled before they can return to it, or it becomes

expelled when the character gets free of Otherworld, at the DM's discretion.

**Phobia:** *Your phobia is out to get you but it will have to go through enemies first.* At the cost of Constitution point, a character with a phobia can summon the phobia to attack an enemy. Of course, how this phobia is perceived will be twisted by Otherworld.

## Otherworld Possession

Creatures in Otherworld attack the target character's Otherworld Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution. These effects affect the character's Charisma, Intelligence, and in most cases Wisdom in the physical reality. The damage is temporary, but if any score is reduced to zero, a creature of Otherworld most likely takes over its victim's physical body, and the character's soul is consumed or trapped by the Darklord of Bileplate. These possessed husks are used to get more victims to enter Otherworld; their alignment is chaotic neutral and they have idiosyncrasies of the creature possessing them. *True sight* or use of mirrors outside of Otherworld shows the creature's true form, which usually requires a Horror check with penalties if viewer did not expect such.

Those possessed by an Otherworld creature can create a 10x5 feet mirror (portal) to access Otherworld and can enter it themselves physically, but nothing can leave the portal. Upon entering the portal, it once again becomes the creature that possessed the body, and cannot leave Otherworld until it possesses another body. Losing the physical body makes it even harder for a soul to return unless *resurrection* or *wish* is used.

Possessed creatures gain the Otherworld subtype and use the Intelligence and Wisdom of the possessing creature as well as an increased Charisma if the

Otherworld creature's is higher. This bonus is equal to the difference of creature's and possessed's modifier. The creature can use the skills and feats of the victim but not class abilities or spell-like abilities. When the possessed body is killed, the creature's form is pulled out of it and into a vortex to Otherworld. This may cause a minor Fear check.

## Creatures of Bileplate's

### Physical Reality (The Wastes)

Dust Devil - Air Elementals that patrol the borders of the Wastes.

Mumurshade - Earth Elementals that patrol the borders of the Wastes.

Velvet Mold - Mold whose spores can push someone into madness and thus into Otherworld.

Mind Wight - An undead creature fights to prove its own existence at the expense of others.

Cactus Dryad - A strange fey that may take care of someone's empty body while their soul is trapped in Otherworld.

Displacer Cat - A deadly feline that uses its harmless appearance as a small cat, while actually being a larger one, to draw in victims.

The Possessed (Otherworld Subtype) - Those victims whose bodies are under possession by an Otherworld creature and now lure others to their doom.

Otherworld Fetch (Otherworld Subtype) - A mirror double of a victim that escapes a reflective surface the character looks at. It has the same skills, feats, and ability scores, but not spell or spell-like abilities. Only the victim can see and harm the Fetch. If the Fetch wins, it replaces the person, putting the victim into Otherworld.

Allips (MM) - When an allip reduces a victim to zero Wisdom, the victim is drawn into Otherworld while the body remains in a



coma, even if the Wisdom is gained back. Allips keep to the shadows in the city ruins or caverns.

Pyre Ravenloft Elemental (DoD) – A few wander the Ruins and Caves.

Gibbering Mouther (MM) - Found in caves or in the depths of ruins.

Vermin, Poisonous (MM) - Scorpions and stinging insects of all sizes, their poison causes madness (Hallucinations) on failed check. The initial failure allows a sneak peek into Otherworld, perhaps even letting the victim say something to those trapped. The second check will have them drawn into

Otherworld. These insects usually carry markings of screaming faces or weird colours to show how they differ from normal insects.

## **Creatures of Bileplate's Mental Reality (Otherworld)**

The Attendants (Otherworld Subtype) - Otherworld's Tricksters and Torturers.

Otherworld's Binder (Otherworld Subtype) - A creature entrapped by barbed wire that chases down victims.

Otherworld Sculptor (Otherworld Subtype) - Sculptors of flesh and bone that serve the Darklord's bidding.

Otherworld Dancer (Otherworld Subtype) - A tortured creature trapped forever in dance that wishes to share its fate.

The Rended (Otherworld Subtype) - Victims of the Murmurshade's attack, these living skeletons look for other people's flesh to be able to leave Otherworld.

Twisted Soul (Otherworld Subtype) - The chosen of the Darklord who help spread the Darklord's influence.

Otherworld Juggernaut (Otherworld Subtype) - A guardian of the Labyrinth that kills those foolish enough to linger.

The Contorted (Otherworld Subtype) -

Spheres that contain a trapped victim, who suffers its contorting essence. A force that bends reality around it, they serve as guardians of the Darklord's black temple.

Living Column (Otherworld Subtype) - Variant of the Living wall (DoD) that receives the Otherworld subtype. It gets created by someone being encased in a pillar alive. Pillars can hold up to 12 medium-size creatures, and the Pillars can be encountered in pairs, or groups of up to 6 pairs. Living columns do not attack or absorb creatures that serve the Darklord of Bileplate, unless they are forced into the pillar.

Vargouille (Otherworld Subtype) (MM) - Receives a Chaotic Neutral alignment, Otherworld subtype, and can speak the names of those it knew in life.

Crimson Bones (Otherworld Subtype) (DoD) - Can be found in the City and Labyrinth of Otherworld. They are created by the Darklord from a flayed soul he frees to serve him. The Crimson Bones gains the Otherworld subtype and Outsider Traits and is not considered undead. Sometimes mistaken as a Render or other skeleton. Someone flayed alive till death can become a Crimson Bones, and their physical Body dies.

Elemental (Otherworld Subtype) (Ravenloft) (DoD) - Creations of the Darklord to wander the Labyrinth and sometimes the City. Gains the Otherworld subtype. Stitched (Otherworld Subtype) (VRGtWD) - Gains the Otherworld subtype and outsider traits instead of undead traits. Those reduced to zero Dexterity become a new Stitched.

## **Velvet Mold**

(Cr 2): A velvet coloured mold that is native to Bileplate's physical reality, it can be found in the shadows of the ruins or in caverns. Any living creature within 5 feet

causes the mold to burst forth a cloud of spores, affecting anyone in a 10 feet radius. The victim must make a Fortitude save (Dc15) for take 1d6 Constitution damage.

Then, a Will save versus Madness (Dc15) is required a minute later - even by those who succeeded the first save – to avoid suffering a random Madness and being drawn into Otherworld. Victims watch as the mold covers them, until they can no longer see or breathe, only to break free to the Otherworld. Their physical body becomes a host for the mold, which does 1d6 Constitution damage each day as it covers the victim. Victims reduced to zero Constitution die. A *cure disease* can destroy the mold, but not return the victim's mind until he escapes Otherworld. Fire can destroy the mold that's not on an afflicted victim, only a 1st degree complete body burn or *cure disease* can completely rid the a victim of the mold.

## Theka

A hidden garden in a desolate land, where predators will destroy the ecology if left unchecked. Ancient technology lies useless, for its inhabitants have long lost the ability to understand it.

Legends speak of an ultimate helm might reside there, which can allow a spelljamming ship to free itself from the domains of dread.. And, yes, there are also giant space hamsters.

## The Land

Full Ecology (Temperate to Warm Forest and Jungle) and Sparse Ecology (Temperate Cliff, Mountains, and Plains).

Theka is a realm of extremes, and once nestled between Valachan and Bluetspur. After the Grand Conjunction, it left the core and became an Island of Terror that can be accessed from the Wildlands.

The North and West edge of Theka is a large mountain range. Within the mountains is a valley with a jungle hidden in its depths. The southern part of Theka is a desolate and vast rocky wasteland similar to Bluetspur's. Only the Tower of Night breaks its flat featureless plains. Two rivers run through Theka, the northern one, full of life, and a southern one, lifeless and motionless.

The sky of Theka changes from a normal sky in the north to a pitch blackness to the south that is similar to the neighbouring land. Climate varies and is usually rainy and warm to the north,





within the jungle, as the south is cool and unchanging.

The jungle valley deep in the mountains is a huge rainforest that has overtaken a classical level advanced civilization. Pillars and statues still peek from the foliage. The only humans within the valley are unthinking predators, either feral tribal living ones or rare vampires from south Theka. The jungle is full of strange beasts found nowhere else and with an overabundance of life. All technology and spells break down in Theka. The domain causes magic to not work properly and mechanisms in technology become jammed, having a ten percent rate of failure. All craft DCs are doubled. Similarly, every spell, spell-like ability, or supernatural ability that affects a subject—whether it is specifically targeted on the subject or merely includes the subject in its area — takes a -1 penalty to caster level and save DC. In the valley, any existing magic is dampened each day, causing the following effects: losing an enhancement bonus until reduced to masterwork, durations are reduced by quarter, caster level and DC penalized by one. These two effects are reversed if removed from the valley, replenishing at a rate of a week per day spent in valley. Those who stay too long in the valley start losing themselves and become no different from the feral creatures of the valley.

Elsewhere in the mountains is a race of humans who are immune to the feral effect, but they have lived in their complex so long that they do not know of the valley and the existence of other lands and those who leave never come back. T'lann uses the complex for his feeding larder. They revere him as their leader.

To the far south is the Tower of Night, a keep that is so black that the darkest sky is considered bright against its contrast. Here the recently made Darklord T'lann

presides, as he tries to learn his new predicament and is realizing that this may look like, but is not, his previous home.

**Cultural Level:** Stone-Age (CuL 1), Ruins Suggest Classical (CuL 4), the Tower of Night and The Complex are Medieval (CuL 7).

**Major Settlements:** The Complex [New Thesalys] (140).

**The Folk:** *Population* - 500, Humans 99%, 1% Others. *Languages:* Vaasi\*, Wildspeak\* *Religions* –Unknown

**Magic Rating:** 0

**Characters:** None

Life in New Thesalys is slow and simple. Many generations have passed since this race got stuck on what they believe is a planet. Their history before has been distorted by passing it down through the ages. They follow strict laws that they impose on themselves and wait for the day that they can return to a place called Greatspace.

The tribes of the valley are the descendants of an old civilization whose past is lost. The tribes war amongst themselves and hunt the beasts of the forest.

## The Law

Hereditary Aristocracy. In both cultures, the right of leadership comes from one family or those related to it. The tribal rulership changes family if all the descendants of the previous family die by natural or unnatural causes.

## Trade and Diplomacy

*Resources* - (not exploited) *Coinage* - none. Neither of the civilizations has encountered one another or any others, believing that they are in isolation with nothing of interest beyond the mountains.

## Darklord of Theka

### T'Lann

Male Ancient Vampire (Half-elf) Wizard 12

**Hit Dice:** 12d12(80)

**Initiative:** +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 40ft, Climb 30ft

**Armor Class:** 28

**Attacks:** 2 Slam +11/+6

**Damage:** Slam  
1d6+5

**Space/Reach:**  
5ft./5ft.

### Special Attacks:

Energy drain,  
blood drain,  
children of the  
night, create  
spawn, improved  
domination

### Special Qualities:

Undead, command  
undead, damage  
reduction 25/+2,  
cold and electricity  
resistance 20,  
gaseous form,  
spider climb,  
alternate form, fast  
healing 6, vampire  
weakness, turn  
resist +6

**Saves:** Fort+4, Ref+7, Will +12

**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 19, Con -, Int 22, Wis  
19, Cha 20

**Skills:** Alchemy+20, Bluff +20,  
Concentration+20, Diplomacy+9,  
Disguise+12, Hide+19, Intimidate+12,  
Knowledge (Arcana)+20, Listen+17,  
Move Silently+13, Perform+11,

Search+21, Sense Motive+19, Spot+13,  
Spellcraft+20

**Feats:** Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Combat  
Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge,  
Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Improved  
Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike,  
Lightning Reflexes, Quicken, Scribe Scroll.

**Challenge Rating:** 14

**Alignment:** Chaotic Evil

**Equipment:** Ring of  
protection +2

### Wizard Spells Prepared

4/6/5/5/4/4/2

0-level - detect  
magic, ghost sound,  
message, touch of  
fatigue

1st - cause fear,  
change self,  
comprehend  
languages, mage  
armor, magic  
missile, sleep

2nd - darkness,  
hypnotic pattern,  
invisibility, mirror  
image, web

3rd - blink, gust of  
wind, hold person,  
lightning bolt (x2)

4th - confusion,  
polymorph other,

shout, wall of fire

5th - cloudkill, mirage arcana, persistent  
image, teleport

6th - Bibgy's forceful hand, sending

### Appearance

T'Lann is an ancient half-elven vampire  
with black, shoulder-length hair that has a  
streak of white. His skin is the white pallor





of death. He wears unremarkable, loose-fitting clothing with high black leather boots. He typically wears a dark cloak with gold trimmings. Around his neck is an amulet in the shape of an upstretched, gauntleted hand.

## Background

Having once been mortal creatures, few vampires really have the willpower for eternal life. Only those creatures who are filled with very powerful hatred and loathing live on, despite the ravages of time on their formerly mortal souls.

T'Lann is such a vampire. He has lived 317 years or more past his mortal birth and still burns on, filled with vile rage and contempt for all things living. Along with the loss of his mortality, all traces of compassion were destroyed within him. He exists purely for the sake of bringing death to the world around him.

But T'lann was not always such a hateful creature. He was a champion of great causes in his youth. Born in what became the nation of Aglarond on the planet Toril in Realmspace, T'Laan was a trusted adviser to Brindor, the first king of Aglarond. The son of a human father and elven mother, T'Laan - then named Dorin - was one of the original settlers of civilized Aglarond and was responsible for the famous Peace Talks of Ingdal's Arm, held after the battle of the same name. He was a hero of peace and was loved and trusted by all who knew him.

But ruin descended upon him like a bird of prey. One evening, T'laan was walking with his bride in the gardens of his manor when the two were accosted by a band of men sent from the neighbouring country of Thay. This evil country had become nervous because of the recent expansion of Aglarond and was causing internal strife. T'Laan's bride was killed immediately by the

rogues, but the half-elven general was a powerful man and not so easily overcome. Before the attackers dealt a death blow to T'Laan, he killed many of them. Finally, however, he lay bleeding on the ground, waiting for death to claim him. He was overcome by powerful hatred for the men who took his life of his bride.

Brooding in powerful rage, T'Laan made a silent bargain with Death. At Death's orders, T'Laan drank the blood from the dead body of one of the rogues, and T'Laan entered forever the world of eternal darkness.

Since that time, T'Laan has lived many lifetimes on many different worlds. He is a harbinger of death, bringing only hatred and ruin wherever he goes. His greatest conquest is Darkspace.

Over two hundred years ago, T'Laan came to Darkspace. It was then a sphere that had no name, for it had not yet been discovered, and its inhabitants had no knowledge of space travel or life outside the sphere. Originally, it had nine planets in orbit around its central sun. Only one planet, the third, had life beyond simple fungi and single-celled lifeforms. Most of the planets were totally lifeless.

The inhabitants of the third planet were a simple lot, living in a world where magic did not exist. They were mostly subsistence farmers and, at the time T'laan arrived, they were beginning to form small cities, which created a demand for occupations other than farmers. Some would call these people overly violent, but more accurately, they were filled with strong passions and energies, constantly driving them onward. To T'Laan's advantage, they were a greatly superstitious people, possessing powerful fears of the supernatural. Within this world of passionate, thriving humans, T'Laan found the perfect hunting ground.

But T'Laan was a "young" vampire, unable to realize the long-term effects of his actions. As the years passed, T'Laan took many victims, but was not cautious enough to ensure that the corpses would not rise, themselves, as vampires. As so it passed that the undead population of the planet (called Verin) grew with each passing month. After many long years of this, the humans of Verin began to form organized groups of vampire hunters, seeking to destroy the undead creatures that threatened their existence.

The newly created vampires, even more short-sighted than their master, engaged in a war with the vampire hunters, thus ensuring their destruction. On the night the vampires rose up against their human hunters, the age was named the Time of Death. And so was written the epitaph of Verin, for within a few years of that night, every man, woman, and child on the planet was destroyed and the vampire population numbered in the tens of thousands.

The huge undead population was now without the life-giving, nourishing blood it required, and soon the immortal creatures began to die, literally, of starvation. Thus began the Age of Blood and the transformation of Verin and its sphere into Darkspace. During the Age of Blood, vampires began to hunt each other for blood, feeding off inhuman hosts to survive. It was a war of attrition, and huge numbers of the creatures died daily as they hunted each other in the fields and in the streets.

Inevitably, sheep turned against master, and soon what few fledglings remained on Verin began to hunt T'Laan, believing his old blood to be a source of power. But T'Laan was older and more powerful than his fledglings, and though they tried, he was never defeated.

Soon the great vampire began to lash out against his children, destroying them by the hundreds every night.

Then one night, some 30 years after the last human on Verin had died, T'Laan looked out upon the world and - in his own evil way - lamented what he saw. What once been a thriving world, teeming with fresh, young, beautiful mortals, was now a dead husk covered in T'Laan's starving creations.

As each year passed, the undead lord grew more powerful. Soon, he could survive for great periods of time without blood and stay for brief periods of time above the ground as the sun rose. Finally, when he could no longer stand the sight of his creation, he went deep underground, burying himself alive, far away from the creatures that hunted him. For long years, perhaps 50 or more, he stayed in his tomb, sleeping, dreaming, far from the affairs of the young vampires he had made. Gradually, he began to wake. It was a slow process, this waking, taking a year to complete. Eventually, he realized that he was fully awake and had been so for some time. Gathering all of his strength, (he was very weak from so long without blood) he began to rise from his deep, subterranean tomb. It took him many weeks of agonizingly slow progress to finally break ground into the nighttime air.

By the time T'laan emerged from his hibernation, there were only 30 or so vampires left alive, hunting each other for blood. Like a shadow, T'Laan descended upon the remaining vampires, destroying them and taking their blood.

Now T'Laan was strong, but utterly alone. Great changes had been wrought upon Verin while he slept. No longer was the once beautiful planet recognizable. It had become a dead, empty rock. No life, not even plants remained. The vampire also



realized that the sun no longer burned with its deadly fires. Like the mortal half-elf, so long ago on another planet in another crystal sphere, the sun had succumbed and turned to darkness, never to shine again.

After many days of searching, T'Laan found the spelljamming ship that brought him to Verin. He planned to leave the planet in search of life-giving blood.

Before departing, however, he gathered hundreds of the corpses the vampires had left behind. Using great necromantic magics that were given him by his pact with Death, he animated these corpses into various undead guardians. Then he constructed a small keep where he would reside when he returned. When all of his workings were completed, T'Laan left Darkspace in search of blood. Later, with the help of several powerful necromancers, whom T'Laan later killed, the vampire created a two-way portal to Greatspace. The monster's plan was not only to destroy the thriving system, but to create a base of mortal creatures in Darkspace that could be used as feeding stock.

Like the Arthurian legends and the stories of knights of old, Greatspace stands like a vestige of mankind's nobility and honor. For as long as anyone can remember, the people of Greatspace have battled against their innate darker sides, and have stood victorious. They are indeed a people by which we may navigate our cultures and use as a landmark for our own progress.

Like all natural things, however, the people of Greatspace are undergoing great trials. In the midst of their achievement and advancement there now stands a great blackness. It came in the form of half-elven bard T'Laan.

Scant months after his arrival on the planet Thesalys, he was requested to perform for the court of House Shambrath

and he did so. T'Laan was immediately offered the lucrative position of court bard. He accepted. Over course of a few years, T'Laan made himself increasingly valuable to the court by constantly offering sound and useful advice. Just four years after arriving in Greatspace as an unknown bard - T'Laan became the advisor to the king in House Shambrath, his position secured!

Unknown to the Thesalians, T'Laan was a vampire of great skill and power. Using his *charm* ability and the natural skills of the potent undead lords, T'Laan hid his true identity flawlessly. No one, in all the time he has been on Thesalys, has ever questioned the oddities of T'Laan. Why did he never show himself except at night? Why did no one ever see him eat? His disguise was complete.

Eventually, T'Laan decided that the time for waiting was over and the time for action had arrived. He began to initiate his plan, which began with the direct control of Gorath Shambrath, ending, ultimately, in his death. Now all of House Shambrath believes that Bruin, the only heir to the throne, leads a rebel group that opposes the current government and is responsible for the "assassination" of Gorath. Bruin has become a hunted criminal in Greatspace.

The fact that the Thesalians, who have held great love and loyalty for House Shambrath for years, could be deceived at such great magnitude is a testament to T'Laan's vast power. T'Laan's necromancers completed the artifact, which cast a large-scale *continual darkness* spell on the sun, shrouding Greatspace in darkness and T'Laan began exporting inhabitants of Greatspace to his home sphere for feeding stock.

The humans were told that they were being transported to support a war effort that Greatspace was involved in. T'Laan had secretly charmed the pilot to crash their

ship on landing. The craft was irreparably damaged and the survivors were stranded at the living complex they were supposed to occupy for this so-called war effort.

Bruin Shambrath and a group of adventurers returned with *sun seeds*, a magical item that turned Greatspace's sun back to normal. They then followed T'Laan back to Darkspace and restored the sun there as well. When they defeated T'Laan, thinking that he was dead, his great evil nature and strong hatred pulled him into Ravenloft, prior to his destruction.

## Curse of the Darklord

Any vampire created now by T'Lann becomes feral and eventually attacks him. When he drinks the blood of those native to the land, he goes into a feral rage for an hour, leaving him no knowledge of what happened in that time other than destruction as evidence. He knows better than to do this where he can harm his own equipment at his tower.

## Current Sketch

A vampire so powerful that he once threatened the cosmos. Now he cannot get the most simplistic magic devices to work properly. Stuck in a prison that threatens to eat itself out of existence, T'lann must protect its ecology and his blood supply.

Because spells and technology seem to break down all the time, he is unable to fix the spelljamming vessel that he believes can take him away from this land.

Werewolves and feral vampires keep attempting to break into the complex, which forces T'Laan away from his projects to defend it. He tries to find reliable help but they seem to have a habit of disappearing or being found dead, likely by his own hands.

## Combat

T'lann would rather let his minions do the fighting. He will attempt to charm foes or use spells to make them remove themselves from battle to lessen the odds. He will use all in his power to escape if things do not go as he pleases.

He can dominate a victim just with his voice and when he uses his children of the night ability, it summons undead skeletal versions of the animals called. The southern river has no effect on T'lann, who can cross it and even immerse himself in it without ill effect. Garlic, and presented holy symbols or mirrors have no effect on T'Lann.

**Blood Drain (Ex):** T'Lann, as a vampire, can suck blood from a living victim with his fangs by making a successful grapple check. If he pins the foe, he drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On each such successful attack, the vampire gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Improve Dominate (Su):** T'Lann targets one opponent as a standard action within 60 feet of him. If the target can see or even just hear the darklord, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Will saving throw against this magic or fall instantly under the vampire's influence as though by a dominate person spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 60 feet.

**Children of the night (Su):** Once per day the darklord magically calls 2d4 swarms of skeletal bats or rats, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, the darklord can call 3d6 skeletal wolves instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire and obeying his spoken commands. The undead remain for 1 hour, until T'Lann



dies, or until he dismisses them as a bonus action.

**Command Undead (Su):** T'Lann can rebuke or command undead as if he were a 12th-level cleric.

**Create Spawn (Su):** A humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain T'Lann energy drain rises as a vampire spawn 1d4 days after burial.

If T'Lann instead drains the victim's Constitution to 0 or lower, the victim returns as a spawn if it had 4 or less HD and as a vampire if it had 5 or more HD. In either case, the new vampire or spawn is under the command of T'Lann and remains enslaved until its master's destruction. At any given time a vampire may have enslaved spawn totaling no more than twice its own Hit Dice; any spawn it creates that would exceed this limit are created as free-willed vampires or vampire spawn. A vampire that is enslaved may create and enslave spawn of its own, so a master vampire can control a number of lesser vampires in this fashion. A vampire may voluntarily free an enslaved spawn in order to enslave a new spawn, but once freed, a vampire or vampire spawn cannot be enslaved again.

**Energy Drain (Su):** Living creatures hit by a T'Lann's slam attack gain two negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, the vampire gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Alternate Form (Su):** T'Lann can assume the shape of a bat, dire bat, wolf, or dire wolf as a standard action. While in its alternate form, the vampire loses his natural slam attack and dominate ability, but gains the natural weapons and extraordinary special attacks of his new

form. He can remain in that form until it assumes another or until the next sunrise. (If the base creature is not terrestrial, this power might allow other forms.)

**Damage Reduction (Su):** T'Lann has damage reduction 25/ +2 magical weapons.

**Fast Healing (Ex):** T'Lann heals 6 points of damage each round so long as he has at least 1 hit point. If reduced to 0 hit points in combat, he automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. Any additional damage dealt to a vampire forced into gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest in its coffin, a vampire is helpless. He regains 1 hit point after 1 hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of 6 hit points per round.

**Gaseous Form (Su):** As a standard action, T'Lann can assume gaseous form at will as the spell (caster level 5th), but he can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect manoeuvrability.

**Resistances (Ex):** T'Lann has resistance to cold 20 and electricity 20.

**Spider Climb (Ex):** T'Lann can climb sheer surfaces as though with a spider climb spell.

**Turn Resistance (Ex):** T'Lann has +6 turn resistance.

## Closing Borders

T'lann rarely closes the border but when he does, it simply causes the victim to appear at the other side of the domain, as if it was just a small planet.

## Dread Possibility

There is a possibility that during the Grand Conjunction T'lann successfully repaired his ship and left Theka, only to be

trapped once again in a pocket domain of phlogiston, filled with ship wreckage. Unable to feed regularly, his isolation has made him rage in bloodlust and prey on ships that are pulled into the domain. Until he feeds, he cannot use his spells or think effectively.

## 5th edition stats

### T'Lann

*Medium undead, Chaotic Evil*

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**Armor Class** 19 (natural armor, ring of protection +2)

**Hit Points** 160 (17d8 + 68, above average hit points)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 20 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+4) **Con** 18 (+4)  
**Int** 22 (+6) **Wis** 19 (+4) **Cha** 18 (+4)

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**Saving Throws** Dex +11, Wis +11

**Skills** Deception +9, Empathy +9, Intimidation +9, Perception +9, Persuasion +9, stealth +14, Knowledge(arcana) +11

Tools alchemist's tools (+10 bonus to all ability checks using these tools)

**Damage Resistances** necrotic, cold, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons

**Conditional Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

**Senses** Darkvision 120', passive Perception 19

**Languages** Vaasi, Elvish

**Challenge** 16 (15000 xp)

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**Combat casting.** T'Lann has advantage on Concentration saving throws.

**Shapechanger.** If the darklord isn't in sunlight or running water, he can use his action to polymorph into a Tiny bat, a Medium wolf, a Medium cloud of mist, or back into his true form. The Southern River does not affect this ability.

While in bat form, the darklord can't speak or cast spells, his walking speed is 5 feet, and he has a flying speed of 30 feet. While in wolf form, his walking speed is 40 feet. His AC in both forms is 16. His statistics, other than his size, AC and speed, are unchanged. Anything he is wearing transforms with him, but nothing he is carrying does.

While in mist form, the darklord can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. He is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing. He can't pass through water. He has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and he is immune to all nonmagical damage, except the damage he takes from sunlight.

**Legendary Resistance (3/day).** If the darklord fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

**Misty escape.** When he drops to 0 hp outside his resting place, the darklord transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious, provided that he isn't in sunlight or running water. If he can't transform, he is destroyed.



While he has 0 hp in mist form, he can't change his shape, and he must reach his resting place within 2 hours or be destroyed. Once in his resting place, he reverts to his vampire form. He is then paralyzed until he spends 1 hour in his resting at which point he regains 1 hp and starts regenerating as normal.

**Regeneration.** The darklord regains 25 hit points at the start of his turn if he has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If he takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn.

**Spider climb.** T'Lann can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Spellcasting.** T'Lann is a 12th lvl spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is intelligence (DC 19 or +11 to magic attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

0: mage hand, message, prestidigitation, ray of frost, chill touch

1st: change self, detect magic, magic missile, sleep

2nd: darkness, gust of wind, hold person, invisibility, mirror image, web

3rd: lightning bolt

4th: confusion, hallucinatory terrain, polymorph

5th: Bigby's hand, cloudkill, teleportation circle

6th: Programmed illusion

**Vampire weaknesses.** The darklord has the following weaknesses:

**Harmed by Running Water.** The darklord takes 20 acid damage if he ends his turn

in running water. This weakness does not apply in the Southern River

**Shadowless.** The darklord casts no shadow.

**Stake to the Heart.** If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into the darklord's heart while he is incapacitated in his resting place, the darklord is paralyzed until the stake is removed.

**Sunlight Hypersensitivity.** The darklord takes 20 radiant damage when he starts his turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, he has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

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### Actions

**Multi-attack (vampire form).** The darklord makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

**Unarmed Strike (vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d6+5) bludgeoning damage. Instead of dealing damage, the darklord can grapple the target (escape DC 18)

**Ray of frost (vampire form).** Magic ranged attack: +11 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (3d8) cold damage and the target's speed is reduced by 10' until the end of T'Lann's next turn.

**Bite (bat or vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing, grappled by T'Lann, incapacitated or restrained target. Hit: 8 (1d6+5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the darklord regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum

to 0. A humanoid slain in this way rises the following night as a feral vampire spawn, outside of T'Lann's control.

**Bite (wolf form).** Melee weapon attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the darklord regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0 and doesn't rise from the dead.

**Charm.** T'Lann targets one humanoid he can see within 60 feet of her. If the target can see or even just listen the darklord, the target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by the darklord. The charmed target regards T'Lann as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under T'Lann's control, he or she takes the darklord's requests or actions in the most favorable way possible, and he or she is a willing target for T'Lann's bite attack. Each time the darklord or T'Lann's companions do anything harmful to the target, he or she can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on him or herself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until the darklord is destroyed, is in a different domain than the target, or T'Lann takes a bonus action to end the effect.

**Children of the night (1/day).** The darklord magically calls 2d4 swarms of skeletal bats or rats, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, the darklord can call 3d6 skeletal wolves instead. The called

creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire and obeying his spoken commands. The undead remain for 1 hour, until T'Lann dies, or until he dismisses them as a bonus action.

**Command Undead.** T'Lann can use his action to telepathically command any undead with Challenge level of 1 or less in his domain to do his bidding. If a susceptible undead is already under control of another creature, T'Lann can gain control of it as an action by defeating the controlling creature in a charisma contest.

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### Legendary Actions

The darklord can take 3 legendary actions from the options below. Only one action can be used at a time and at the end of another creature's turn. The darklord regains his spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

**Move.** The darklord moves up to 30' without provoking attacks of opportunity, as long as he doesn't have a grappled target.

**Attack (Vampire form).** The darklord makes one unarmed attack.

**Cantrip (Vampire form).** T'Lann can cast one cantrip.

**Bite (costs 2 actions).** T'Lann can make one bite attack against a grappled or willing target if in vampire or bat form or a normal bite attack while in wolf form.

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### Equipment

Ring of protection +2 (provides +2 bonus to AC and all saving throws)

**Further Reading: Crystal Spheres**



# Moridana

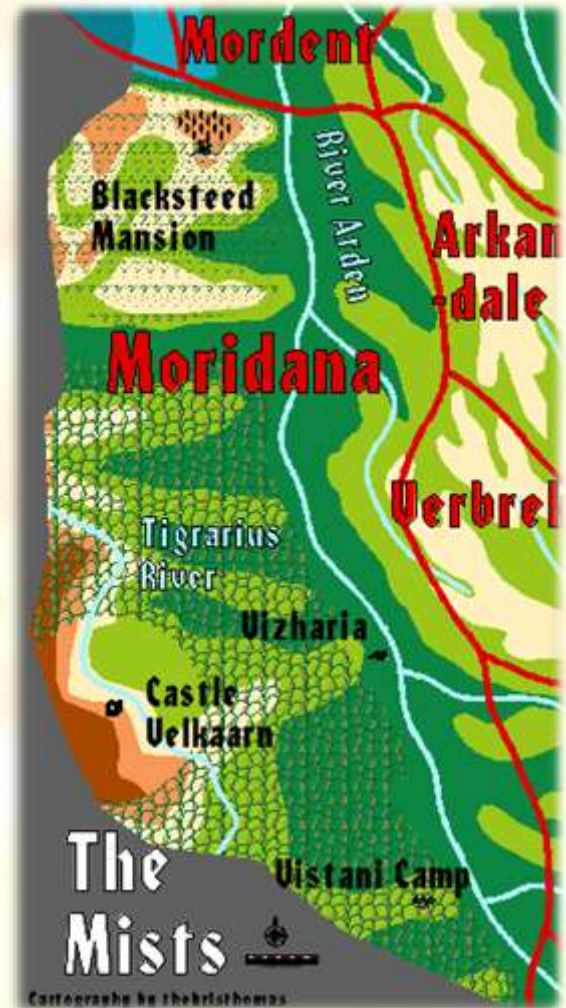
Legends speak of a Vistani hero who will take back their land from the vampire Velkaarn. How much is legend and truth is now lost to the mist. Perhaps this is why the Vistani still seek their homeland that can no longer be reached.

## The Land

Moridana is a perversion of the name *Maridrar* and the land was once part of that kingdom. Maridrar was an Oerth kingdom, and after more than a century of war, it was the last to fall to the evil Velkaarn. After a battle that nearly wiped out the township, the village of Vizharia came to a truce with Velkaarn, who took over the castle southwest of the village. Mists descended, and castle and village were deposited in Ravenloft. The domain of Moridana appeared around the same time as the Sea of Sorrows and was located south of Mordent and alongside Arkandale. Moridana vanished before the Grand Conjunction.

The landscape is altered by the force of Velkaarn's will. Where the Tigrarius River once flowed peacefully in the gorge below the castle, now only a trickle of foul-looking water runs over barren rocks. The Arden River cut a path through the land, and a ragged range of mountains where none had been before now ran along the western border. The land became barren and uneven, as though the land been shaped by the contours of Velkaarn's mind.

The north borders the Sea of Sorrows and is composed of hills of tall dry grasses. A valley and the large forest with the village of Vizharia take up the southern part of the land. The former castle Milamus became Castle Velkaarn, also known as the Castle of the Undead. This castle and the completely barren land around it, take up the southern



tip of Moridana.

Night lasts for long periods of time in Moridana and before the domain's disappearance, the night had lasted a record-breaking two years.

**Full Ecology:** Temperate Mountains, Hills, Forest and Plains.

**Cultural Level:** Medieval (CuL 7)domain.

**Major Settlements:** Vizharia (*pop.* 100)

**The Folk:** *Population* - 300. Human 70%, Undead 22%, Vistani 5%, Half-Vistani 2%, Other 1% *Languages* - Darkonese\*, Mordentish. *Religions* - None.

**Law:** Undead Despotism - The Vampire Lord Velkaarn rules over the village of

Vizharia. The Storm Riders, four thugs that work for Velkaarn, all vampires riding ebony undead steeds, grab unwary villagers to use as slaves and blood larder at the castle.

**Realm Magic Rating: 4**

The people of Vizharia are gruff, cautious, and have a well-placed fear of the supernatural. Terrified by the undead, they lock their doors and windows. rarely venturing out except to collect food; this makes the village look like a ghost town. The haunted Blacksteed mansion with its large family cemetery lies an hour away north of Vizharia on a steep dismal hilltop. There is a semi-permanent Vistani camp within the large woods. It's a large tribe headed by an old and wise Vistani named Magda.

## Trade and Diplomacy

*Resources*- Potatoes, Turnips, Parsnip, Carrots, Mushrooms, Flounder, Sole, Sardines, Lobsters and Oysters. *Not exploited* -Iron, Clay, Salt. *Coinage* - Smattering of obscure coins.

Vizharia rarely gets visitors and thus has no trade. The people survive on mushrooms, root crops, fish and the rare game animals of the forest.

**Characters:** *Classes:* Bards, Fighters, Rangers, Rogues, Sorcerers, Wizards. *Skills* - Climb, Craft (blacksmithing, carpentry, weaponsmithing), Knowledge (Monster Lore), Profession (farmer, fisher), Sense Motive, Use Rope, Survival. *Feats* - Blind-Fight, Ethereal Empathy, Ghostsight, Haunted, Lunatic, Reincarnated, Skill Focus (Knowledge [Monster lore]), Weapon Focus (crossbow, dagger).

## Darklord Of Moridana

### Velkaarn

Male Eminent Vampire (Human)  
Necromancer 18

**Hit Dice:** 18d12(80)

**Initiative:** +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improve Initiative)

**Speed:** 40ft, Cimb 30

**Armor Class:** 28

**Attacks:** 2 Claws +16/+11 or Longsword +20/+15

**Damage:** Claw 1d6+7 or Longsword 1d8+9

**Space/Reach:** 5ft./5ft.

**Special Attacks:** Domination, energy drain, blood drain, children of the night, create spawn,

**Special Qualities:** Undead, command undead, damage reduction 25/+3, cold and electricity resistance 20, gaseous form, spider climb, shroud of darkness, lord of the undead, alternate form, fast healing 8, , turn resist +7

**Saves:** Fort+6, Ref+9, Will +14

**Abilities:** Str 24, Dex 19, Con -, Int 22, Wis 18, Cha 24

**Skills:** Alchemy+28, Bluff +28, Concentration+28, Diplomacy+11, Disguise+12, Hide+21, Intimidate+14, Knowledge (Arcana)+28, Listen+17, Move Silently+13, Handle Animal+11, Search+23, Sense Motive+19, Spot+13, Spellcraft+28

**Feats:** Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Quicken Spell, Improve Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Mounted Combat, Martial Weapons, Weapon Focus (Longsword), Scribe



Scroll.

Challenge Rating: 18

**Alignment:** Chaotic Evil

**Equipment:** Ebony Longsword +2

Wizard Spells Prepared

4/6/5/5/5/5/4/3/2/1

## Appearance

Evil virtually oozes from this man, this lord of vampires. His nose is long and pointed, and his coal-black hair is swept straight back from the widow's peak on his forehead to spill down his shoulders. He has a cruel-looking mustache and pointed beard. His black eyes glimmer dully with the fires of the Abyss, and his silken, hissing voice insinuates itself into your brain, coiling around your mind like a deadly snake. He wears dark robes and a cape.

## Background

Ridiculed, and an outcast of his own village, Velkaarn eventually left to seek power to fuel his revenge for his mistreatment. By the time he was in a position of power, he knew his plans would not come to fruition unless he found a way to extend his life. Through dark bargaining he became a vampire lord but by the time he returned to the village it was already gone. Unable to get his revenge, he secluded himself and seethed

for centuries as he worked out a grand scheme to prove to everyone how powerful he was when he decided to return. He fueled his energy to use a prince, who was a mere puppet ruler of a small fiefdom, to conquer nearby kingdoms. He used his vampire spawn to conquer the lands surrounding the Howling Hills in the late three hundreds, common year, on Oerth. Velkaarn wanted to replace the prince, once

he secured all the territories. The last kingdom was Maridrar, where Queen Velina, a Wolf Nomad by birth, and Milarnus a Rhennee (Oerth's gypsies, possibly related to the Vistani) ruled.

Milarnus was determined not to let his land fall to the evil one. Milarnus was wise; he knew that Velkaarn and his armies of thirsty undead couldn't be beaten by them alone. He summoned the land's most powerful wizards and directed them to create a weapon that would not only

destroy the vampire lord but also the evil he had placed on the land. The mage Rustanglius and Vistani seeress Magda, mustered the power of the magical planes and imbued a weapon with such abilities as to destroy Velkaarn's evil. Milarnus summoned the wolf tribes of the land to give part of themselves to the cause.

The mage and the seeress crafted a powerful spell. The wolf tribe sacrificed their



mythical powers to imbue the weapon. and the Bloodknife was born. They knew their kingdom was fated to fall, so the blade was linked to Milarnus' two sons who were chosen to leave that world and then to someday save it.

When Velkaarn finally reached his goal of conquering Maridrar, his victory was cut short as he soon found the kingdom to cut off from the rest of Oerth by mist and that the land itself had changed.

## Curse of the Darklord

Velkaarn cannot be truly killed except through the power of the Bloodknife being united with the diamond of the sun. So paranoid about the knife, he has consumed his mind with it so much that he cannot enjoy the kingdom that is now only his. No matter how powerful he has become, he is still powerless to the knife and its prophecy, which infuriates him. Velkaarn rarely leaves his castle due to fear for his own safety.

## Current Sketch:

He eventually found out, through torture, the story behind the blood knife, and he sent his vampire minions into the Mists that he could not enter, in hopes of finding where the blade is. So paranoid about the knife, he keeps to his castle working on plans to thwart the prophecy.

## Combat

Velkaarn was powerful enough that even the typical weakness of vampires had no hold on him. He surprised defenses by attacking while the sun was still setting. In his old world, he was skilled in mounted combat and a brilliant tactician with armies.

He now does not fear the light for the sun has not shined for two years in Moridana. He has grown complacent and lazy, relying on minions to do his work. His castle is filled with ghosts to do his bidding

as well as undead created by his necromantic magic.

When forced into combat, he can drain a victim of four levels when striking with his claws or even his specially crafted magical ebony longsword. He is also a powerful necromancer but he would rather corrupt and turn his victims to vampires then to use his powerful magic to destroy them outright. His pride that he is all powerful causes him not to pursue combat at full strength but instead to tease and torment his opponents.

**Blood Drain (Ex):** Velkaarn can suck blood from a living victim with his fangs by making a successful grapple check. If he pins the foe, he drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On each such successful attack, the vampire gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Dominate (Su):** Velkaarn can crush an opponent's will just by looking onto his or her eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that the vampire must use a standard action, and those merely looking at him are not affected. Anyone the vampire targets must succeed on a Will save or fall instantly under the vampire's influence as though by a dominate person spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.

**Command Undead (Su):** Velkaarn can rebuke or command undead as if it were a 22th-level cleric.

**Children of the Night (Su):** Once per day the darklord magically calls 2d4 swarms of bats or rats. While outdoors, the darklord can call 3d6 wolves instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire and obeying his spoken commands. The



undead remain for 1 hour, until Velkaarn dies, or until he dismisses them as a bonus action.

**Shroud of Darkness(Su):** The vampire can create a field of magical darkness at will. The vampire can create this field only around itself, but it can see normally in this darkness. The vampire's darkness is destroyed instantly if any part of it comes into contact with natural sunlight. Except in those respects, this ability is identical to a darkness spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer.

**Lord of the Undead(Su):** Ghosts and vampires created in Velkaarn's domain are bound under his command while within it. He can telepathically issue orders which they will try their best to follow.

**Create Spawn (Su):** A humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain by a vampire's energy drain rises as a vampire spawn 1d4 days after burial.

If Velkaarn instead drains the victim's Constitution to 0 or lower, the victim returns as a spawn if it had 4 or less HD and as a vampire if it had 5 or more HD. In either case, the new vampire or spawn is under the command of Velkaarn and remains enslaved until its master's destruction. At any given time a vampire may have enslaved spawn totaling no more than twice its own Hit Dice; any spawn it creates that would exceed this limit are created as free-willed vampires or vampire spawn. A vampire that is enslaved may create and enslave spawn of its own, so a master vampire can control a number of lesser vampires in this fashion. A vampire may voluntarily free an enslaved spawn in order to

enslave a new spawn, but once freed, a vampire or vampire spawn cannot be enslaved again.

**Energy Drain (Su):** Living creatures hit by a Velkaarn's slam or ebony sword attack gain four negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, the vampire gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Alternate Form (Su):** Velkaarn can assume the shape of a bat, dire bat, wolf, or dire wolf as a standard action. While in his alternate form, the vampire loses his natural slam attack and dominate ability, but it gains the natural weapons and extraordinary special attacks of its new form. He can remain in that form until he assumes another or until the next sunrise. (If the base creature is not terrestrial, this power might allow other forms.)

**Damage Reduction (Su):** Velkaarn has damage reduction 25/ +3 magical weapons.

**Fast Healing (Ex):** Velkaarn heals 8 points of damage each round so long as he has at least 1 hit point. If reduced to 0 hit points in combat, he automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. Any additional damage dealt to a vampire forced into gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest in his coffin, the vampire is helpless. He regains 1 hit point after 1 hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of 8 hit points per round.

**Gaseous Form (Su):** As a standard action, Velkaarn can assume gaseous form at will as the spell (caster level 5th), but he can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect manoeuvrability.

**Resistances (Ex):** Velkaarn has resistance to cold 20 and electricity 20.

**Spider Climb (Ex):** Velkaarn can climb sheer surfaces as though with a spider climb spell.

**Turn Resistance (Ex):** Velkaarn has +7 turn resistance.

## Closing the Borders

Velkaarn cannot close his borders but he can command all undead creatures in his domain to stop intruders or keep within the borders.

## 5th edition stats

### Velkaarn

*Medium undead, Chaotic Evil*

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**Armor Class** 18 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 190 (18d8+90, above average hit points)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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**Str** 22 (+6) **Dex** 19 (+4) **Con** 20 (+5)

**Int** 22 (+6) **Wis** 19 (+4) **Cha** 22 (+6)

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**Saving Throws** Str+13, Wis+11, cha+13

**Skills** Deception+13, Empathy+11, Intimidation+13, Perception+11, Persuasion+13, stealth+11, Knowledge(arcana)+13

Tools alchemist's tools (+7 bonus to all ability checks using these tools)

**Damage Resistances** necrotic, cold, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons

**Conditional Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

**Senses** Darkvision 120', passive Perception 21

**Languages** Darkonese, Mordentish, elven, orcish, goblin, draconic, and Ordai

**Challenge** 23(50000 xp, although he usually doesn't fight in full power)

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**Eternal.** The darklord cannot be completely destroyed unless by the blood knife. If the diamond of the sun is used with the blood knife it will instantly destroy him and is only way to stop him from returning.

**Combat casting.** Velkaarn has advantage on Concentration saving throws.

**Sunlight vulnerability.** If Velkaarn is exposed to sunlight, he suffers disadvantage to all rolls for as long as he is in the sunlight and till the end of his next turn after he is out of sunlight. This includes effects like sunray that emulate sunlight but not daylight spell.

**Shapechanger.** The darklord can use his action to polymorph into a Tiny bat, a Medium cloud of mist, or back into his true form.

While in bat form, the darklord can't speak or cast spells, his walking speed is 5 feet, and he has a flying speed of 30 feet. His AC in bat form is 16. His statistics, other than his size, AC and speed, are unchanged. Anything he is wearing transforms with him, but nothing he is carrying does.

While in mist form, the darklord can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. He is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing. He can't pass through water. He has advantage on Strength, Dexterity,



and Constitution saving throws, and he is immune to all nonmagical damage.

**Legendary Resistance (3/day).** If the darklord fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

**Lord of Undead.** Ghosts and Vampires created in the domain are bound under the Darklord's will. He can telepathically issue orders in which they try their best to follow.

**Misty escape.** When he drops to 0 hp outside his resting place, the darklord transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious, provided that he isn't in sunlight or running water. If he can't transform, he is destroyed.

While he has 0 hp in mist form, he can't change his shape, and he must reach his resting place within 2 hours or be destroyed. Once in his resting place, he reverts to his vampire form. He is then paralyzed until he spends 1 hour in his resting at which point he regains 1 hp and starts regenerating as normal.

**Regeneration.** The darklord regains 25 hit points at the start of his turn if he has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If he takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn.

**Spider climb.** Velkaarn can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Spellcasting.** Velkaarn is an 18th lvl spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is intelligence (DC 21 or +13 to magic attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

0: mage hand, mending, message,

prestidigitation, ray of frost, chill touch

1st: detect magic, magic missile, Tasha's hideous laughter

2nd: Blindness, gust of wind, hold person, mirror image, ray of enfeeblement, see invisibility, web

3rd: Bestow curse, counterspell, dispel magic, lightning bolt, slow

4th: Blight, confusion, Evard's black tentacles

5th: Bigby's hand, scrying

6th: Circle of death, Magic jar

7th: Finger of death

8th: Feeblemind

9th: Power word kill

**Shroud of darkness.** The darklord can create a field of magical darkness at will around himself, and he can see normally in this darkness. The vampire's darkness is destroyed instantly if any part of it comes into contact with natural sunlight.

**Vampire weaknesses.** The darklord doesn't suffer from the usual vampire weaknesses.

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### Actions

**Multi-attack (vampire form).** The darklord makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

**Ebony longsword (vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 12 (1d8+8) piercing damage plus 17 (5d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the darklord regains hit points half to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target takes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A

humanoid slain in this way rises the following night as a vampire spawn.

**Unarmed Strike (vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (1d6+6) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. Instead of dealing damage, the darklord can grapple the target (escape DC 21)

**Ray of frost (vampire form).** Magic ranged attack: +13 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. Hit: 18 (4d8) cold damage and the target's speed is reduced by 10' until the end of Velkaarn's next turn.

**Bite (bat or vampire form).** Melee weapon attack: +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing, grappled by Velkaarn, incapacitated or restrained target. Hit: 9 (1d6+6) piercing damage plus 17 (5d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the darklord regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction is not restored until the target is treated with a greater restoration spell or similar magic. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way rises the following night as a vampire spawn.

**Charm.** Velkaarn targets one humanoid he can see within 60 feet of him. If the target can see the darklord, the target must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by the darklord. The charmed target regards Velkaarn as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under Velkaarn's control, he or she takes the darklord's requests or actions in the most favorable way possible, and he or she is a willing target

for Velkaarn's bite attack. Each time the darklord or his companions do anything harmful to the target, he or she can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on him or herself on a success.

Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until the darklord is destroyed, is in a different domain than the target, or Velkaarn takes a bonus action to end the effect.

**Children of the night (1/day).** The darklord magically calls 2d4 swarms of bats or rats. While outdoors, the darklord can call 3d6 wolves instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire and obeying his spoken commands. The undead remain for 1 hour, until Velkaarn dies, or until he dismisses them as a bonus action.

**Command Undead.** Velkaarn can use his action to telepathically command any undead with challenge level of 2 or less in his domain to do his bidding. If a susceptible undead is already under control of another creature, Velkaarn can gain control of it as an action by defeating the controlling creature in a charisma contest.

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### Legendary Actions

The darklord can take 3 legendary actions from the options below. Only one action can be used at a time and at the end of another creature's turn. The darklord regains his spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

**Move.** The darklord moves up to 30' without provoking attacks of opportunity, as long as he doesn't have a grappled target.



**Attack (Vampire form).** The darklord makes one unarmed or longsword attack.

**Cantrip (Vampire form).** Velkaarn can cast one cantrip.

**Bite (costs 2 actions).** Velkaarn can make one bite attack against a grappled or willing target if in vampire or bat form or a normal bite attack while in wolf form.

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#### **Equipment**

Ebony longsword+2

***Further Reading: ENDLESS QUEST  
Castle of the Undead, Van Richten's  
Arsenal Volume 1 (Bloodknife -pg.54)***

**Author Note:** All three of these domains were mentioned by name within *Neither Man Nor Beast* as being once part of the Core. The old black box map shows land across borders where these land exist, except Bileplate which is too small.

# NATION OF PROGRESS

## The Role of Lamordia

By Mikhail "NeoTiamat" Rekun

upon the Swiss, alpine setting of *Frankenstein*.



### Tropes

The ur-text of Lamordia is, of course, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley. Just as the novel is at once classically Gothic and yet a new brand of Science Fiction, so too is Lamordia. There is a key difference, however, in that while Mary Shelley drew on then-modern experiments with galvanism for her monster, Ravenloft's early-19th century setting cannot plausibly provide "our" modern sci-fi horror, with nanites and gene engineering and the like. Instead, Lamordia draws its imagery from the science of yester-year, the science of Tesla, Edison, the Curies, Louis Pasteur, and others, when it was much less antiseptic than today, when science meant getting into the guts (sometimes literally) of the subject. The apocalyptic tone of much of modern horror-sci-fi is replaced with a more visceral, brutal feel. Lamordia is *the* domain for Mad Science in Ravenloft -- that is, the domain that demonstrates the negative aspects of science, the ways in which it can further human vices and human obsessions. On a more practical note, Lamordia also draws

### Purpose

Lamordia basically exists as the default 'mad science' domain of Ravenloft, a suitable location for all one's grisly Victorian-science needs. Aside from the obvious flesh golems, all manner of eerie technological horrors can be located in Lamordia: artificial humans, death rays, robots, scientific necromancy (zombie plagues) and so forth.

The alpine setting also makes it a good place to strand the PCs on a mountain, preferably while there's a blizzard going on and an angry golem is stalking outside. Finally, Lamordia's optimistic, modern, and civic-minded attitude and high emigration makes it a good point of origin for PCs, even when the campaign takes place elsewhere.

### Theme

Lamordia is constructed out of the following themes:

- The Dominance of Man over Nature. Lamordians believe that there exists no problem that can't be solved with the proper amount of effort and know-how, and they refuse to accept the constraints of their environment. It's a very can-do attitude, an optimistic feeling that Lamordians can do



## Mad Science, not Bad Science

One of the faults to which Mad Science stories are prone is that they sometimes treat science as 'bad', saying that there are things man is not meant to know, that science is inherently immoral and evil, and so forth. Luddism is an unfortunately common philosophy. The best way to handle this when dealing with Lamordia is to emphasize that science is a *tool* - Lamordian science has done a great deal of good for its country and for the Core at large. The problem comes when science is put into the service of human obsession, and it is on the obsession that the GM should shine a light.

anything if they put their mind to it. This becomes a problem when it's paired with...

- Loneliness, Alienation, and Obsession. Lamordia is remote. Lamordia is cold. Lamordia is lonely. It's a large country with a small population that is snowed in for half the year. People *brood* when given so much time to dwell on things. They fall into depression. They *obsess*. They grow distant from others, pushing them away. Unable to leave their present company, they begin to feel trapped, and overly fixate on the faults of those they know. They work themselves into a frenzy over petty slights, they rage against the uncaring universe, and because they are Lamordian, they set out to do something about it.

- What is Man? In Lamordia, they have created automatons. Metal men who serve without complaint, they serve only to increase the isolation of the people, because they are not *human*, they are machines. Yet what happens when people

start treating their mechanical men like people? And what happens when they "do" start acting like people?

## The Land

### Environment

Lamordia is a primarily alpine country located in the northwestern corner of the Core. Most of Lamordia is taken up by the northern end of the Balinok mountain chain, the same mountains that run south into the eastern part of Falkovnia, northern Borca, Barovia, western Hazlan, and on down into the Phirazian peninsula. Called locally the Schlaptia, or the *Sleeping Beast*, the mountains are a central fact of life in Lamordia. They are middle-aged, as mountains go, not quite the screaming, jagged peaks of younger mountains, but not yet worn down into glorified hills, instead rising majestically into the sky with their snow-capped peaks. Below the tree line, they are covered in old-growth coniferous forest, while above, snow and ice cling to the mountains year round.

The mountains define life in Lamordia. Habitable land is found in small, modestly fertile valleys nestled between the many peaks, but if one wants to actually *get* anywhere in Lamordia, one has to travel through the mountains. Slender passes wind beneath the snowy heights - good, solid roads but ones which are ever-threatened by the specter of avalanches. The avalanche is a national specter, capable of swallowing travelers, even entire communities beneath a thousand tons of snow. (There are documented cases of towns of a thousand people vanishing completely to an avalanche, with no survivors, the most recent occurrence being in 742.) In many parts of Lamordia, there's

a practice of firing artillery shells into the mountainsides, triggering controlled avalanches that reduce the risk of an unexpected one later on.

Along with the mountains, *winter* controls life in Lamordia. Located as far north as it is, Lamordia is in for several long winter months during which the entire country is blanketed in several feet of snow. In previous years, the snow rendered travel impossible -- it would choke off the passes under not feet but *yards* of the stuff, and everyone had no choice but to sit tight till summer. In modern times, the Lamordians have taken to digging tunnels through the mountains, and the railroad provides some little relief, but smaller communities are still cut off. Even in the valleys, winter tends to be a quiet time, as few are willing to brave the subzero temperatures and knee-deep snow and ice to visit one another. Spring is even worse than winter in some ways, as spring is avalanche season, when the melting snow becomes much likelier to break off and roll down the mountains.

The Lamordian coastline is likewise singularly uninviting, composed of stony cliffs and rocky beaches. As the Schlaptia descend into the water, they form an archipelago of sharp, rocky islands known collectively as "The Finger" jutting out into the Sea of Sorrows, the largest of which is known as the Isle of Agony. Sailing through the Finger is considered a task only for very brave, very stupid, or *very* cautious captains -- numerous rocky outcroppings lurk just below the surface of the water, and in the winter one has to worry about floating pack ice as well. Most of the Finger is uninhabited, though there are a handful of hardy fishing communities that cling to the cliffs, and the entire place is considered to be ill-omened even by the un-superstitious Lamordians, with most shunning the Finger.

## GM's Note

And of course, there's the chance that the Lamordian and Dwarven engineers will wake something nasty up while playing with dynamite.

Over the last hundred years, the Lamordians have taken to turning their engineering know-how on their own land, with an eye towards making it more habitable. They've bored tunnels through the mountains, have developed new ways of handling avalanches, and are busily mapping the reefs of the Finger -- and in some cases, blowing those reefs up sky-high. Much of this work actually involves explosives of one sort or another, and it is *quite* dangerous, with accidental explosions, cave-ins, and avalanches all common.

## Social Geography

Humanity in Lamordia is singularly divided, a million and a half people sorted into hundreds of small valley communities. Despite the coming of the Northwest Train Line and the construction of tunnels and improved passes, large parts of Lamordia are still isolated in the winter seasons. These isolated areas, usually consisting of a town and some villages, are each called a canton, and the canton is the basic grouping of Lamordian society. Each canton strives for self-sufficiency, and indeed, it is the need of each canton to provide for itself despite being cut off for months at a time that has helped the artisan and middle-class professionals of Lamordia prosper.

Two cantons in particular stand out as being larger, wealthier, and more important than the rest. The first is the city of Ludendorf, a large town of not quite a hundred thousand souls, located on the Lamordia coastline, inside the Finger.



Ludendorf is the country's capital, its largest city, its *wealthiest* city, and is the location of probably the only good port in Lamordia. Shipping, fishing, shipbuilding, and whaling are the main trades in Ludendorf, though many of Lamordia's best artisans eventually make their way here -- the printers and bookmakers are particularly celebrated. Ludendorf is also home to the national legislature (the Diet), and other bits and pieces of government. It's a picturesque town located on the grey cliffs overlooking the harbor, and while the great ports of Martira Bay and Port-a-Lucine dwarf its little harbor, Ludendorf is nevertheless a prosperous and sophisticated town.

The other notable canton is Neufurchtenberg, Ludendorf's smaller, provincial cousin (population ~60,000). Located in the southeast of the country, in the foothills of the Balinoks, Neufurchtenberg is a major mercantile and industrial center. Raw ore is shipped from all across Lamordia to it, where massive foundries smelt it into metals which are then shipped elsewhere, particularly to neighboring Falkovnia. Glassmaking, brickmaking, apothecaries, and a host of other trades all call Neufurchtenberg home, though the soot-stained and grimy atmosphere of the place make it a less convivial home than Ludendorf. Of particular note is that the local town council meets in a monastery once dedicated to Skogul, one of the old Lamordian goddesses.

In addition to the cantons, towns, and villages, Lamordia is also home to three other sorts of habitations. The first of these are the noble manors. Once, Lamordia's aristocracy maintained large and ornate estates up in the mountains. These *Schlosses* (the word *schloss* is roughly equivalent to the word *château* or *palace*) are mostly in disrepair nowadays, as few of

Lamordia's aristocrats have the funds nowadays to keep up their crumbling ancestral homes -- some do, but not many. Of those palaces whose owners have been less successful in finding money, many have been sold off to the local canton or to wealthy citizens, often turned into social clubs or universities. A few of the most remote have simply been abandoned.

Another unique feature of Lamordia's countryside is the monasteries. The ancient Lamordian pantheistic faith had a strong monastic tradition to it, and the present scientific mindset of the Lamordians can be traced to those monks that sought to understand the divine world about them. Many of the monasteries eventually became the seeds of towns or universities, but as with the schlosses, some proved too remote or difficult to reach to be worth the bother, and so were simply abandoned.

### GM's Note

There's nothing quite like having the PCs, driven to seek shelter from a sudden blizzard, holing up in an abandoned aristocratic palace or crumbling, long-forgotten monastery perched on some gloomy Lamordian mountainside.

Finally, there are the universities. Unlike other lands, the idea of a national university as in Dementlieu, or even purpose-built academies as in Falkovnia, never quite caught on in Lamordia. Higher education in Lamordia was essentially the preserve of private individuals or local cantons. As such, Lamordia has *many* universities, small institutions of higher learning, often supported by bequests from wealthy aristocrats and located in former schlosses or monasteries -- they tend to be located at a distance from the nearby towns, to avoid

## GM's Note

The university is perhaps the very best of settings for the classic Lamordian adventure. On the one hand, they're delightfully isolated, being located on cold, remote, and inhospitable mountains, in eerie estates or former monasteries. On the other hand, they concentrate several hundred academic individuals, removed from outside contact, and give them tools and libraries to pursue their own personal obsessions.

distracting the students. Few of these places have more than a few hundred students and a score of faculty, but they provide some of the best education in the Core, particularly in science and technology, but also in philosophy and logic. They often accept individuals from outside Lamordia, and more than one prominent scientist in Richemulot or Falkovnia can credit their success to an education received in some tiny college teetering precariously over a cliff.

## The Folk

### Social Classes

Since the 690s, and peaking in the 730s, Lamordia has been undergoing a technological revolution, with steam power, machine tools, better iron-making processes, and scientific agricultural techniques transforming the Lamordian economy. This has resulted in a hollowing out of both the Lamordian upper and lower classes in favor of the middle. The old Lamordian nobility was, with a few exceptions, too conservative and set in its

ways to adopt the new technologies, and found itself steadily impoverished. The poor peasants and workers, meanwhile, found themselves unable to compete with mechanization, and smallholders rapidly found themselves losing ground to those who could invest capital in the machinery necessary. Lamordia is essentially a bourgeois country now, firmly dominated by middle class values, middle class ideas, and middle class politicians.

There are still some **Aristocrats** around in Lamordia, most notably the Barons von Aubrecker. Still, the last hundred years have not been kind to them, and most of the aristocrats still in the country have had to make do in some fashion. While a few of the most conservative refuse to acknowledge the rising middle classes as anything but 'dirty tradesmen', most of the nobility lack the funds to sequester themselves in their estates and ignore the change of the world. Young aristocrats now commonly use their last family funds to attend one of Lamordia's high-quality universities, and then enter into industry or banking, where their family name can be used for a bit of an edge. Others follow an easier route and simply auction off their children as brides and husbands for up-and-coming industrialists, either in Lamordia or outside the country. They get money enough to keep up their estates, and their children's spouses get a noble title into the family. Everyone wins! (Except for the newlyweds, which periodically causes trouble).

Meanwhile, those of Lamordia's **Poorer Classes** who are still around are generally working in the factories or mines, or as seasonal laborers. While they can still get by in Lamordia's more remote communities, where technological change hasn't penetrated as deeply, in larger communities they hold on to their livelihoods by their



## Lamordian Emigration

Lamordia is not unique in suffering from these technology-driven social changes, as Paridon, Dementlieu, and Falkovnia are all dealing with industrialization as well. And yet, even though the process is furthest along in Lamordia, the von Aubreckers' country has managed to avoid the social strife of Dementlieu or Paridon, and manages without Falkovnia's heavy state hand. How? The answer is emigration. The opening of the Northwest Train Line allowed those Lamordians on the losing end of their country's societal changes to pack up their bags and head out, and do so at a fraction of the cost, and much more safely and easily, than they would have in generation previously. Conscious of the dangers of an impoverished proletariat as leading to revolution, Lamordia's politicians have done what they can to smooth the journey. The largest part of Lamordian expatriates settle in Falkovnia. They share a language and a culture, and assimilate easily. Significant minorities also settle in Dementlieu and in Richemulot, and small numbers even travel to the far south -- to Verbrek, Invidia, or Kartakass, where land is easy to get. Lamordian nobles, meanwhile, tend to hang around Port-a-Lucine or Martira Bay, where they form a distinct 'Old Lamordia in Exile'.

fingernails, always afraid that the management will replace them with humanoid automatons. Luddism becomes a common philosophy among such disaffected

people, and while mechanization has made Lamordia's industry much *safer* (especially in traditionally high-risk trades such as mining), it seems a cruel joke to have the safety and productivity come at the expense of their jobs. The situation is worsened by the fact that most Lamordians have a kind of half-pitying, half-contemptuous attitude to those unwilling or unable to fall in step with the march of progress. There is a small yet powerful strain of political radicalism in the poor of Lamordia. And yet, in many ways, the proletariat of Lamordia is *better* off than that in Falkovnia or Dementlieu -- literacy is quite good, and starvation hasn't been a serious danger in generations. But then, it makes sense. People living on the edge of oblivion can't afford the energy to think about politics.

The **Middle Class**, also called in Lamordia the *Mittelstrauta*, is what most people think about when they think of Lamordians. This is a motley collection of well-to-do farmers, artisans, and other professional people, those who have enough money to stay in the technological race and afford the new devices and machines as they become available. They're a very polite, proper people, and have an unusual amount of political power compared to their fellows elsewhere. Many of Lamordia's wealthiest citizens, bankers and industrialists and such, are still considered to be part of the middle class and possess a distinctly middle class ethos, but Lamordia's fractured geography and relatively poor national economy makes it hard for really large concentrations of wealth to emerge. Most Lamordians are well off, few are really *rich*. While servants in the style of Dementlieu are uncommon in Lamordia outside the wealthiest homes, most middle class Lamordians have an apprentice or journeyman who lives in the house, and automatons are slowly filtering into society -

- most of the more well-off Lamordians will have an automaton around the house, and the man-machines are steadily moving down-market.

Finally, linked to the middle class and yet set off to one side is the **Technical Class** -- that is to say, people who make their living on the basis of science and technology. The line can be blurry at times, as someone who operates a large thresher for a group of farms may at once be a farmer and a member of the middle class and also a technical expert. Still, these are the people who work with their minds and their educations. Technicians, engineers, lawyers, scientists, teachers, factory managers, these people are considered the very best that Lamordia has to offer, and are accorded high status in Lamordian communities. There's a distinct hierarchy within as well. Those who deal with the humanities (lawyers, teachers) are at the bottom, though still respected, while doctors are a bit higher up, engineers and other people who bend nature to their will are higher still, and at the very pinnacle are men of science and invention, the people who create the new technologies. The desire to become such an inventor has many a stout Lamordian burgher playing around with gears or chemicals in their basement, hoping for a breakthrough. Sometimes the breakthroughs happen.

### GM's Note

And sometimes it accidentally causes a disaster -- Mad Science, after all.

## Ethnic Groups

The Lamordians are the only human ethnic group found in their mountainous country in any number -- they're a Lamordic

people, obviously enough, and are generally thought to be the original Lamordic people, from which the population of Falkovnia and Western Darkon derived. The typical Lamordian is tall, with the men often reaching six feet in height, and is possessed of a more slender build and more delicate features than their Falkovnian cousins. It takes a great deal to break Lamordians out of this general build, as physically powerful Lamordians tend towards the slim and wiry rather than broad-shouldered and heavily muscled, while even those people who run to fat are more likely to have potbellies than to balloon all over. Blond hair and blue eyes are considered the most classic Lamordian traits, though hair color runs the gamut from pale yellow to dark brown (brown hair is actually more common than blond), and eye color is as often grey or green as it is blue. Lamordians are a pale people by nature, but exposure to the biting winds of their homeland gives most of them a ruddy complexion in short order. Fashion tends towards the utilitarian and pragmatic, particularly towards heavy woolen clothing, with waistcoats and stout dresses being the norm. Modesty is enormously important. Eyeglasses or spectacles are common, both because the combination of a highly literate society and somewhat imperfect gaslights or candles leads to eyestrain (electrical lights are extremely rare in private homes), and because they're considered a sign of intellect and scholarly status.

Lamordia is also home to one of the largest dwarven populations in the Core, one it shares with neighboring Darkon. Lamordian dwarves are what might be called 'half-integrated'. They are a common sight in Lamordian towns and villages, work in Lamordian factories or with Lamordian artisans, study in their universities and participate on equal terms in their politics, but at the end of the day usually return to



their own communities, which are organized into their own political districts for electoral purposes. Culturally, they're extremely similar to their Lamordian neighbors, though perhaps a bit less atheistic (ancestor veneration is common) and with an even stronger respect for tradition and seniority, and as a result there is very little prejudice against dwarves in Lamordia -- more commonly, Lamordians and dwarves unite in being politely contemptuous of foreigners. Most dwarves live in one of several large, underground Holds in the Schlaptia mountains, though a small number have settled in Lamordia's towns and villages, with the largest dwarven community being that of Neufurchtenberg, where they work in the iron foundries of that town.

A very peculiar form of "ethnic group" is that of the Automatons, the self-animating and self-actualizing machines created by Lamordian science. Lamordian automatons are probably the most advanced technology in the entire Core, perhaps within the entire Demiplane, and the intricate machinery is nearly impossible to recreate outside of the country. They are not limited simply to machine men: anything the human mind can imagine has been recreated in machine form. Mechanical nightingales are popular entertainments, mechanical horses pull carriages through the streets, and even self-lighting street lights line the streets of the larger cities. The humanoid automatons are similarly varied: an automaton might be a metal man that plays chess, or a delicately painted marionette who dances with greater precision than any flesh and blood performer. These automatons have become more and more common over the years, to the point where seeing one is no surprise to Lamordian citizens, and to where they are seen daily in cities. They are a peculiar

ethnic group because, of course, they are hardly an ethnic group at all -- these are machines, with no will or thoughts, beyond what has been given to them by their programming.

The issue with this is two-fold. First, there is a distressing occurrence in Lamordian society where people become overly attached to their automatons, to the point where they begin to project emotions where there are none. This is exceptionally common among those who own humanoid automatons, as these often display a shocking degree of intelligence, but have no desires beyond obeying their master's commands. Since they have none of the emotional foibles or demands of real, flesh and blood friends, many of their owners begin to prefer them to real, flesh and blood company. This usually results in alienation and deteriorating mental health on the part of the owner, as they become more and more obsessed with something that is incapable of returning their feelings. It has on occasion resulted in more tragic endings: a shocking recent case, for example, involved a woman who murdered her best friend over an "affair" with the woman's serving automaton.

The far less common, and far more worrisome, issue is that some automatons *do* develop their own emotions and consciousness -- becoming, in effect, "alive". There seems to be no rhyme or reason to why or when this happens. Some automatons seem to develop emotions in response to their owner's desires, while others remain soulless hunks of metal no matter how badly their master yearns. Others seem to appear randomly among those who pay no mind to their metal servants, especially those who consider the idea of machine intelligence to be nonsense. This sudden genesis of sentience never ends happily. Those who had no wish for

their servants to be alive are horrified to find that their automatons are no longer obeying their orders. Those who yearned for their automatons to love them back quickly find their *perfect* partner is no longer perfect, now having emotional wants and needs just like any flawed human being. Legally, rogue automatons are considered a public menace, and are to be destroyed as soon as they are discovered. Some instead escape out into the mountains, trying to make sense of their newfound free-will.

As a result of automaton technology, there is a certain group of people who have mechanical limbs, often replacing those lost in mining or industrial accidents. These people are, officially, treated like any other citizen -- technology has overcome their unfortunate circumstances, which is something to be celebrated. Unofficially, those who have significant portions of their bodies replaced with machinery often find that their temperaments change, and there are many well-reported and well-documented incidents of these people going berserk when exposed to innocuous stimuli. Even those people who do not succumb to this strange madness are well known for having troubles with their newfound limbs, from extreme paranoia over their mechanical parts, to having them move on their own.

## Religion

Centuries ago, the Lamordians worshiped a pantheon of gods led by Lothurr, the lightning god and life-giver. It was a shamanistic-monastic faith, with devotees often withdrawing from society to live as hermits or in monasteries, to better contemplate the holy electricity, while the common folk told legends of trolls and giants and huldras. Much of Lamordia's

## GM's Note

The Lamordian construct is one of the most amazing technological advancements in the entire core. The use of them prevents hundreds of mining deaths every year, allows for rescue operations even in the worst of blizzards, and improves the quality of life almost everywhere they are employed. Yet, they are almost *never* found outside of Lamordia. The reason for this is one of prejudice, for the most part. Dementlieu has banned the automatons due to a public defamation campaign by Dominic d'Honaire and the Council of Brilliance -- since automatons cannot be turned into Obedients, d'Honaire has done his best to ensure that they can never be used against him. Drakov holds his loyal people in high esteem, and hates the idea of courageous soldiers being replaced by metal men. Darkon has golems of its own, created by magic, which don't require engines and fuel to run. Everywhere else simply finds the automatons prohibitively expensive. Not only are the automatons themselves costly, but any repairs to them require highly specialized parts, sent from Lamordia. Other countries simply don't have the industrial capability to overcome the cost barrier in a significant fashion.

earliest technological innovation occurred in those monasteries, as monks sought to learn more about the world around them, and in so doing to gain greater understanding of their gods' mysteries.



But those days are long past, and the monasteries are abandoned. The bulk of the Lamordian population is deistic at *best*, and the elites are often outright atheistic. Those Lamordians who do believe in some manner of divine agency tend to ascribe to a 'Divine Watchmaker' view of the world, wherein an unknown and unknowable creator designed the world but does not interfere with it.

The more educated Lamordians deny even that concession in favor of a purely rationalistic view of the world. Divine magic, as they see it, is simply a branch of the arcane fueled by obsession -- they note that anyone with enough devotion can cast the spells, regardless of what that devotion is *to*. Some Lamordians have sought to devote themselves so much to the concept of order as to demonstrate that divine magic can be extracted from anything, and while they haven't had much concrete success, they *have* had enough that most organized faiths are dubious of them. In general, Lamordians find the idea of organized worship to be kind of silly, and while they tend to be too polite to comment on it, people who are actively or outspokenly religious tend to find themselves quietly avoided or shunned.

Still, there are a few exceptions to this. The dwarves, while holding to the same

views as their human neighbors, do have a system of ancestor veneration and memorialization that stops *just* short of ancestor worship. Similarly, a small number of Lamordians have taken to the Ezran faith, usually following the Port-a-Lucine branch, though they keep it to themselves. And there are still some crazy hermits or overly-enthusiastic antiquarians who are interested in the old Lamordian gods, some of whom believe that Lothurr has been incarnated in human flesh. The Monastery of the Quickening Thunderbolt, in the high mountains, is the largest collection of such individuals, though they are standoffish and unfriendly to an extreme, and unwelcoming to visitors.

## Culture

Though Lamordians follow no religion, the idea of Order quite nearly takes its place. They rarely call it that, necessarily, referring to it more simply as 'the proper way of thinking' or 'Reason' or what-not, but it can be most easily understood as the idea that the universe obeys certain mechanistic rules, and that by following those rules people may gain power (in the sense of becoming wealthy, happy, and successful). This idea of order is reflected in several parts of Lamordian life and culture.

Order means having a stern public morality and a strong sense of civic duty. Lamordians do not approve of various 'goings-on', and are noticeably more prudish than their various neighbors to the south and east. In public, a Lamordian is expected to be a paragon of virtue, to be sober, hard-working, practical (not given to airy idealism -- though Lamordians are actually very idealistic), dutiful, and public-spirited. They should stand by their community, always pitch in when necessary, and always be polite. Even if you want to strangle the man, you are polite to him.

### GM's Note

Generally speaking, one does not run across Lamordian divine casters (clerics, paladins, etc). Lamordians don't like religions and most religions don't like Lamordians. Still, there are possible exceptions, but any Lamordian who is too open about it is going to be shunned by his neighbors and be met with disbelief by non-Lamordians.

Order also means minding your own business. Just as a Lamordian is expected to be prim and proper in public, there is a tacit acknowledgement that what happens behind closed doors should stay there. Lamordians are very curious about science, nature, culture, news from other lands, but *not* about what goes on with their neighbors. Lamordians have a strongly passionate streak, and for all their fussy practicality, as "S" puts it, they are people very much driven by emotion. Love-matches are the norm in matters of the heart, and children are encouraged to pursue whatever trade interests them most.

Order, finally, means that Man is raised above Nature by his Reason. Lamordians believe that nothing is impossible with sufficient expertise and resources, and that there is nothing truly *unknowable* in the world -- merely mysteries which have not *yet* been solved. In the absence of God, the Lamordians place people, both collectively and individually, at the heart of their ethic. Nature is something that exists for the benefit of Man, and it becomes beautiful when it becomes *useful*. A well-ordered farm is far more beautiful than some moody, pointless woodland. This also means that Lamordian society stresses social mobility and a kind of technocratic/meritocratic ordering of society. The best and brightest rise to the top, and those who fail drop down, unless caught by well-meaning relatives.

At its best, Lamordian society is idealistic, optimistic, and in a sense romantic. Lamordians deny the limits of their world and believe that making a better life is within their hands. Unlike so many other lands, Lamordians are not so ground down by poverty or oppression, and there's a liveliness to them that can't be denied. At their worst, Lamordians can be naive and overoptimistic, but the true dark side of this

## GM's Note

The Lamordian habit of shunning those who are *strange* fits in very well with the theme of Obsession. Someone who violates Lamordian social rules is cut off from the community and left to brood in solitude, until they are driven to darkness.

philosophy of order is that it is not kind to those that break its rules or fail to live up to its promise. If a man can accomplish anything with enough reason and hard work, then the only explanation for failure is that one is either stupid or lazy, and Lamordians approve of neither trait. Those who falter are left to the grudging charity of their relatives, and those who transgress against public morality are quietly but thoroughly ostracized. Lamordians are never rude, but they can make it exquisitely clear when someone isn't welcome.

## Lamordians & Magic

For a variety of reasons, very few Lamordians traffic with the supernatural.

- A Lamordian druid (or to a lesser extent, ranger) is essentially a contradiction in terms. Nature, in the Lamordian mindset, is something to be dominated and tamed.

- Similarly, Lamordian clerics are *extremely* rare -- Lamordians are usually agnostic at best. The religious conviction required for divine spellcasting is considered both embarrassing and somewhat unhinged, and most divine casters leave the country due to the unreceptive nature of their local flocks. Paladins might appear once every fifty years.

- With regards to the Arcane, sorcerers require special bloodlines which just don't seem to surface among



Lamordians, even if they should by all reckonings do so (such as the other parent being a sorcerer themselves). Free-wheeling bards clash badly with the stern public morality. Wizards are borderline compatible, with their studious approach to magic, but even then, many Lamordians simply *can't* cast spells, however intelligent they are. There are even known to be Lamordian bloodlines that are resistant or completely immune to magic, an occurrence that increases in frequency the more secluded a village is (which has lead some of these secluded people to conclude that magic does not actually exist). This leads to a widespread belief that the only way to become proficient with arcane magic is to make a deal with unsavory powers -- in a word, to cheat. Most Lamordian wizards quickly emigrate to Falkovnia or Dementlieu to continue their studies.

- Artificers and alchemists are far more common and are accepted (and generally considered proper and orderly).

Of course, PCs exist to break the rules, but the both Player and GM should be aware that a Lamordian spellcaster of any stripe is going to be strange, and should have a good reason for why one exists -- say, the Lamordian druid is a gunsmith that ended up making a pact with a fey entity under duress, while sitting on a branch over a pack of hungry wolves, or the Lamordian paladin is actually a reanimated avatar of the ancient god Lothurr, incarnated in stitched-together flesh by a mad golems of the Monastery of the Quickening Thunderbolt.

## Lamordian Science and Technology

There is nothing in the world quite like Lamordian technology. Only the Paridoners come close to it, with Falkovnia and Dementlieu following at a more sedate distance. To those unfamiliar with it, many

Lamordian inventions come across as thoroughly fantastical, more so than the outright magic of other lands. The most famous (or infamous, depending on how one looks at it) technology is that of the automaton. Machine servants and workers, Lamordian automatons have become the symbols of the new world, machine rendered into the form of man. Other Lamordian devices and techniques in common use include automated factories and mines, very good train engines, a range of advanced farm machinery such as seed drills and threshers, mechanical printing presses and easier papermaking technology, new metals (notably new forms of very high-quality steel), easy-to-produce glass, and optical devices ranging from telescopes to much better eyeglasses.

More broadly, Lamordians excel at two specific things. First, they are extremely good at producing *energy* -- that is to say, they have steam-powered engines, fueled by coal or oil. This energy can then be converted into machine power that can be used to chop wood, dig ditches, or power factory machinery. Electricity is also in use in Lamordia, a legacy of Lamordia's lightning-focused religion, and though electricity-powered devices are not yet in common private use, one runs across electrical street lamps or electrical factory machines. The other thing that Lamordians are very good at is creating machines that are capable of responding to external stimuli, in other words, machines that can *sense* things, seeing or hearing by way of primitive cameras or microphones, or reacting to vibration, and then triggering an action based on what they perceive. These two technologies come together in automatons, which are basically machines that can go for a long time without refueling and can respond to complex situations.

# The Realm

## Economy

While reasonably well off, it is difficult to call Lamordia a wealthy land in comparison to its immediate neighbors. Lamordians are usually able to get by, especially with the invention of automatons and with the application of technological innovations to agriculture, mining, and industry. But geography and the environment ensure that Lamordia will never be a very "wealthy" land.

To begin with, Lamordia is agriculturally poor. It has long winters with unexpected

and sudden frosts, which makes for a short growing season. More importantly, the topsoil in Lamordia is thin and extremely rocky. In the realms of industry, while Lamordians are very good at designing manufactured goods, their population base is too sparse, and travel over the mountain passes too difficult, to make it the kind of industrial hub that nearby Falkovnia is. As far as trade goes, the Finger and its reefs and ice floes make it easier for most merchants to go to either Port-a-Lucine to the south or Martira Bay to the north. Mining is the most profitable sector of the Lamordian economy, as the many mountains are rich in various metals and minerals, particularly iron, copper, and tin. Lamordian artisanal goods, meanwhile, are considered of very high quality and are sought throughout the Core.

Technology has gone a good way towards rectifying these problems in recent years. They make up for their weak soil with chemical fertilizers and mechanical threshers, and heavy machinery is able to do the work of many men in mining and manufacturing. Careful navigational maps, new tunnels, and the train route go a long way towards making up for Lamordia's deficiencies as a nexus of trade. Automation is the signature Lamordian technology, the creation of advanced machines (often humanoid) that are capable of performing labor, and it has utterly revolutionized many trades, particularly in manufacturing, where automatons prove extremely well suited to the repetitive actions necessary. Mining has been slower to succumb to the lure of automatons, as the act of seeking and gouging ore out of a mountain side requires more in the way of thought and thus more complex and expensive automatons, and of course they must compete with dwarven miners. Still, more and more automatons are produced all the time, and a few more

### GM's Note

As a general rule, Lamordian technology matches that of the 1860s and 1870s -- that is to say, you have things like fairly advanced steam engines, large-scale use of iron and steel, early repeating rifles, gatling guns, and ironclads, and so forth. In the realm of electrification, the Lamordians are closer to the 1920s or 1930s, and automatons are, of course, a fantastic technology that relies on the Dark Powers making certain energy constraints go away. On the other hand, textiles, biology, non-prosthetic/surgical medicine, and the like are if anything less developed in Lamordia than in the real world's 1870s, or even in Paridon or Falkovnia. This all applies only to the technology that is in common use, however. A plot-relevant mad scientist will have whatever ideas and devices the GM thinks necessary.



foundries, factories, and mines are mechanized with every passing year.

Many of these innovations, however, are more about letting more work be done with fewer people, and this is one of the reasons that Lamordia has suffered considerable emigration over the last few decades. Many of these migrants send money back to the country, especially those who have aging parents back home. Remittances thus form an important but unspoken part of the national economy.

## Law

Lamordic Law forms one of the older legal traditions in the Western Core, and elements of it can be found on Graben Island, in Falkovnia, and in parts of Western Darkon. It's a common law tradition -- precedent and schultebott (town council) rulings piled together for centuries on end, with legal codification coming only much, much later. This can sometimes make for some perplexing loopholes in the law, as some smaller communities may not actually have laws making, say, *murder* illegal. It may be that it simply never came up in that little hamlet. Despite that, Lamordians are not great fans of legalistic wrangling, and usually solve such problems by throwing trouble-makers into a guarded root cellar while the schultebott has an emergency session to rectify the problem. If anything, Lamordic law tends to be over-complicated, with scores of irritating little regulations and civic ordinances passed by schultebotts with nothing better to do.

Lamordic law is enforced by a *gendarmerie*, a small but very professional police force of career officers, who follow military discipline. Not every town will even have a gendarme about, and the ratio of police-to-population is only about half that of neighboring Darkon or Dementlieu, let alone Falkovnia. When the gendarmes do

need more bodies (for searches or such), they usually requisition the local militia. Some of the gendarmeries in the larger towns have been experimenting with automatons as backup, but budgets rarely stretch to have more than a handful of the things. In any case, law enforcement in Lamordia tends to be a dull affair, as there just doesn't seem to *be* a strong criminal element in the country -- Lamordians are law-abiding to a fault. As a result, the Lamordian gendarmerie spends a fair amount of time enforcing petty schultebott ordinances (to the grumbling of the gendarmes), and many of Lamordia's professional police end up emigrating to Falkovnia or Dementlieu, where they can advance much more quickly. When a crime is committed, the accused is put on trial before a magistrate (in smaller communities this is simply the schult or mayor, while the towns will usually have a professional judge), and is given legal representation. There is no jury system in Lamordia, with the judge making the final decision, but there is an adversarial legal system and Lamordian judges are considered to be singularly fair-minded.

Still, there are a *few* crimes that seem endemic to Lamordia. Grave-robbing is a common problem, and is often winked at by the community. Dead bodies are necessary for medical education, but Lamordian ordinances and laws forbid using anyone but a tiny number of convicted criminals, which means that most medical students find themselves on night-time expeditions to the local graveyards at least a few times in the course of their education.

## Government

The Sovereign Barony of Lamordia is a federal constitutional monarchy, led by Barony Vilhelm von Aubrecker and a representative legislature called the "Diet".

Real power lies in the hands of the *Schults* (Mayors) and *Schuldebotts* (Town Councils). Lamordia's villages and towns are heavily isolated from one another -- even at the best of times, travel through the mountain passes is difficult, tedious, and unpleasant, and in the winter one can add 'dangerous' to that list as well. As a result, Lamordians have developed a strong tradition of self-government, probably one of the more democratic and egalitarian systems in the Core.

Most local governance is handled by the schuldebotts. Members of a schuldebott (called the stautsrote) are elected by an assembly of all the male landholders in a community to a term of six years, with terms being staggered so that one third of the schuldebott is up for election every two years. The size of a schuldebott varies, but generally speaking small villages and hamlets will have six people, modest towns will have twelve or eighteen, and the schuldebott of Ludendorf has thirty six members. The schuldebott handles most domestic problems - everything from passing local laws to setting taxes to organizing the militia. They also select the schult for the community, who is almost always a former or current stautsrote. The schult handles matters relating to trade, serves as a tie-breaker in the schuldebott, and generally exercises executive duties in the community.

On a larger level, Lamordia is divided into several cantons (mostly based on geography -- all members of a canton can easily reach each other), the schuldebotts of which select one or more "Mitglied" (members) to send to the great Diet at Ludendorf, one for every twenty five thousand people in the area and serving for staggered six year terms. The mitglied serve in the legislature and pass the few pan-Lamordian laws that exist, mostly dealing

with foreign affairs such as maintaining the Lamordian army or negotiating trade treaties. By long right and custom, Lamordia's dwarven communities are always organized into their own cantons, and have equal rights in the country.

Over all of this preside the Aubreckers. Formally, the Baron Vilhelm von Aubrecker serves as ceremonial head of state, commander in chief of the army, and has certain emergency powers to use in times of national crisis. In practice, it's been over a century since Lamordia last warred with anyone (they're too small to be expansionistic and no one is quite foolish enough to try and attack their mountainous strongholds), and the Diet would have a collective heart attack if the Baron tried to declare a national crisis, so the Barons are mostly trotted out to look regal for foreign dignitaries. In any case, Vilhelm is close to a hundred years old and in singularly ill health, and so much attention is being paid to his only surviving child, Gerta von Aubrecker, who is also a Mitglied and a member of the Ludendorf schuldebott.

## Military

Lamordian military leaders are realists. At one and a half million people, the Lamordians can never defeat Dementlieu (ten million), let alone Darkon (thirty million) or Falkovnia (fifteen million and the most powerful army in the Core) in open battle. Instead, the dominant strain of thinking is to make their country too much of a *bother* to attack. While the Lamordians would be eventually defeated, it would be a Pyrrhic victory, and since everyone knows this, no one wants to bother attacking them in the first place.

Part of this defense is based on the country's environment and geography. Lamordia is a mountainous land, and there are numerous passes where a small force



can hold off a much larger army. In the winter, the country becomes wholly untouchable, at least until someone figures out how to march troops through waist-deep snow. The other part is that the Lamordians work to ensure that they have a very good, and surprisingly large, army for their size.

Lamordia has universal conscription, and every Lamordian youth, male or female, spends two years, from eighteen to twenty, as a militia soldier. Under the eye of watchful career officers and NCOs, they are given some of the best weapons in the Core (rapid-firing repeating rifles), and taught how to use them to best effect. The militiamen spend their time patrolling the border, hunting down wild beasts or peculiar scientific horrors, and serving as assistants to the local gendarmerie. After they muster out, they are given the rifles to take home with them, and show up once a year for a three-day refresher course. Lamordia's military reserve, as a percentage of their total population, is not so far from that of their Falkovnian cousins.

This large militia is stiffened by a small number of professional soldiers and officers, as well as a highly competent artillery corps and navy. Of particular note are Lamordia's Mechanized Divisions, which are small units staffed largely or in part with automatons. Most are simply humanoid automatons outfitted with either melee weapons (this requires a simple program and a cheaper machine) or long-range sharpshooter rifles (more expensive, but aiming automatons are *very* accurate). A few groups use large automatons like mobile fortresses, a bristling hedgehog of guns and blades and armor, mounted on wheels or treads. So far, there are only a few of these machines, since getting money out of the Diet is like squeezing blood from a stone, but Lamordian military innovation is closely

followed by all the general staffs of the Core, and "especially" that of their Falkovnian cousins. Drakov is known to disdain automatons, but not all of his generals are quite so certain themselves.

Lamordian troops are among the best in the Northwestern Core, though like the gendarmes they suffer from the fact that there simply isn't much for them to *do* in Lamordia. This means that, again, quite a few emigrate into Falkovnia or Dementlieu and take up positions there. Others become mercenaries, fighting in wars as far abroad as Invidia or even in Phirazia, where their competence and professionalism is greatly respected.

## Politics

All politics is local, and nowhere is this more true than in Lamordia. With cantons and individual communities frequently cut off from the rest of the country by blizzards or avalanches, most politics occurs at a local level. People scheme to be elected to the schultebott, and then once in the schultebott they scheme to enrich themselves or advance their community or generally just to lord their status around. In most communities, all of the local 'worthies' will be members of the schultebott, and it's very often considered to be a place for old merchants to fuss about street lights or the proper regulations for door width. To a great extent, this is true... except that schultebotts also decide where and how the great Lamordian engineering projects are carried out, and the location of a tunnel or canal or a land improvement project can make or break people. In smaller communities, where there are only a few hundred farmers, this doesn't really matter, and in those places the schultebot really is a debating society for the self-important. But in the larger towns and cities, fortunes are at stake, and electoral politics gets

decidedly vicious. Lamordians don't poison their rivals like the Borcans do, but whisper campaigns and anonymous, slanderous attacks are common, with the goal being to paint one's rival as either irrational or as violating public morality. Elections to the Diet, which determines trade treaties, are even worse, a kind of reputation demolition derby.

Aside from the management of engineering projects, the other great debate in Lamordian politics is that of foreign policy. Essentially, should Lamordia continue to be neutral, or should it throw its lot in with the Falkovnians? A majority of the population is quite content to exist as a high-tech backwater, away from the life-or-death struggles of politics in the rest of the Western Core. But there is a growing, vocal minority (comprising perhaps 20% of the politically involved population) that believes that Lamordia's national destiny requires it to join with the Falkovnians, and that only by uniting Lamordian know-how with Falkovnian industry can their people truly rise to greatness in the Core. So far, older and more cautious heads have prevailed, but these debates rage across Lamordian newspapers and in Lamordia's coffee shops and schultebott meetings, and the nationalist position is particularly attractive to the youth of the country.

#### Foreign Relations

Lamordian foreign policy can be best summed as 'they do nothing, and they do it *very carefully*.' Lamordia is a sparsely populated land adjoining three of the largest and most powerful countries in the Core, and no one is under any illusion that Lamordia's military could stand up to even Dementlieu, let alone the juggernauts of their more easterly neighbors. At the same time, it's been generations since Lamordia was able to fully feed itself on its own land, and so trade is vital to the country. Thus,

Lamordia's politicians are very, very cautious and do nothing that might earn the enmity of their powerful neighbors.

**Falkovnia** Falko-Lamordian relations form a very complicated dance. On the one hand, relations between the two are excellent. Lamordia is the ancestral homeland of the Falkovnian people, there is a strong cultural affinity and a shared language, there is constant trade of Lamordian manufactured and technological goods for Falkovnian grains, small but regular migration (primarily Lamordians wishing to ascend to greater heights, who go to Falkovnia), and periodic cooperation between the governments. At the same time, Lamordia would very much like to "not" be a Falkovnian client state, and so they pursue an independent line as much as possible, to the frustration of Falkovnia's foreign ministry, and Falkovnian immigration into Lamordia is limited.

**Dementlieu** There is a strain of cool condescension among Lamordians towards their southern neighbor. While the Dementlieuse are seen as a quite intelligent people, the decadence of their aristocracy makes the civic-minded Lamordians gag. Still, the Lamordian state is sometimes considered a fifth member of the Four Towers Pact, in that they tend to agree with their southern neighbors on most diplomatic matters "except" Falkovnia (primarily matters of banking and trade). There's some bad blood over the illicit Lamordian extension of the train route, but the more rapid movement of goods and people promises to be a boon to both national economies.

**Darkon** If the Lamordians are cordial with the Falkovnians and condescending towards the Dementlieuse, their attitude towards Darkon is one of outright xenophobia masked by politeness. Darkon is a cruel empire founded on magic and



## Dread Possibility

At the time of the creation of Lamordia, the gods of Mordenheim's home world (or, perhaps, the Dark Powers) played one final trick on him.

Mordenheim was utterly convinced that life and cognition were purely biological/mechanical phenomena, entirely rejecting the concept of a "soul", and he thought creation of his "Adam" would prove the point once and for all. The gods therefore decided to strip his own soul from his breast and implant it in his creation, while leaving his mind intact.

Now, Adam has the soul of Mordenheim, with its yearning for understanding and creation, but the body, mind and memories of the construct made by Mordenheim's hands. Adam is intensely frustrated by his desire to create new life, because he lacks the mental acuity and knowledge necessary to bring it to pass; he is intensely jealous of his former master's abilities and yearns to succeed where Mordenheim failed, but he simply doesn't have the know-how to do so.

Mordenheim, on the other hand, is now the construct--immensely gifted in intellect, but essentially without imagination or desires. He is doomed to repeat the same series of experiments throughout eternity, not understanding why it all seems so empty and why he cannot replicate his first astonishing success.

The domain reflects Mordenheim, rather than Adam, to highlight to Adam the frustration and despair of his (literal) self-alienation (since everything reflects Mordenheim) and to highlight to Mordenheim his own essential emptiness and intellectual sterility (again, since everything reflects him).

superstition, blood enemy of their Falkovnian cousins, and generally an all-around wretched place. They blew up a city by accident, really, what more need be said? Still, relations between the two countries are very proper and correct, and there is some forced cooperation over the matter of Darkon's sizable Darko-Lamordic population, and the unity of the dwarven communities across the north of the Core.

## Adam & Mordenheim

The most brilliant scientist in a nation of brilliant scientists, Dr. Victor Mordenheim is centuries ahead of his colleagues. Familiar with the germ theory of disease, atomic theory, cell theory, and working around the edges of genetics, Mordenheim

is a genius, but one that is little respected in his own land. To the extent that most Lamordians think of the man, they think of him as that strange, mad recluse that lives in Schloss Mordenheim and ventures forth only occasionally to buy supplies, or to send out journal articles or academic papers that, while possibly brilliant, are so dense and complex as to be incomprehensible to all but himself. There are dark rumors about him, of course, that the man is a grave robber, but then such rumors swirl around many great scientists (eccentricity is almost expected of such geniuses). Still, aside from a few correspondents at universities around Lamordia and the Core and the occasional student, most Lamordians ignore Dr. Victor Mordenheim, and he happily returns the favor.

Of the Creature, much less is known. Adam is a boogeyman, a popular ghost story and a reason to avoid the Isle of Agony, but most Lamordians, safe in their little valleys, consider the Creature to be a fictional being, something invented as a kind of all-purpose 'scare the children into going to bed' character. Not everyone is *quite* so confident in the matter, particularly those merchants and whalers who sail near the Isle of Agony, and the gendarmerie of Ludendorf who must sometimes deal with unexplained murders or abductions. The 'monk's of the Monastery of the Quickening Thunderbolt know a great deal more, of course, but they aren't telling anyone.



# The Midnight



# Market

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**Mme. Araignée Veuve Noire Crissoire** is pleased to inform the denizens of the Market that following the recent voyage to **Paridon**, she has **returned**, and shall continue to offer those **services** which the Market has come to associate with her name. Service you may be **assured** of, at the **Haunted Mansion**. Objects **bought** and **sold**, situations **resolved**, difficulties **removed**, disruptions **quieted**, acquisitions **appraised**. **Mme. Araignée Veuve Noire Crissoire**, for when **discretion** is of **paramount** value.

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# THE MIDNIGHT MARKET

By Mikhail "NeoTiamat" Rekun  
illustrations by Eleanor "Isabella" Ferron

*The Minister asks. "Have you been good?"*

*You say yes.*

*The Minister asks. "Have you obeyed the Laws?"*

*You say yes.*

*The Minister asks. "Have you obeyed the Pacts, the Bindings and the Rituals, the Oaths of the Damned and Darkest Promise?"*

*You say yes.*

*The Minister asks. "Will you serve me as Beast and Slave?"*

*You say yes.*

Some places are necessary. They may be unpleasant, they may be unwholesome, they may be evil in a way that causes the very ground to weep, but they are necessary. The value of the free market, the value of the truce grounds, is something that cannot be denied. Everyone, even the direst enemies, needs a place to be able to shop, to scheme and to plot. In the sorrowed lands of the Mists, the Midnight Market fulfills this duty, a neutral ground that all the Legions of the Night agree is inviolate. To promise violence in the Market is a poor idea... Because the Minister of Fear enforces the truce.

## Entering the Market

For mortals, a visit to the Market of Nightmares always begins the same way, with an invitation. The invitations always look the same, a beautifully engraved card decorated with images of cherubim and flowers, upon which is written in a calligraphic hand:

*You are cordially invited to participate in Our Market Night upon January 2nd, 761 [or whatever the date is], by grace of God the two hundred and fifteenth anniversary of the Market. Hours of admission are from 12:00 PM to 1:00 AM. A donation of one (1) drop of blood per visitor is greatly appreciated.*

*Invitation tendered by courtesy of \_\_\_\_\_.*

The invitations are delivered by tame ravens, attached by a colorful silk ribbon to the bird's left leg. The name at the bottom is that of the current participant in the Midnight Market who has petitioned for the recipient's entry. In a rare few cases, however, the card is merely inscribed "Courtesy of the Minister."

At the bottom of the card, in a crude, block letters, someone writes the location of the market's gateway for the night in question. The gateway is always a little used door in some dry and dusty corner of



a building, a broom closet or an attic bedroom. It might be the door to a mausoleum, or it might be a door still in the workshop of a peasant craftsman. It doesn't really matter where the door normally goes. For this one hour of this one night, it leads to the Midnight Market.

Visitors arrive at the gateway, which opens silently, a moment before they can knock. Inside, they are greeted with a small

### The Nature of Time, and Returning to the Market

Time inside the Midnight Market and time outside of it have a very strange relationship. Inside the market, a day passes for every hour outside. One who enters the Market at 12:01 at night and stays there for twelve hours, emerges to find it still only 12:31. With that said, the Market only exists for an hour each night. So, one who stays in the Midnight Market an entire day finds that likewise, a day has passed outside, due to the Market's limited existence.

Those interested in returning to the Midnight Market, meanwhile, need only ask a raven for an invitation. Any old crow on the street will do. And in an hour, a raven will return with an invitation.

As for those interested in bringing others... well, for that one petitions the Minister for an invitation. One finds him wandering the streets of the Midnight Market, the rain dripping off his coat, and the petitioner makes his case. And usually, the Minister will nod, and an invitation will be sent out. It's a simple affair, in truth.

room, one that resembles an old-fashioned Mordentish parlor, with cozy couches and upholstered walls. Upon a side table sits a collection of silver bowls, equal in number to the visitors, each with a small knife, a towel, and a tiny glass bottle of iodine. There is no door except the one they entered by.

Visitors who decline the 'donation' of one drop of blood may spend as long as they like in the parlor, but will be unable to penetrate further into the Midnight Market. Once each silver bowl is graced by a drop of blood, however, the door behind the visitors opens into the Midnight Market.

### The Shopkeepers

Many of the shopkeepers are small, goblin-like men with beady yellow eyes, ugly and deformed yet not quite beyond the limits of the human form. Ears may be absent entirely, or expand like the wings of bats, noses are hooked till the tip touches the upper lip, or else inches long, hands have six fingers, or four, or are long as spider-legs, or melted into a kind of grotesque, waxy mitten

The goblin men sell everything and anything, whatever the soul desires.

- A beautiful portrait to grace your abode? It can be done. If the woman in the painting screams at times, pray, ignore it. It does that sometimes.

- An herbal infusion to cure a persistent cough? Certainly, here is some just in from Sri Raji. Ah, yes... the periodic burping of serpents is a side-effect. It's quite harmless. Just kill the snakes by nightfall.

- The skull of an unshriven mass murderer for a magic ritual? Well, it may require placing an order, but something can be arranged.

## The Market Grounds

The Midnight Market is the size of a good-sized city block, though it feels much smaller and more claustrophobic. Narrow streets of grey cobbles meander everywhere, while tiny alleyways lead off into the darkness. Tall townhouses, four, five stories in height crowd alongside the streets. The townhouses are dark and quiet, and seem to have no doors, but sometimes shapes can be seen to move inside the curtained windows. Nothing ever comes out of the townhouses, but that's all right. No one who goes in comes out either, which is also all right.

A perpetual light drizzle comes down on the Midnight Market, and the grey sky makes it impossible to tell what time it is. Flickering gaslamps illuminate the streets, but on the whole, the place feels somehow somber, and grey, and muted. Flocks of ravens roost in the upper levels, but the observant visitor will notice that these ravens... they do not breathe, and are slightly transparent.

The only 'life' (for a given value of life) in the Midnight Market is on the street level. There the merchants of the Market have set up their tents and stalls in alleyways and under overhangs, beneath bridges and in the middle of the street.

No one is quite certain how many of the goblin-men dwell in the Midnight Market. They seem interchangeable, faceless, scheming Faerie interested only in wealth. Unless a visitor asks or seeks one

by name, it is easy to believe that the same goblin is never seen twice.

With that said, there are usually a hundred other entities in the Midnight Market in addition to the goblin-men. Some are visitors, others merchants, but all are creatures of the night. A sample follows:

### Sodalis, the News Cat

This small, grey cat is usually one of the first creatures that the newcomers to the Market meet. It is also one of the most uniquely helpful. Called Sodalis by the merchants, the cat can rescue lost market-goers, lead visitors to specific merchants, or



provide a bit of friendly company as required. The cat's most notable habit is that it provides a small broadsheet with advertisements and locations for all of the Midnight Market's merchants and stalls.

How the cat does this is something of a question. It never speaks, not even under the influence of magic. Whether it's some benign fey or ghost, or some creature required for the Market to function is an open question, but Sodalis does a great deal to ensure that the Market remains coherent to newcomers.



## The Clan Karkar, the Merchants of Death

This family of gnomes is likely the most famous group of mortal merchants to do business within the Midnight Market. These black-robed, silent figures are crafters of

### The Market comes to Town

Most of the time, the Midnight Market takes place in its own little corner of reality, not really here and not really there. Yet on certain occasions the gates of the Market open, and in some corner of the Core the merchants colonize an abandoned fairground, an old cemetery, the interior of some ruined church. The Market comes to any given place only once every few years, but on those nights the usual strictures regarding invitation are lifted, and anyone can stroll into the Market if they can find whatever out-of-the-way ruin they occupy. Of course, without the Minister to keep the peace, those visitors come at their own risk. Still, it's a way for the merchants to see some fresh blood, and a way for GMs to use the Market without necessarily going through the full rigmarole of an invitation. The newspaper from the beginning of this entry is from such an occasion.

weapons extraordinaire, reliable, conscientious, and uncurious as to their customers. They have set up shop beneath a bridge near the center of the Market, hanging black curtains to create the semblance of a true shop.

When one enters the Clan's shop, one is greeted by their spokesman, Malthus

Karkar, a squat, large-nosed figure dressed solely in black silk, his face shrouded in shadows. A large orb of light, similar to a will-o-wisp, hangs by his side. Malthus Karkar acts as the customer's guide, showing them a large variety of flails, swords, axes, daggers, crossbows, and other weapons. Their prices are fair, their weapons are high quality and the enchantments are always quite reliable.

Of course, they also ask for a few pints of blood with every purchase, but one gets used to these eccentricities.

In truth, Malthus Karkar is not the



gnome who greets visitors, but the orb of light by his side. Malthus is an ancient Gnomish Vampire and powerful mage, and has been ruling his mortal descendants for centuries, turning them into blood slaves, and supplementing his diet with the blood of customers. It's a ghoulish little business, but one that fills a niche. And the Clan Karkar *does* make good weapons.

### Araignée Veuve Noire Grissoie, the Broker

This strange old woman is perhaps the most successful of the Midnight Market's

many brokers, and certainly the most high-profile. Her stall is large and permanent-seeming, more shop than simple stall, and resembles the home of a rich old widow rather than any sort of merchant's store. Grissoie greets her customers one by one, seated in the shadows. She is a small, hunched woman with odd proportions, dressed in a woman's suit in pale colors, and clutching a cane of white wood.

Primarily, Grissoie is a solver of problems. People come to her with tales of lost loves, hated enemies, stories of decadence and defeat and despair. Grissoie listens with inexhaustible patience, asking only a few questions to elicit the full story. And then she makes her offer. She will make the problem go away, for a price – always high, but usually not as terribly esoteric as some in the Market. A rival may fall ill and die, a contract may be altered with none the wiser, a relative freed from prison in dead of night.

Very little is impossible for Madame Grissoie. The woman is a very powerful witch and fulfills many of her contracts herself, but she also knows many queer and uncanny creatures, and how to summon or persuade them to do her bidding. Essentially, she's a middleman, an arranger of affairs.

Grissoie supplements her business with more mundane tasks. She is a very rich woman, and will buy rare objects, or else sell something from her collection, as well as conduct appraisals. These are fairly straightforward, but one had best have a great deal of gold before Grissoie bothers with such things.

### Athené, the Revolutionary

Not everyone who comes to the Midnight Market does so out of wholly selfish desires. Athené seeks the liberation of Dementlieu, the freedom of her people



and the creation of a new, republican form of government for her homeland. That this would involve the deaths of the entire Dementlieuse aristocratic class is, in her eyes, a net positive.

Athené moves through the society of the Midnight Market with an easy confidence backed up by palpable physical power. In her human shape, Athené is a tough, muscular woman with a scar running down her face and with a well-used rifle at her side. She's stronger than she looks and she's an excellent shot, but when pressed, she can turn into something significantly stranger, a freakishly tall bird-creature with eyes like dish-plates and hooked talons that can punch through a door. Most likely, she's



some manner of obscure were-creature, a were-owl perhaps, judging by the fact that her hair turns into greyish feathers when sufficiently stressed.

Athené sometimes works as a mercenary at the Midnight Market, offering quick violence to make problems go away. Other times, she hires people herself, to strike a blow against the hated nobility. She's really quite easygoing, if somewhat taciturn, and her idealism is tempered by a sadistic streak that should give more people pause than it does.

### Greysilk, the Fence

Sometimes, people come to the Midnight Market not to buy, but to sell. Some things are valuable, assuredly, but only to those in the nocturnal realm of the Midnight Market. A condemned man's last breath? Fresh virgin tears? Soil from a vampire's coffin? For those, no mundane merchant will do. Enter Greysilk the Fence.

Greysilk is an easy individual to spot, wandering around the Midnight Market. A short, chubby man in a pale grey, silk suit, Greysilk cuts a fairly ridiculous figure amongst the shadowy customers and goblin merchants of the Market. Eminently friendly, even over-familiar, Greysilk introduces himself as "Charles Emmanuel Grey, Esquire," and has the manners of a court dandy.

Greysilk doesn't buy everything offered to him, of course. There's really been an over-supply of condemned men's breaths ever since Drakov took over. But some things he will buy, and not just the esoterica either. Greysilk will buy jewelry, stolen paintings, most anything, and he pays in good gold and silver for it, though his coins are oftentimes of... peculiar origin, displaying mintmarks or denominations that have never been produced in the Core or the Islands beyond.



### Kasim al-Darwish, the Alchemist

The pavilion of Kasim al-Darwish is a large, circular tent in red and orange silk, luxurious and ostentatious to a grand degree. A table is set up before the tent, covered in cut-glass bottles and little jars of liquids and powders, all arrayed in a haphazard fashion. There are long, blue bottles with thin necks, small red jars that contain something that glows lightly, what appears to be an obsidian inlaid snuff-box, and other strange odds and ends. There is a price-list pinned to the fabric of the tent, written in a calligraphic style upon a stretched out parchment.

Kasim al-Darwish himself sits in an over-stuffed chair behind the table of merchandise, a pair of huge, russet-furred hyenas lounging at his feet. Kasim al-Darwish himself looks like a decidedly predator sort, with a slim smile and mismatched eyes beneath his tattoos. One eye is a dark brown, nearly black. The other is a pale blue. And Al-Darwish has claws.

Long claws, which tip the fingers of powerful hands.

Al-Darwish claims to be a wizard, having trained at the Red Academy of Hazlan before going abroad to seek his fortune. Certainly, the man is an extremely skilled alchemist with a pleasant, seemingly-obsequious manner, with many references to the "Honored sir" and "This one, your servant." Of course, there is the fact that he accepts payment in human flesh as an alternative to more conventional currencies. He is particularly interested in human brains, which, if brought to him fresh, he will eat at the stall, or else give to his hyena-creatures.

## Conall, the Killer

Even amongst the shadow-dwellers of the Midnight Market, this grim Tepestani stands out. He maintains no stall or tent, offers no goods or magics for sale. Conall sells only himself, never for more than a day at a time. Conall is a mercenary, and if his businesslike manner is to be believed, he is a *very* good one.

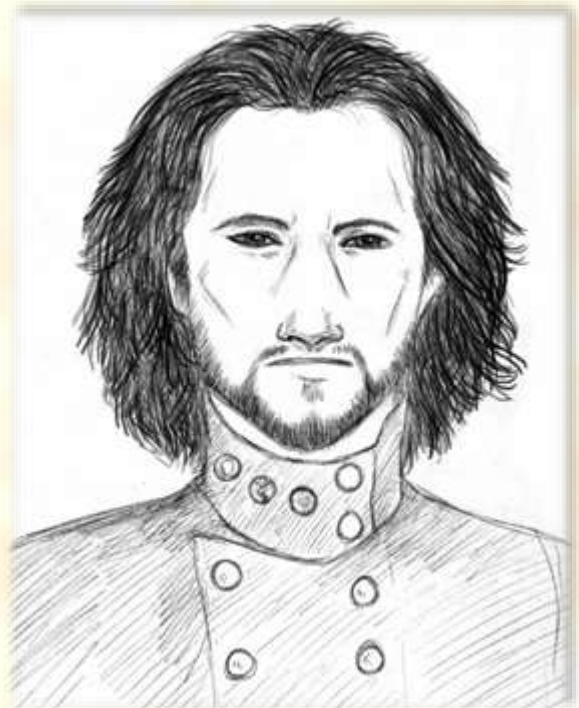
Certainly his appearance bears it out. Conall stands six feet and seven inches tall, and is possessed of the frame and build of a blacksmith or stevedore. He carries no weapons, and dresses in workman's clothes instead of armor, but he has no need of either, for Conall is one of the Mountain Loup Garou, a werewolf of unimaginable power, harmed only by the touch of pure gold.

And for a price, for one day, this engine of destruction will stand at his employer's side, and rend and tear whomsoever gets in the way. And for his price, Conall asks no money or jewels. For one day of service, Conall demands a life. And not just any life, but that of an artist, though whether musician, painter, or whatnot matters not in the least. How great an artist is a matter of

negotiation, though Conall has been known to settle for street buskers and music-hall singers, for all that some suspect him in the disappearance of the Dementieuse ballerina Yvette DeMontaine. Only when the sacrifice is brought to his feet, willingly or in chains, does Conall offer his not inconsiderable might. Those who care about such things presume that Conall sates his animal lusts on his victims in some unsavory fashion. In truth, the story is rather different.

Once, Conall was an infected werewolf, a maddened beast who upon his first transformation slew wife, parents, brother, and child in one gore-soaked night. Unhinged with grief, Conall made a bargain with an entity best left unnamed. For one hundred and twelve lives, lives of artists, his own life will be returned to him.

This is something Conall has come to believe with a religious fervor. He *needs* to believe it, to maintain his own vestiges of sanity. If only he can cover his hands in enough broken dreams, then perhaps his curse shall be lifted, his family returned.





Those familiar with the bargains of Faerie expect a less happy ending to Conall's tale.

## Mercator Melanchthon, the Astrologer

The Melanchthons are an old and well-respected family of the Darkonian gentry, the leading citizens of a village near Nevuchar Springs. The family is principally human, but over the years has acquired more than a hint of elvish blood. The family has produced numerous doctors, lawyers, clergymen (the family is roughly evenly divided between staunch Ezrans and near atheists), and mages, including a previous Mercator Melanchthon, Mercator Aloysius's great-uncle, who was a founding member of the Fraternity of Shadows before being lost in the Mists in 652 (see QtR 13: *The Umbra* by Nathan of the Fraternity).

As a young man at the University of Il-Aluk, Mercator was fairly bright and very, very ambitious. However, his progress was not as rapid as he wished, and he began to look for other ways to get arcane power—combing tomes and grimoires not only for their contents, but for whom he might negotiate for a certain lease on greater powers.

At last he found what he was looking for—or it found him. One night in the University observatory he trained the telescope on a familiar constellation and saw a new star, gleaming with a peculiar light in a color he found he could not name. He avoids thinking of what happened next, and can only remember brief images of whatever it was that transpired. When he came to himself, it was morning; he was slumped on the observatory floor, his face covered in dried bloodstains showing he had bled from the eyes, ears and nose. From that time forward he has had certain powers, and the stars have, from time to

time, given him messages—messages far more clear, specific, and commanding than those that other astrologers seem to take from the stars.

Mercator initially arrived at the Midnight Market in the course of researching his peculiar condition (or perhaps the better word would be 'patron'), but like many other regulars of the Market the half-elf has become something of a merchant himself. Somber and quiet, a tall figure dressed in clothing that was the peak of Darkonese fashion a quarter century ago, Mercator offers his services as both an astrologer and a physician to the residents of the Midnight Market – and on occasion, he delivers messages from the stars, missives far more relevant and precise than is comforting.



## Marie Tempest, the Maestro

Marie Tempest is rarely referred to as anything but "The Maestro," and it is certain that Marie Tempest is not her real name. Little else is known about the faerie. She has a striking appearance, and terrible fashion sense. She's an average sized woman, with olive skin and feverish light brown eyes. Her short-ish, brown-red hair looks like it's been struck by lightning several times. She wears hideous plaid vests, brightly colored dress shirts, and plain slacks and dress shoes. This is all topped off with a fur-trimmed coat that's covered in stitches. She has multiple piercings in her ears, with chains running between a few of them, and rings on every finger. A long, jagged scar runs across her nose and under her eyes, completely bisecting her face. She smokes an antique Calabash pipe.

The Maestro has her own wares (antique theater equipment, long-lost plays and stories), but the most well-known attraction is her bizarre stage play and fun house at the Midnight Market. On the outside, the place appears as a crude, if entertaining, sideshow, often run with shadow puppets or paper cutouts. Once inside, though, the true special effects come out, sometimes appearing more real than life. For most, the side show is just a way of letting off steam, or perhaps a deeper catharsis - visitors can get on stage and act out a fantasy of their own with no consequences or prying eyes. For those who ask, however, the Maestro is willing to

play a gambling game within the theater, and the prizes to be won can be great indeed. Provided, of course, the player is willing to gamble something of equal value.

Like all things at the Market, however, the buyer should beware. When gambling, the Tempest likes to pit her opponent's vice against their virtue, and she doesn't like to lose. The line between reality and theater tends to blur when playing, and players should be very careful what they do when gambling. People who fail to take the game seriously, assuming that it's simply an illusion, will quickly discover the

consequences of their actions are not limited to the stage.

## Black Huiarnviu, the Púca

He is tall, with skin so pale that it is like the finest alabaster, and short, black-brown hair that fails to conceal his long, black rabbit's ears. His eyes are completely black, and they are hourglass-shaped, like a goat's. He wears the clothing of an old-fashioned courtier, a

robin's egg blue doublet with a ruff, and white stockings and blue knee-britches, and silver-buckled shoes. He has a heavy signet ring on one finger (the sigil taking the form of a wheel), and he has a sword strapped to his belt, a semi-transparent creation of crystal and cold. He has a harp, a small thing, of black wood and crystalline strings, that makes no sound when plucked. He speaks slowly, in a quiet, whispery voice that sends shivers up one's arm, choosing every word with care, and never using two where one will do.





The Púca appeared in the Market a few years ago, a companion of the Maestro. He is a cold, slow-speaking figure, a striking contrast to the Maestro's madcap frenzy. He says that he is a bard, a lore-keeper and story-teller. He gives his rank, if asked by a knowledgeable individual, as an *Ollamh fili*, a master-bard.

What the Púca can do is grant wishes. He is a man who makes dreams come true. He specializes in the traditional wishes - for fame, for love, for glory, for beauty, for wealth, for health. He can grant them, playing them true on his soundless harp of crystal. Of course, there's a catch. What Black Huiarnviu is doing is that he is rewriting the subject's destiny... but he cannot create good fortune from whole cloth. Instead, the Púca can move it about the aspects of the subject's life. A woman wishes for fame, and is killed in a dreadful murder that will be emblazoned in newspapers and penny dreadfuls across the land. Another man may wish for love, and be afflicted with a ruinous, wasting, disease, through which he meets the nurse that will be his wife. Indeed, the Púca always takes away more than he seems to grant, whether as payment for his services, or due to some twisted supernatural entropy, or both, it is difficult to ask.

Black Huiarnviu rarely knows precisely *what* will happen, but the Púca has been doing this long enough to make some very shrewd guesses. If a client is suitably polite and respectful, the Púca will explain the mechanics of what he does, and what is most likely to befall him. But he doesn't have to.

### Eric Finnsen, the Master Boatman

*"Well we struck that whale and the line played out*

*But she gave a flunder with her tail  
And the boat capsized and four men were*



*drowned  
And we never caught that whale,  
We never caught that whale."*

*"Oh, to lose that whale, my captain cried,  
It grieves my heart full sore  
But to lose four of my gallant men  
It grieves me ten times more, brave boys,  
It grieves me ten times more!"*

Eric Finnsen is a handsome Grabenite man in a sealskin coat, black-eyed and with grey-blond hair, usually found sitting at a booth with scrimshaw and pearls, odds and ends from old shipwrecks, while singing old sea shanties in a loud and cheery voice. He's an incorrigible flirt, irrepressibly enthusiastic, yet for all that, he also has a tendency to discreetly vanish whenever things get *too* dangerous. He only accepts payment in silver, and he has a positive fascination with the stuff.

Finnsen is a professional guide, blessed with an unerring sense of direction and a

host of minor magics that let him go where he likes, unhindered and unimpeded by the elements. Any expedition with Finnsen on it will never get lost, and will always have favorable weather. He specializes in travel over water, but for enough money he'll cheerily travel to the peaks of the Balinoks or the heart of the Amber Waste. Rumor has he's even crossed a closed Domain border or two in his time, but the how of it is something he prefers not to explain – such a crossing has its own price, much higher than the silver he usually asks for.

When not leading people hither and thither and fro, Finnsen is usually found sailing his little skiff, diving for pearls, or scavenging old wrecks. Being a selkie, this is a profitable little sideline for Finnsen, but the Master Boatman enjoys company too much to spend all his time diving. Mortals are just so much *fun*.

### **Abernathy, Abernathy, and Chevrier, Attorneys-at-Law**

Progress waits for no man, and for no monster of the night either. Even a dread vampire or subtle faerie must still contend with taxes and land fees and citizenship papers if it intends to try and mimic humanity, and all of these have become immeasurably more complex in recent generations. Enter the law firm of Abernathy, Abernathy, and Chevrier, legal advisors to the world of the night.

The elder Mr. Abernathy was a rural Mordentish lawyer until his encounter with a vampire, and watching his sire's struggles with the paperwork of setting up an identity in Mordentshire gave Felix Abernathy the idea of creating this law firm for monsters. After all, aged vampires and unscrupulous witches tend to have a great deal of money, while at the same time rarely have a mind for numbers. Out of this, an interested party could turn quite a profit. When a vampire

needs to transfer funds from one identity to another, or a lich needs to purchase a property through different identities, it is to Abernathy, Abernathy, and Chevrier that they turn.

Over the years, Felix Abernathy (an austere, somber-looking gentleman) has expanded. The younger Mr. Abernathy, Leon, is a huge, husky man with golden hair, variously whispered to be vampiric



childe or lover of the elder Abernathy. Morena Chevrier is a Valacani woman of singularly feral aspect, with the eyes of a cat. Felix Abernathy tends to remain in Mordentshire, while his two younger colleagues travel the Core, providing legal services for all manner of monsters.

### **Inkeri Halvari, the Witch**

Inky's Emporium is a large, triangular tent, pitched with heavy beams of wood,



the tops carved into intricate knots and animal's heads. Several more beams create a large overhang in front of the entrance. The warm interior is lit by a large, iron brazier, punched and carved with designs that leave intricate patterns across the tent cloth; the smell of incense tingles at the nostrils. Herbs lay drying, hanging from racks, along with a few stray ducks and hares. A table in the back contains jars and pouches, their contents unknown. Nearby sits a basin of water with a ladle, a pair of chalices, a drinking horn, a broom, and a milking stool.

Inky, as she prefers people call her, is a lovely young woman with blue eyes, her long golden hair pulled back behind a white kerchief. A long, cow-like tail trails out from behind her dairy-maid's dress, though no one has ever gotten close enough to tell if her back is a rotted tree hollow - at least, no one who's ever admitted it. In person, Inky is flirtatious, friendly, and a bit childish. She makes an effort to put on a dignified and demure attitude, especially with customers, but her results are... mixed. She can be self-centered to the point of solipsism. For all that she's rarely malicious in any meaningful sense; her temper is terrifying when unleashed, given that she can bend a steel bar in a fit of pique.

Ultimately, Inky's is one of the best places in the Midnight Market to go to for good old fashioned witchcraft. Inky brews healing elixirs, raises and puts down the dead, conducts divinations (with runes, or with an apple and a silver dish), as well as the odd love potion or enchantment. Her prices are entirely random, and she's been known to ask for a single kiss in exchange for a life-saving brew, or a deed to a house she'll never use to lay to rest an unquiet spirit.

## Grandmother Thorne, the Seller of Dreams

This old Faerie is a peddler of dreams and nightmares, a buyer of fears and hopes. In appearances, she resembles an old woman, a Barovian babushka with a hunched back and faded shawl over her head. Of course, no one would mistake her for a mortal, as Grandmother Thorne's eyes have been pierced by two massive rose thorns, the size of railroad spikes. Still, this doesn't seem to discomfit her, though a slow ooze of blood stains her dress.

Grandmother Thorne buys and sells emotions, bottling them in crystal vials on which she scrawls *Old man's hope for son* or *Fear of a vampire attack* in her crabbed hand. Mortals come to her, trying to forget evil events and dreadful horrors. Vampires and Liches visit her, hoping to buy the taste of life for just one flickering moment. And the Faerie come to her, though best not ask why.

The old Fey sells her services not for money, but for misery. For every service she offers, the customer must pledge with binding oaths to make someone unhappy, themselves or others. Mortals often elect to give up some of their own happiness, but others... A vampire once engineered the suicide of an entire family of five to pay Grandmother Thorne's price.

## Monsieur Dior, the Slaver

Those who see this beautiful figure think him one of the Faerie, or at the least one of the Children of the Night. A tall, willowy man with golden-blond hair, Monsieur Dior conducts his business in the market with face concealed beneath an ivory half-mask, a vision almost angelic. In truth, Simon Dupree is quite mortal. He is also a monster greater than most in the Market.

Ever since his first visit to the Midnight Market, Simon saw a niche for himself. So much in the Market can be bought with human lives, with human souls, with blood and pain and whispers and tears. But not all creatures wish to go to the hassle of kidnapping a mortal merely to hire the services of Conall, or care to drain themselves of blood (if they even possess blood any longer) just to purchase from the Clan Karkar.

Simon makes it so that they don't need to, for Simon, you see, is a slaver. Traveling through the sunlit realms, the beautiful Richemuloise man places himself as



honeyed bait, pretending to be a merchant traveling upon business (which, in truth, he is). To his elders, Simon is a studious young man of business, eager to learn. To his fellows, Simon is the dashing traveler, carrying just a hint of exotic danger about him to heighten the allure. To children, Simon is kind and attentive, always ready with a helping hand and a kind word. And when the time is ripe, when he lures his victim to a secluded spot with soft words and sweet looks, he strikes. A stab of the syringe, the clink of the manacles, and then through the Gateway to the Midnight Market, to await the buyers with their soft gold and bright silver.

As for what happens while his prisoners are in his care... very few of the denizens of the Midnight Market care whether or not their victims are in pristine condition when bought.

### Jeremy Carter, the Beggar

When the visitors meet this young man, dressed in rags and with a bandage around one arm, he tells a sorrowful tale. He came here by accident one night with his fiancée, Emily. At first it was interesting - the strange people, the peculiar sights, but now Jeremy just wants to go home to Mordentshire and his father's shop.

Except he can't find Emily. The young man is vague and confused, but somehow he's lost Emily, and search as he might, he can't find her. Please, he begs, please find Emily. Young Jeremy is quite desperate, and worried out of his mind about his beloved.

Try as they might, however, the visitors cannot find Jeremy's fiancée. Look everywhere, ask everyone, no one in the Market knows where Emily is. Of course, if one were to ask the oldest denizens of the Midnight Market, Malthus Karkar or Grandmother Thorne or one of the others,



## The Minister of Fear

He is the master of the Midnight Market. He is its lord, its judge and its executioner. He enforces the Market Truce, he enforces the Bindings and Promises. He is fear incarnate, a fey so old and corrupted that even great liches and Faerie lords shudder at his name.

The Minister takes his name from his appearance. A tall, gaunt man some six feet in height, the Minister dresses like an old preacher, in dusty black with a broad-brimmed hat. His face is stern, with empty eye sockets as though his eyes were pecked out by carrion crows, while his arms are the twisted talons of a raven, covered in black feathers where they emerge from his jacket. The Minister carries a book with him always, from which he reads his judgments in a sonorous voice, and is accompanied by his Hounds.

Those Hounds are one reason why the Minister is so feared. A dozen strong, these twisted beings were once men, or undead, or other Faeries. But the Minister asked them to be his Beasts and his Slaves, and they agreed, though why shall never be known. And once they agreed, they twisted. They grew razor teeth and sharp talons, black fur and black feathers. Some walk on all fours; others still remember they were once men. They never speak, but at the Minister's command, they attack like a ravenous horde, undying, unceasing, shrugging off wounds that would slay an ox.

The ghost-ravens of the Midnight Market likewise obey the Minister of Fear, for they are his eyes and his ears. They know everything in the Market, and thus he knows it too. But it is not merelu for the hounds, or the ghost-ravens that the Minister is feared. He is feared for his questions. For the questions he asks, one is compelled to answer, and should he ask you to join his Hounds, become Beast and Slave, then you will agree. Everyone else he asked has. And he has been at it for a very long time.

Or perhaps it is not even that which causes him to be so feared. The Minister of Fear enforces the laws and promises of the Midnight Market. His rules are simple. All creditors must pay their debts, all oaths must be honored, and violence may not be offered to any unless both parties agree to a duel. That is all. And so many of the denizens of the Market whisper that he is not merely a boogeyman writ large, no incarnate of fear alone. He is a Faerie Lord of Fear... and Justice.

And in their darkest hearts, everyone fears justice.

one learns a curious fact. No one has ever been able to find Emily.

And Jeremy has been asking for the last two hundred-odd years.

## GM's Notes

The Midnight Market draws inspiration from a whole host of 'Bazaars of the Bizarre', a tradition that has its roots in the stories of Fritz Leiber of *Fafhrd and the Grey*

Mouser and in Christina Rossetti's poem, *The Goblin Market*. More recent inspirations include the Floating Market of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, the Goblin Markets of

*Changeling: The Lost*, and of course, Sigil, the City of Doors, which is a city-sized Bazaar of the Bizarre.

## Dread Possibility The Nature of the Market

The Midnight Market is a meeting ground and shopping location for all manner of strange creatures. Mortals come there, and the living dead, and the dwellers of Faerie. Yet what is it? A few possibilities:

- It's a faerie realm, located physically in an otherworld of peculiar nature, perhaps in the Shadow Rift, perhaps somewhere not mapped to conventional understandings of the Demiplane of Dread's metaphysics.
- It is a Pocket Domain, similar to the Carnival or the House of Lament. The Darklord is Jeremy Carter. For the last two hundred and fifteen years, the young Mordentishman has been trapped within his own mind, in a mental demiplane of his own devising, searching for his beloved fiancée. Only with Emily can he escape the damnation he forged for himself so many years ago. His actual, corporeal body has been locked in a coma for years, stored away in a side-room of a sanitarium in Mordent. His records were long since lost; the staff has too high a turnover to notice that this one patient has been living for over two centuries now. Meanwhile, the Darklord searches aimlessly throughout the Market for Emily, trying to make some sense of his shattered memories and the alien reality around him. Sometimes, he thinks he sees Emily in the rain. Which, in the darkness of his heart, he knows is quite impossible. He killed her two hundred years ago.

As for the residents

- The native inhabitants of the Midnight Market are the creations of their world. They are fey beings, fully formed from their alien realm, or astral constructs conjured up from Jeremy's tormented mind.
- They are interlopers, faeries who found a door to it long ago. So they've set up shop now, and use it for their own ends, and are ever nervous that the *real* owners are going to be returning any day now.

And the Minister of Fear

- Perhaps he is a great faerie lord, as so many think. A distant cousin of Loht, the Prince of Shadows, more interested in most of the high unseelie in human interaction, in faith and gold. Of course, the interest of one of the high fae is a difficult thing to grasp.
- He is a manifestation of the Dark Powers, faintly similar to Count von Lovenhorst or other Mist Creatures. He exists because it is necessary that he do so, whether because the Dark Powers use him to torment the true Darklord of the Midnight Market, or because the Dark Powers find the Market useful and wish to maintain it.



Now, the Midnight Market is not for everyone's campaign. People who are sticking to a more traditional Gothic style may find it a too strange and surreal for that style.

On the other hand, if it *is* for your campaign style, then the Midnight Market can serve as an excellent place for the PCs to meet with some eldritch informant, or to do some shopping (the prices are strange and the gear disturbing, but very little in the Midnight Market is actually cursed. It'd be bad business to scare away the customers). In fact, one could start a campaign by means of the invitations, having the PCs gathered in the Market by some unknown patron or adversary.

Beyond providing services and meeting grounds, the Midnight Market also serves as a good place to seed some more... *unusual* adventure hooks. Many of the merchants accept alternative payment, often strange, for their wares. Or what about the drops of blood the Midnight Market collects as payment? Sympathetic magic can be quite powerful, and the Market has collected the blood (or in some cases, bone slivers or what-not) of a great many powerful beings. One could do a great deal with this.

## Credits

The Midnight Market was designed and mostly written by Mikhail Rekun ("NeoTiamat"). All illustrations, as well as the character of Marie Tempest, are by Eleanor Ferron ("Isabella"), Mercator Melanchthon is a former PC of Nathan Okerlund ("Nathan of the FoS"), converted with permission. Also, a thanks to the original patrons of the Fair Folk thread in the FoS forum, particularly Irving the Meek, for advice and moral support, and to my players in the Shattered City campaign (including Nathan), for serving as test subjects for the Midnight Market.

# MOCHOCARANIA

## The Dukkar's Domain

By John Berndt



*The rider gallops along the line at full speed, shouting "Stand, you slugs!" but his greatly outnumbered troops still panic. Even the mercenaries are being swarmed, then killed. Trying to keep his troops in line, he slaughters a few of them to "make an example of them." After he slays a couple dozen of them, he twists his face in horror as the mists envelope him and he is gone.*

*A while later, he is surrounded by thousands of Vistani who grab him and slowly and painfully beat him to death. Later, a swarm of Vistani grab him and slowly put him to death by making small cuts all over his body. Later yet, he is slowly hanged to death.*

Malocchio woke up, remembering the past. A revolt broke out in Invidia, one that he could not control. The problem, he finally realized, was that although he was immune to Vistani curses, others were not. The land itself became accursed as many Invidians drew the ire of the Vistani. Crops started failing, people started turning into freaks, and merchants discovered their craftsmanship greatly suffered. So the damned Vistani beat him in the end, after all.

He hired Drakov's mercenaries and that too turned out to be a mistake. They were brutal, crude, and worst of all, foreign. They were widely hated for this and when one of them killed a ten year old child, that started the revolt. It was merely the spark, of course, if that were all it was, it would have been quickly put down. But the revolt then spread throughout the domain. Agents of Strahd helped fan the flames; in retrospect, he should have forbidden his troops from pursuing Vistani into Barovia. Count Strahd had made it clear that Vistani in his land were HIS and he wasn't going to put up with it forever.

After the mists claimed him, he wound up here, where there were nothing but Vistani. There were some changes to these Vistani though, the major one being that they were not cursed to wander and indeed most have no wish to leave the domain. They were mainly farmers and fisherman with some foresters as well. The domain is rich as its land is more fertile than even Falkovnia, and it has perfect weather year round; the trees are fast growing and valuable and there are lots of fish in its bays, rivers and lakes. Indeed, the domain is second only to Falkovnia in food exports.

When he arrived in Mochocarania, he found himself in the throne room and considered king. When he found out about the wealth of the region, he imposed crushing taxes, more to keep his people miserable than for the money's sake. However, that caused a revolt and he was



beaten to death. The next day, he woke up here and the Vistani again saw him as their king. He then imposed harsh laws on them. A short time later he was cut to pieces by a mob. The last time he tried oppressing only the woodsmen, but even that touched off a revolt and he was hanged. He gave up after that; the deaths were painful and humiliating.

King Malocchio lives in a splendid palace surrounded by servants and in luxurious surroundings, but is still completely miserable. He is totally surrounded by people he hates, as only Vistani live in his domain.

From time to time the Dark Powers taunt him by having Non-Vistani visit the land, but King Malocchio is cursed never to meet them, outside of quick glances. As Dark Lord, he gained two powers. The first is the ability to detect Non-Vistani the moment they enter his domain. He cannot repress this power. The second is that he is also undying and unaging. Whenever he is killed, he is raised from the dead by the Dark Powers and placed in his throne room. The Vistani remember nothing about why they killed him and are again loyal to him.

He knows instantly when a non-Vistani enters his domain but not where. If he tries to have them picked up, the guards will quickly forget about them and wander off while they escape. They do remember them, however, if they commit a crime and are imprisoned for that reason. In that case, when he tries visiting them, something threatening his rule always crops up and he can't go.

Worse yet, the Vistani are very wealthy and their numbers are increasing rapidly as the women are unusually fertile and food is plentiful. He can't even impose crushing taxes to try and stop this, as that tactic resulted in his painful death before.

The king is also cursed with remembering every mistake he made and acknowledging that it was his own. His blindness of the past is all too clear in his mind. He doesn't think that he has done anything wrong morally (he has no morals to begin with), but only wrong politically.

Malocchio is also taunted over his past failures. There are a number of paintings in his palace that can neither be moved nor destroyed. From time to time, they depict the various mistakes he made in the past. No one else can see these changes. Occasionally, he also sees mocking smiles from the inhabitants - only he can see this change as well.

He has lost his teleport at will power and has to go everywhere normally. This grates at him terribly. Not only is he reduced to being like everyone else, but he has lost hope, believing that even if he should lose his darklordship somehow, his destiny is still ruined.

His palace guards are known as "The Blades" and are fanatically loyal to him. They are the only ones who stay loyal to him during a revolt. They are 7th level fighters, but there are no more than fifty of them, and he has been unable to increase their number in the past. Whenever there is a revolt, they are vastly outnumbered and are torn to pieces by the mob.

# USTALAV GAZETTEER

A sidetrek between Keening and the Shadow Rift

By "Jester" David Gibson



The chilling laughter of the widderrìbhinn continued as I fled; the haunting and inhuman sound echoed around me, coming from all sides at once. I fled for the border. Tristessa's moans grew increasingly faint. With every step, my anticipation over departing the dead land of Keening grew.

As my remaining protective enchantments faded, the curious bracer upon my wrist grew uncomfortably warm. Then as now, the nature of your enchanted bracer eluded me; its magical aura seems incompatible with the item's protective function. But I imagine you know this quite well, my patron.

Upon raising my eyes from the bracer, I found that a thick bank of mists had risen from the ground. The pale white tendrils rushed over me, embracing me with their cool touch. As quickly as the fog came, it departed, moving past me like a swift autumn breeze. Aware of the properties of the Mists, I furtively looked around to see if my location had changed. I was thankful to find I had not moved, that the mists had just been regular fog, some local phenomenon.

Returning to my escape from Keening, I continued my journey west to the land of Ustalav.

My planned route across the nation sprung quickly to mind, as clear as a freshly hatched idea. I would cross the border from Keening close to Karcau and then circle southward around the nation, ending at Lepidstadt. At that city's famed University I would continue my research on the cavernous Shadow Rift that is rumoured to lurk beneath the surface of the Core. This would complete the largest of my Doomsday Gazetteers leaving me with just the seas to detail.

Ustalav? Curious. I suspect those were indeed the Mists of my tormentors. I wonder what they hope to gain from this little... excursion.

## Landscape

Unlike many other nations in our world that are dominated by a single geographic feature, Ustalav features a variety of different terrains. In the north, there is a stretch of plains and woodland cut by swift moving rivers, which becomes boggy in the lowlands. The flat landscape quickly gives way to the rough mountains and hills of central Ustalav, where a stretch of the Balinok Mountains bisects the land. The south is divided between rough plains and



hills and the wide basin that eventually becomes Lake Encarthan.

Politically, Ustalav is divided into eight regions, which are known as either *counties* or *palatinates*. I will further delve into the difference between these regions when I discuss the history and politics of Ustalav.

### Ustalav at a Glance

**Culture Level:** Medieval (7)

**Ecology:** Full

**Climate/ Terrain:** Temperate forest, hill, plains, and mountains

**Year of Formation:** 601

**Population:** 46,000

**Human Ethnic Groups:** Barovian (89%), half-Vistani, (8%), Terg (3%)

**Languages:** Balok\*

**Religion:** Lawgiver, Hala, Eternal Order

**Ruler:** Prince Aduard Ordranti III

**Darklord:** Venture Captain James Weylan

However, given the wide range of geography in Ustalav, these districts are useful for reducing the nation into manageable areas.

The northeastern region is the county of Sinaria, centered around Karcau and Lake Prophyría. The western border of Sinaria is the Vhatsuntide River, which is fed by the numerous rivers and streams from the eastern highlands. These meandering waterways leave much of the region boggy, with the landscape covered in scattered ponds and marshy grasslands. The largest expanse of wetlands is Graidmere Swamp, adjacent to Lake Prophyría, however, infirm patches of earth occur randomly throughout the county, interrupting fields and making overland travel difficult. It is easy to

become mired in a sudden fen or tumble into a hidden bog, as I discovered on more than one occasion, much to the displeasure of my horse.

The Sinaria countryside is spotted with abandoned keeps and fortresses. The region was once heavily fortified, possibly due to internal division or shifting borders. The locals claim these date back to the Terg occupation, but the ruins seem far older. Regardless, the reason for the ancient keeps has long since been forgotten, and many of the ancient structures have partially vanished into bogs.

West of Sinaria is the palatinate of Vieland, occupying the northwestern corner of Ustalav. To the north is Darkon, with the Moutray River separating the nations. The Vhatsuntide River marks the eastern border of Vieland, with its Western border being the rough mountain range known as the Crumbling Hills. The slopes of these mountains are riddled with caverns, and there are dark stories of beasts and unmentionable horrors lurking within. Named for the frequent avalanches and the loose scree that covers much of its slopes, the Crumbling Hills serves as a natural deterrent to the forces of Falkovnia, and has so far limited invasions. The Vieland residents seem unconcerned with the threat of foreign powers, leaving the defense of the land to Canterwall to the south.

Vieland was one of the last stretches of Ustalav to be civilized, and there remains a strong Terg presence in its hills and woodland dales. The region features numerous standing stones, rolling barrow mounds, and stone circles. It is impressive that these ancient megaliths remain standing, not having been pulled down to construct buildings or fortifications. Across the rest of Ustalav, these stones were removed or destroyed.





small squads across the western border, and Ustalav's defences have managed to defend against incursion.

Occupying the wasp-waist heart of Ustalav is the county of Ardeal, formerly the capital of the nation. Despite its rough terrain, Ardeal is heavily farmed, with small ranches and farmsteads covering the countryside. Near the hilly border with Tepest is the depopulated city of Ardis, formerly home to the royal court. When the prince moved south, so did most of the noble families, and the county is littered with abandoned estates and unkempt manor homes.

The borders of Ardeal are in flux, with its lands being claimed by and Sinaria and Canterwall to the north and Versex to the southeast. A generation ago, Varno attempted to annex a stretch of land at their border known as the Dragosvet Plains, starting the four-year War Without Rivals. The conflict ended with the contested countryside being burnt and salted, and the plains remain a dead maze of trenches now known as the Furrows. In part because of these shifting borders, the area around Lake Kavapest and the road connecting Ardeal with Caliphas to the south is tightly held by the county, and frequently patrolled by soldiers and mercenary companies.

Once the county of Virholt, Virlych is an accursed wasteland of shattered mountains and dark magic. Bordered by Borca and Falkovnia, the region is inhabited only by beasts, undead, and madmen. The region is wracked by storms of magical fury that rain fire or hail lightning.

Farmers in neighbouring Canterwall and Ardeal spoke to me in whispers of dust storms that that hunted the living, rain that turned men to ash, phantoms wreathed in frost, and worse.

In 733, Vlad Drakov made the second of his attempts to invade Ustalav, this time

from the south, moving through Virholt, ignoring the rumours of the region. The results were less disastrous than his Dead Man Campaigns against Darkon, but no more successful.

The southern border of both Ardeal and Virlych is the Hungry Mountains, which split the nation in twain. The mountains have a surprisingly diverse ecology, with small but dense forests on their slopes, seemingly bottomless chasms, fields of scree, small bogs, and deep mountain lakes. Locals refer to the range's "Hundred Haunted Vales" and speak in whispers of fey creatures and witches who make their homes between the peaks. There are a number of ancient keeps and watchtowers in the mountains, along with small manors and other structures, such as the Monastery of the Veil, which I describe later in this report. While I am uncertain there are truly a hundred of the small valleys, I saw numerous examples in my two crossings of the mountain range, so the true number might not be far off. I suspect many of the so-called haunted caverns might lead down into the Shadow Rift, but was unable to secure a guide and hesitant to test the protective magic of my bracer by wandering blindly into caves.

Pray your reluctance does not hinder your task, my little scholar. Fortunately for you, what I seek is unlikely to be found below.

Spanning the eastern ridges of the Hungry Mountains is the county of Versex.

## Secret Society: Cults of the Old Ones

These strange cults worship ancient beings known as the Great Old Ones, and have survived for centuries despite all attempts at eradication. The cultists worship beings with names like Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, Shub-Niggurath, Yog-Sothoth, and Cthulhu. The cultists of these alien beings seek to prepare the world for the end of days, when their inhuman masters arrive, or awaken, or return. They await the day when all life will be purged from the world and their unholy masters will dominate the land. Some hope their obedience will lead to a role of a prominence in the new order, while others simply hope to be eaten first.

In order to aid the coming of their masters, the cultists seek arcane knowledge and lost magic. They hope to use this forgotten lore to summon or awaken their lords, or at the least their master's servants. Many cultists are not entirely human, and belong to unnatural bloodlines, corrupted by inhuman progenitors, or tainted by generations of inbreeding. Other cultists are gripped with madness, their sanity having been shattered either through delving into secrets best left forgotten or witnessing the impossible.

While cultists of the Old Ones are found in numerous locations in Ustalav, they are especially common in Versex, where the barrier between worlds is thin, and sensitive individuals hear the whispers from other worlds. The city of Carrion Hill is a center of cult activities in the region, and is built atop ancient ruins that predate humanity. To the south, the village of Illmarsh is also home to numerous foul cultists of more squamous lineage.

For more information consult the *Pathfinder Chronicles: Faction Guide*.

The county stretches across Ustalav, beginning at the southwestern border of Tepest, surrounding Lantern Lake, and moving south to the edge of Lake Encarthan. The terrain is rough, with rock slides a common hazard, even in the foothills. The southeastern border is ill defined, overlapping with Nova Vaasa's Beastwood, known in Ustalav as the Forest of Veils. Here the forest is thick with cypress and alder trees, and curious beasts are said to wander the woods.

Despite neighbouring both the royal capital of Caliphas and former capital of Ardeal, Versex is sparsely inhabited. There are a number of small hamlets, isolated villages, and several reclusive monasteries, with the largest city being the unfortunately

named Carrion Hill. Versex is renowned for its poor cropland, and what little crops manage to grow are stunted and twisted. Livestock is prone to a disease known as the *phage* that leaves them emaciated and results in deformed offspring. While most humans seem immune to the phage, there is a higher than average occurrence of calibans in Versex. These pale, twisted humans are almost a common sight in the region, and many caliban found elsewhere in the nation trace their heritage to Versex.

Occultists often speak of "ley lines" and other supernatural phenomena when describing Versex, suggesting the flow of mystical energy is to blame. My arcane skills revealed that the region is indeed flush with magical energy. There are few megaliths



marking these ley lines and strange natural growths can be found in place of the standing stones, such as mushroom faerie rings or copses of arching trees. The walls between this world and other planes seem weaker in Versex, and magical energies bleed through into our land from beyond. These energies seem unnatural and foul more than fiendish, very different than the power of Necropolis, or other magics I have encountered. After but a couple weeks in this corrupting presence I found myself thinking strange thoughts and considering ideas I had previously dismissed as rash or impractical. While my training in the arcane might have left me sensitive to its influence, I can only wonder at the effects this land has on common folk.

The easternmost county is Varno. The plains of Nova Vaasa stretch into this land, as the rough terrain that covers much of Ustalav flattens. The county is home to numerous farms, ranches, vineyards, and orchards, with the latter having fame across the central Core. Varno produces the vast majority of the local fruit, as well as Ustalav's liqueurs and spirits. While Varno wine cannot compete with Borcan vintages in terms of quality or prestige, it is cheap and plentiful and thus more widely consumed across the Core.

Varno is deceptively peaceful, lacking ruins and standing stones, estates and feuding families, and even dangerous predators. Perhaps because of these reasons, the locals are more suspicious and wary of strangers than typical Ustalavs. The folk of Varno spend their time whispering rumours and sharing legends. They are aware of the stories told of elsewhere in the nation, and will share them with those who win their confidence.

Despite the peaceful nature of Varno, I felt ill at ease and uncomfortable. I am always wary of hidden dangers, especially

when things appear peaceful, but this unease was different. I believe I began to feel this slight discomfort as soon as I entered Ustalav but was not entirely cognizant of the feeling. It dismissed it as weariness, fatigue from my constant travelling, and longing for a home that was no longer mine. In Varno I was able to finally able to put it into words: this land was not where I belonged. Ustalav did not want me here. Nevertheless, I ignored this feeling and continued my research.

The county of Caliphas is isolated in the southwest corner of Ustalav. The landscape of Caliphas slopes down from the Hungry Mountains to Lake Encarthan, broken by woodland and fertile river plains.

## No Place Like Home

Those born in Ustalav have a bond to their homeland, and have strong compulsion to remain, regardless of how horrible their lives become. This innate stubbornness can be resisted and many traders or mercenaries Ustalavs do leave, but they always feel a pull to return and no other land truly feels like home. This effect is stronger for some, who even do not feel at ease away from their home region.

Outsiders have the opposite reaction to Ustalav, and find themselves with a strong desire to leave. No matter how long they live in the land, they never feel at home and always feel like a foreigner. Native Ustalavs can sense expatriates as outsiders on an unconscious level, and have difficulty seeing them as anything else.

The current capital of the nation, much of the nobility has moved south to the city that shares its name with the county. Despite the high population of the county, much of the landscape is sparsely inhabited, with the inhabitants tightly clustered in small fishing and shipping hamlets along the coastline of Lake Encarthan. While the rest of Ustalav dismisses folk from Caliphas as urbane and soft, the county's northern stretches are just as rustic as Vieland or Sinaria.

## Flora

Sharing a climate with Barovia and Tepest, it is unsurprising that Ustalav is dominated by fir, spruce, and pine trees. Copses of these trees can be found throughout the land, regardless of altitude, and make up the majority of the Shudderwood. The Forest of Veils includes some cypress, laurel, and alder, and there are also patches of hardwood trees, such as cherry, hazelnut, beech, oak.

Farmers readily grow flax and beans, while the floodplains are used for rice, mustard, and cotton. Ustalav has predictable seasonal precipitation. The orchards of Varno produce plums, cherries, apricots, and apples. There are also a number of vineyards in the region, typically producing white and rosé grapes. There is regular rain in the spring and flooding after the heavy winter snows that fills the wide flood plains along the mountain streams. There are short droughts during the summer and fall that are easily anticipated and farmers are adept at preparing for dry stretches.

## Fauna

The forests and plains of Ustalav are rife with deer, elk, wild boar, and bears. There are a number of local animals hunted for their pelts, including badgers, weasels,

and foxes. The rivers and lakes have an abundance of fish, with catfish, stickleback, anglers, and eels being common. Ustalav has myriad varieties of snakes, which can be found in the forests, marshes, plains, and lakes. A number of serpents are found in the sewers of Ustalavic cities, and have been known to swim up the plumbing. Most serpents are not venomous and relatively harmless. However, there are a number of deadly species that look deceptively like harmless breeds, so all snakes should be considered dangerous.

Predatory animals are frequently encountered in rural areas. While most avoid groups of humans, lone, unwary travellers can easily fall victim to hungry beasts. Wolves are common in the woods – especially Shudderwood – and cougars can be found in the mountains.

Ustalav has its share of monstrous predators. The Shudderwood is home to all manner of unnatural beasts, and is rumoured to be the hunting grounds of several rival packs of werewolves. I have also heard tales of hideous man-spider creatures that command arachnids the size of large dogs. The Virlych region is home to roving undead. Twisted vampire creatures and crazed ghouls roam that wasteland. There are also tales of large packs of ghouls lurking beneath the Hungry Mountains, with some claiming there is an entire subterranean city ruled by ghouls. I am uncertain of the truth of these legends, as it seems incompatible with the existence of the Shadow Rift and there are no legends of ghouls consorting with the Arak. Despite their cannibalistic nature, ghouls are surprisingly intelligent, so it is not impossible.



## The Kingdom of Ghouls

Beneath the Hungry Mountains is the Kingdom of the Ghouls. These hungry predators silently hunt throughout their lightless realm, capturing unwary travellers and dragging them beneath the earth to either be devoured or to join their lifeless ranks. More cunning and intelligent than common ghouls, these undead frequently operate as scavengers, and may choose to converse with those they encounter.

The ghouls have their own society beneath the mountains. There are a number of large warrens occupied by nomadic packs of ghouls. With few possessions and not needing a place to eat or sleep, ghouls feel little desire to claim a permanent home. Their loose society is led by cultists of a Great Old One known as the Charnel God, an unnatural void-like being resembling a humanoid absence. The cultists wear purple hooded robes with metallic masks, which is a common guise for ghouls when they must venture out onto the surface.

The vast network of ghoulish tunnels sprawls across the nation, overlapping with ancient sewers and natural cavern systems. Many tunnels connect to graveyards or catacombs, allowing the ghouls to emerge and feed. Other tunnels lead to basements or old wells, allowing the ghouls access to the heart of cities. The web of passages is almost impossible to map, with shifting elevations and interconnecting caverns; only the ghouls seem to be able to navigate them, relying on senses beyond sight. Deeper underground, where the tunnels reach the edge of the Shadow Rift, the passages cross over into the world of dreams, allowing the ghouls to physically enter the Nightmare Lands and other dream realms. Here the ghoulish warrens grow even more labyrinthine, seeming to move or shift, leading to strange places and distant lands.

Your task is not to tell me what is or is not possible, nor to report on local legends.

## History

I've studied the past of many nations in our land, but the history of Ustalav is a paradox beyond what I have experienced before, and one I am completely unable to unravel. While other nations have contradictory histories, the past of Ustalav is uniquely disarrayed. Historical dates are inconsistent and do not match the physical evidence, which seems to vary between

regions. Making sense of this nation's origins led to such frustration, that I cannot believe it was accidental or the result of careless documentation. I postulate that the nameless forces behind our land have purposely rendered Ustalavic history incomprehensible. But for what purpose I cannot say.

Truly? After so much time, you still cannot see the pattern in the tapestry?

The early years of Ustalav have fallen into mystery. The land was held by unknown tribes of humans who erected the various monuments and standing stones

found across the landscape. They are also believed to have built the many large barrow mounds across the countryside, but many of these seem to predate even the tribes. This might be a contradiction or perhaps the early humans imitated existing barrows. I am uncertain which.

Over several centuries, these original inhabitants were driven out by the early Ustalavs, led by the figure Soividia Ustav who gave the nation its name. The fleeing tribes were driven to the north and east and away from the early Ustalavs. Presumably, many simply tribes fled to the less hospitable highlands and are the ancestors of the mountain folk who live in the forgotten dales and valleys of Ustav.

Almost a thousand years ago, the land was seized by an undying ruler known only as the "Whispering Tyrant" who ruled for six centuries. (However, the earliest reference to the Tyrant is dated an unfathomable two millennia earlier, which seems deeply implausible.) The Tyrant raised a legion of the walking dead and united tribes of savage humanoids to form its army. The identity of these tribes is uncertain, but it was likely the tribal folk displaced by Ustav. This force swept across the land, razing villages, and enslaving its victims. During this period much of the early history of the land fell into legend, as libraries were lost when entire cities were razed. Eventually, after centuries of rule, the Tyrant was overthrown through an organized crusade, led by knights both foreign and local. This revolution would have taken place around the year 100 of the Barovian Calendar, however the exact date is uncertain and it might have occurred up to two centuries prior.

When Ustav was revealed by the Mists in 586 BC, this period of violent expansion was immediately noticed by the Barovians, who quickly declared the

invaders to be their ancient enemy, the Tergs. They were also quick to hail Count Strahd von Zarovich as one of the instrumental figures that led the revolution against the Tyrant. However, the Terg occupation of Barovia took place in the 320s, two centuries after the defeat of the Tyrant. But, somehow, this glaring contradiction goes unnoticed by both Barovians and the Ustalavs.

Similarly, several of the armies and knighthoods who aided the defeat of the Tyrant were gifted land as a reward, and offered the Ustlavic counties to the southwest. The Ustalavs assume these lands were Dorvinia, and have a curious respect for that nation, claiming an ancient kinship. The Ustalavs were critical of Dorvinia's merger with Borca following the Great Upheaval, and considered it an invasion or political betrayal. There is strong support among the peasantry for assisting the liberation of Dorvinia.

While the Tyrant had been defeated, its minions still plagued the land, hiding in forgotten places, and dark shadows, but also sometimes in plain sight. Old spirits, roused by the magics of the Tyrant but kept at bay through fear, were now free to roam the land. This middle history of Ustav is filled with human treachery, monsters, and desperate struggles to overcome these horrors. The names of these horrors are well document, even if the specifics are maddeningly contradictory: Bastard Hall, the Beast of Lepidstadt, Spring-heeled Jack, Mr. D, the Devil in Grey, the Owlman of Ardis, the Reapers of Reputation, the Ravengro Devil, and so many more. The folk of Ustav have a penchant for evocative names for their nightmares.

Following the defeat of the Tyrant, the population attempted to return to their old lives. However, the royal line that had originated with Soividia Ustav had been



broken during the Tyrant's rule. The surviving noble families, most with only distant ties to the crown, fought for control of the nation. After two years of infighting and intrigue, House Ordranti claimed the throne. This ascension was not universally accepted, and the conflict continues to the present, albeit more subtly. This is most notable in the actions of the Caliphvaso family, who have spent the intervening years attempting to claim the throne through one intrigue after another. While the family has never succeeded in seizing the throne, they have avoided all efforts to bankrupt or exile their family in retaliation.

Sometime after the reestablishment of the royal court, there was an influx of barbarian tribes threatening from the east. I am unable to pin down an exact date, and it occurred between 85 BC and 310 BC, which is an unacceptably wide date range, especially since the lower end is prior to the estimated defeat of the Tyrant. To defend against the barbarians, the mercenary Kazavon was hired, and successfully drove away hordes. However, Kazavon claimed a stretch of the western lands and became a harsh dictator. He ruled for 20 years before being overthrown. Ustalavic historians believe this regime to be an ancestor of Falkvonia, and claim Drakov descends from "the line of Kazavon". There are reports that the general that defeated Kazavon was aided by arcanists of the Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye, a group that was potentially founded years after this event.

The Esoteric Order was founded around 160 BC when Aldus Aldon Canter – the future count of Vieland – returned from exploratory expeditions in a foreign land that I assume to be the Amber Wastes. However, this is almost 400 years prior to the earliest recorded appearance of Har'Akir. Upon his return, Canter began lecturing on foreign philosophies and their

paths to mystical enlightenment. Within the year, Canter had founded the Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye. A decade later, the count was caught performing a midnight orgiastic ritual in a standing circle and declared a witch. He lost his position as count and was quickly removed as head of the Esoteric Order. However, the reputation of the Order never truly recovered.

Histories record that the city of Lepidstadt was founded in 171 BC and in 460 BC a mysterious curse befell Castle Maiserene in the county of Varno. The castle was renamed Bastardhall and the fate of the respected Arudora family is unknown.

## A Land Without A Past

The past of Ustalav is contradictory, and precise details are often impossible to confirm: dates shift, the season in which events occurred changes, exact names vary, and there are curious anachronisms. An individual might appear to have been in two places at the same time, their ethnicity might shift, or there might be opposing descriptions of their personality. This happens regardless of the skill used to research the past, the success of a check, or any magic used. The exact truth of events is simply impossible to discern.

Not all details are inconstant, as historical events always seem to have taken place, and their location seldom changes. It is merely the exact details of the major events that are inconstant. A casual glance at the nation's history reveals few problems and local scholars are adept at ignoring contradictions.

Every 100 years since this date, the Black Coach rumbles across the countryside collecting unfortunate victims and escorting them to the keep. I can assert this date more authoritatively than others, as the Black Coach was last seen in 560.

I speculate the University Lepidstadt was founded sometime around 469 BC. However, there are reports that also place the date as 136 BC and 342 BC. I've even found references to the year "4422", which I imagine was a transcription error and should have been either 442 or 422.

This historical disarray abruptly ends in the year 601, which is also the date that the neighbouring lands record Ustalav entering the Mists. It is with some certainty that I can say that Ustalav did not exist as a solitary isle in the Mists prior to joining the Core, and conclude that the incongruities are a result of the land's false history. While I can place the date of Ustalav's seminal event as 601, my efforts to discern its dread lord have been in vain.

The events of roughly 155 years ago offer little insight into the nature of the dread lord. The first of the Mr. D murders in Caliphas was my initial theory, but upon checking the dates, these murders occurred in 635 BC, and thus happened after the land was unveiled. I initially wondered if the appearance of the reconstructed Bastardhall and its black coach in 560 BC might also be connected, but the regular reappearance of the castle every 100 years does not coincide with the founding of the land.

I even turned to unorthodox sources for information. The Pathfinder Society is a small organization of historians and general troublemakers. I have been aware of them for some time, but have managed to avoid dealings with them until now. The Society pursues historical relics and lore and then cheapens their accomplishments by publishing their findings in the most

## Secret Society: The Pathfinder Society

Historians, explorers, and adventurers, Pathfinders travel across the land seeking lost lore, magical relics, and insight into history. Operating out of lodges housed in large cities and maintained by Venture Lieutenants, Pathfinders travel the Core and the lands beyond. Local Venture Lieutenants will often assign Pathfinders to a particular mission, directing them to explore a particular ruin, land, or region. However, these tasks are voluntary, and Pathfinders are free agents able to choose their own destination. While given the freedom to explore as they wish, Pathfinders are forbidden from direct conflict with each other and are encouraged to cooperate whenever possible.

Pathfinders can be identified by their Wayfinder, a special compass enchanted to glow upon command. Each Pathfinder is awarded their Wayfinder upon completion of their training. While in the field, Pathfinders record their findings in journals. These journals are sent back to the central Pathfinder Lodge in Ardis, and the highlights are published in a series of books known as Pathfinder Chronicles. These volumes are printed and sold throughout the Core.

For more information on the Pathfinder Society, please consult the *Pathfinder Chronicles: Faction Guide* and the *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Pathfinder Society Field*



sensational of chapbooks. However, their focus on unearthing the secrets of the past made them uniquely suited for clarifying my own research. I even met with the head of the Pathfinder Society, Venture Captain James Weylan, in their lodge in Ardis. He proved of keen mind and well versed in the history of the land, and provided me with a number of reports that aided my research. However, even with his assistance and access to his records, I could not unearth anything pertaining to the dread lord.

A group of historians in a land without a clear history. Is this not an obvious curiosity? My tormentors are many things, but they are seldom subtle.

Continuing with history that can be confirmed, in 615, the Sincomakti School of Sciences was founded on the south shore of Lantern Lake in Versex. Unlike the University of Lepidstadt, the Sincomakti School is more open to the possibility of magic, and is famed for its collection of occult books.

In 651, one of the chief Ustalavic gods fell silent. Once known as the Last Azlanti or the God of Humanity, the dead power is now known only as the Forgotten God. This prompted a religious upheaval: Ustalav always possessed its own small pantheon of gods, but since the land was revealed by the Mists, the locals increasingly ignored these gods. With the death of the Forgotten God, the existing churches warned that apathy would lead to the death of more gods, while those who converted to the Iron Faith of the Lawgiver claimed it was merely the end of false deities. The building secular movement claimed that the death of the Forgotten God was merely the first death and that the time of religion had passed. In the north, the Eternal Order had begun

spreading from Darkon, replacing and mingling with local beliefs. This religious tension continued until 707 when the Church of the Lawgiver took control of the churches and temples of the Forgotten God, establishing a firm hold over the land. The other assorted deities of Ustalav were dismissed, with the official dogma of the Church labelling them as either angelic servitors of the Lawgiver or manipulative demons leading the unwary to sin.

In 706, one of the largest prisons in Ustalav, Harrowstone, was engulfed in a fire, killing the prisoners and much of the staff. The residents of nearby Ravengro refer to this as the Harrowstone Fire. This caused much disorder in the nation, as many counties relied on Ravengro to house their criminals. Construction of a new prison began south of Ardis, but has been perpetually delayed due to corruption and scandal.

After years under the ineffective rule of Prince Valislav Ordranti and his corrupt local counts, there was much unrest among the commoners of Ustalav. This came to a head with the Bloodless Revolution of 713, when Vieland and Canterwall deposed their local rulers and became the palatinates. The remaining counties suffered riots and similar unrest.

Local historians tend to attribute the death of Prince Ordranti, locally known as the Eunuch King, as a major cause for the revolution's end. However, from my examination of events, the Prince's weak rule had little impact beyond the capital and royal court. I believe that the unrest would have continued and spread, had Falkovnia had not made its first attempt to invade Ustalav. In early 719, Drakov marched troops directly across the Crumbling Hills. This incursion became known as the Starving March, for it abruptly ended when a late snowfall struck the hills, causing

avalanches that blocked supply lines and divided squadrons. The surviving troops were harried by mountain tribes of Tergs and emerged to face the Ustalavic forces, weakened and demoralized. This invasion prompted a surge of national identity and paranoia, which halted further revolution.

Following the death of Prince Ordranti, and in the absence of an heir, Prince Aduard III ascended to the throne in 720. An honorary general in the Ustalaivic army for most of his life, Prince Aduard III was thought unlikely to ever rule and received

### Alison Kinder

While the people of the Core know Alison Kinder for her gothic romances, others know her as a retired adventurer, a former member of the Pathfinder Society, and lapsed monster hunter. Following the assault on her sister, Ellishan, Alison Kinder dedicated herself to fighting the creatures of the night, particularly the undead. Her adventures led to the death of her fiancé, which eventually forced Kinder to retire.

Alison Kinder now lives in Grimol Hall in Ardis, and spends her days penning somewhat fictionalized versions of her career as an adventurer, although this fact is not public knowledge. Her works include: *Bleak Heart*, *Case of the Dreaming Dead*, *Feast of the Nosferatu*, *Galdyce's Guest*, *Her Wounds Never Bled*, *Hunter's Moon*, *In the Council of Corpses*, and *Steps Upon the Sanguine Stair*.

For more information on Alison Kinder, consult *Pathfinder Tales: Bloodbound*.

little education on courtly life. To this day he approaches political situations with the bluntness of a soldier.

It is at this period I encounter the earliest reference of famed novelist, Alison Kinder. Details of the reclusive writer's early life are vague, but she appears to have suffered a personal tragedy and taken up the life of travelling scholar and monster hunter, not unlike Darkon's Doctor van Richten.

In 730, Kinder was allegedly involved in the death of Viscount Galdyce of the Vale of Red Breath. Her fiancé Duristan Barlhein was also presumed to have been killed in the incident. The few known details of the incident parallel the plot of her novel *Galdyce's Guest*, suggesting her works might not be the fictions she presents them as.

Most curious. I have a copy of Galdyce's *Guest* in my personal library, but was never certain of its origins.

The War Without Rivals between Ardeal and Varno began in 734. This led to four years of violent trench warfare, over the stretch of plains separating the two nations. Many of the soldiers fighting in the war belonged to mercenary companies or soldiers hired from Falkovnia, Darkon, and Nova Vaasa. As many foreigners perished in these battles as local forces.

Shortly after the end of the war, the Great Upheaval struck the land, launching many nations into chaos and confusion. Compared to other lands, Ustalav weathered the Great Upheaval with few difficulties. There are rumours that the earthquakes that punctuated the magical event caused numerous chasms and tunnels to open in the Hungry Mountains. And, there was a marked increase of reports of



dark fey creatures in the region following the Upheaval.

The most recent historical event of note actually occurred in my homeland of Darkon. In 749 the Requiem destroyed the city of Il Aluk, an event I likely do not need to elaborate on. In the aftermath of catastrophe, there was an influx of Darkonese refugees fleeing south across the border. Most noteworthy was the wave of scholars who settled in Lepidstadt. With the University of Il Aluk lost in the heart of the Necropolis, the University of Lepidstadt became a vital center of learning and education, as students and expatriates from across the Core came to Lepidstadt to study.

The immediate history of Ustalav is one of growing concerns. Nobles with interests in the palatinates of Vieland and Canterwall have renewed their efforts at sowing dissent against the civilian leaders of those regions, while supporting royalist factions. And there is lingering tension between Ardeal and Varno over the civil war, as neither side feels satisfied with the outcome. Prince Aduard III is seemingly ignorant of these problems, as disinterested as he is with the intrigue in the capital. In recent years, he has been in negotiations with Falkovnia, ostensibly seeking peace or treaties of nonaggression. I suspect he might share Drakov's ambitions of marching south, perhaps reclaiming the purported Ustalavic territory or Borca. While the recent past of the nation has been calm, I fear its future might prove tumultuous.

## Populace

The folk of Ustalav are divided into three distinct ethnic groups: Ustalavs, half-Vistani, and the mountain folk known as Tergs. These three groups keep to their own communities and seldom mingle, so

there is a wide cultural and physical difference between the ethnicities.

Ethnic Ustalavs are physically similar to Barovians and Borcans, and outnumber the other ethnic groups. Ustalavs have thick builds with wide shoulders and stocky limbs. They have a shadowy, dusky appearance with dark hair and eyes being the norm. Their skin ranges from a pale tan to light brown. Unlike Barovians, Ustalavs tend to have sharper features, including narrow jaws, jutting cheekbones, and thin eyebrows. Men wear their hair long and brushed back, often revealing pronounced widow's peaks. Beards are uncommon, most often found among the nobility due to an ancient law that has long since ceased to be enforced, but lingers as tradition.

Rural Ustalavs tend to dress in functional clothing: men wear heavy breeches and simple shirts, often accented with a leather overcoat or vest, while women favour a loose blouse and long skirt. However, most people have a nicer set of clothes for special occasions, such as church services or weddings. Urban Ustalavs dress in plain suits and dresses of lighter fabric, and even the nobility eschews high fashion, dismissing a preoccupation with clothing as a Borcan excess. Ustalavic cities have a curious timeless quality regarding fashion, being several decades out of date from the West, yet not antiquated or unfashionable. Regardless of social class and region, dark or muted colours are favoured, often black, grey, brown, or blue.

While a single ethnicity, Ustalavs are quick to distinguish their social circles from others, dividing themselves into subgroups such as northerners and southerners, urbanites and country folk, and counties and palatinates. Effortlessly shifting between stereotypes and self-identities, whom an Ustalav considers "the other"

varies greatly depending on their current company.

Ustalavs speak a variation of Balok. I don't believe they always spoke this language but rather that, when the land was revealed by the Mists, the tongue changed to match its neighbours. Ustalavic Balok is full of the familiar guttural sounds and differs only in small ways from the Balok of Barovia, such as pronunciation and accent. For example, Ustalavs tend to speak more swiftly, with fewer drawn out vowels. The Ustalavic accent is subtler and less thick than the Barovian, which almost feels like a comic exaggeration of the Ustalavic.

### Language Primer

A few of the common words in Ustalavic Balok are presented below.

*bine ati venit:* welcome

*noroc:* good fortunes

*scuzati-mai:* apologies

*multumesc:* thank you

*da:* yes

*nu:* no

*ajutor:* help

*vrăjitorie:* witchcraft

*fiara:* monster

The Vistani were quick to move into Ustalav, taking advantage of the easy routes between the northern and southern Core. Vardos are a common sight along the roads and mountain passes, and many small hamlets rely on regular trade with caravans. Curiously, there are numerous reports of Vistani in Ustalav prior to the land being revealed by the Mists, and many Ustalavs seem to possess some Vistani blood. There are a number of aged caravan yards and settlements around Lake Encarthan that have been used by the Vistani by generations, which paradoxically seem to predate the seminal event of 601. While

there are no permanently occupied camps, like the one by Tser Pool in Barovia, caravans are found at some preferred sites more often than not.

Ustalav is also the location of some of the few permanent settlements of both half-Vistani and Vistani *mortu*, which are located close to the Vistani encampments on Lake Encarthan but far enough away that the outcasts do not have to interact with their kin. The primary inhabitants of these small villages are Vistani who suffered the condition known as "static burn", caused by remaining in one location for too long – due to injury, illness, or imprisonment – as well as their offspring and any non-Vistani family members. These settlements have few *karash* – Vistani that have been banished but not cursed as darklings – but some of these outcasts have been accepted into the communities.

While most of these mortu Vistani live peaceful lives, a small percentage is known for their criminal activities, including pickpocketing, robbery, extortion, and confidence schemes. Known as the *Sczarni*,

### The Sczarni

A loose collection of criminal families with Vistani blood, including mortu, karash, and their half-Vistani offspring. Each Sczarni family is independent and has little in common with other families.

Sczarni focus on non-violent crimes and frown on members that resort to murder or assault. However, they are not above hiring someone to perform an assassination or deliver a beating.

For more information on the Sczarni, consult *Pathfinder Campaign Setting*.



these criminals exclusively target non-Vistani. Other Vistani frown upon the actions of the Sczarni as contributing to persecution of the Vistani and spreading their reputation as scoundrels.

In the mountains, there are small communities of savage tribal folk that reject civilization in favour of traditional lifestyles. A few ancient communities remain in the central Hungry Mountains, but the majority are along the Balinok Mountains bordering Tepest and Keening. Since Ustalav was revealed by the Mists, these folk have come to be known as "Tergs", but they do not identify as such. In several ancient tomes I found references to the "Kellid" tribes and believe this was a forgotten name of this people, but it could have referred to even earlier inhabitants.

Regardless of their true origin, the Tergs are muscular but compact people, with dark hair that tends to grey at a young age. Tergs keep their hair cut short and faces clean shaven, equating facial hair with deception and having something to hide. They dress in leathers and wools, favouring clothing they made themselves, dyed with natural colourings into shades of dull red, green, or blue.

Farming is a common occupation: while lacking the abundant fields of Falkovnia, Ustalav is largely self-sufficient and does not need to import grains, save in particularly dry years. Wheat, rye, and barley grow plentifully, and Ustalavs bake all manner of breads. Vegetables such as cabbage, turnip, beets, and onions are common produce. Livestock is less diverse, and goats and sheep are the primary herd animals, used for their milk and wool as often as their meat. Stews are the most common meal, with the thickness of the broth being the distinguishing factor between the common folk and the nobility. This leads to sayings such as "you can walk

on a noble's dinner" to demonstrate the opulence of the Ustalavic nobility, or indicating someone's poverty by commenting that they "have naught but water."

Ustalav is a rich realm, but much of the wealth is tightly held by the nobility. Even in the palatinates there is little sharing of wealth, and power has simply shifted hands from the nobility to the merchants and officials. The majority of the population lives a subsistence lifestyle, earning just enough money to maintain their status, with little extra coin saved to better their life. There is an exceedingly limited middle class, whose power is tightly maintained by the nobility and the wealthy. There is not nearly as much crippling poverty as I witnessed in Barovia or Dementlieu, and the poor live well compared to many others, but there is still much hardship: an unseasonable or prolonged drought easily leads to starvation.

The cities of Ustalav are not that different from the countryside despite the attitudes of the residents and the manner of employment. The poor toil for meager wages, while the wealthy nobility hoard their wealth and enact laws designed to maintain their power. Few artisans own their own business, instead renting a shop space or working for its owner.

The difference between urban and rural life is largely one of attitude, as the cities cloak themselves in cynicism and skepticism while superstition and tradition rule the countryside. This superstitious nature makes Ustalavs slow to react, more likely to suffer with quiet stoicism than risk solving their problems, out of fear of making things worse. They avoid confrontation, warding away evil and danger rather than facing it head on. A community is likely to ignore danger for years – generations even – rather than risk unnecessary deaths.

## Secret Society: The Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye

Dedicated to opening their arcane third eye, the Esoteric Order is a group of curious nobles and the idle rich. The Order was founded by the spiritualist followers of Aldus Aldon Canter, an amateur philosopher and occultist. The secretive nature of the Order makes it the subject of numerous rumours, its members being popular targets for conspiracy theorists. It has been blamed for orchestrating revolutions, assassinating leaders, secretly controlling the monarchy, and housing vast stores of artifacts or foreign treasures.

The Order is divided into small local chapters that independently operate. Many chapters do not even communicate or coordinate activities, but chapter houses try to avoid competition. There is no central authority or leader, and each chapter establishes their own hierarchy. Chapters typically share information with other members of the Order, exchanging interesting findings or revelations – sometimes for free and sometimes in return for a promise of future assistance.

Each chapter house has its own agenda and goals. Many explore the possibilities of life after death, attempting contact with the spirit world through séances or spirit communication devices. Others seek to unlock the latent psychic powers of their members. Magical research is a common activity, studying spellcraft and collecting arcane relics.

For more information on the Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye consult *Pathfinder Adventure Path #44: Trial of the Beast*.

I am uncertain if I would describe Ustalavs as pessimistic or optimistic. They do believe that careless action will result in negative outcomes. However, their attitude encourages people to be happy with things the way they are, for they could always be worse.

A nation in denial. How very frustrating.  
How very useful.

Ustalavs are fond of telling stories, and there is a strong oral tradition. Legends are quick to spread across the land, and stories change and shift as each teller adds their own flourish. A superstitious folk, Ustalavs are quick to see patterns, and attribute ill events to a local boogeyman. Local news quickly becomes a campfire tale. (None of

this did anything to make my task of documenting their history any easier.)

As an example, some travelers went missing by Ravengro, and a nearby ranch hand heard large leathery wings. At the scene, hoofprints were found and trees were curiously burnt. Suddenly, the entire town began speaking of a hideous fire-breathing carnivorous horse with massive bat wings. It would be laughable if it were not so infuriating.

For all their stories and warnings, Ustalavs seem unusually fascinated by the horrors of the night. They are equally terrified and excited. While their instincts for survival keep most indoors at night, they clamour for details and new legends.

There is no shortage of amateur occultists in the nation, collecting magical oddities and historical trinkets. I met with



several during my travels, and there seems to be a sort of club for these hobbyists, attracting the usual wealthy individuals with more gold at their disposal than sense. They seem fascinated with relics from Har'Akir and Sebuia, and pay ridiculous prices to import items or arrange expeditions to the Amber Wastes. Most seem uninformed regarding the true nature of the arcane, let alone the secrets of their land and our world.

## Magic in Ustalav

The details of magic are little known and vague: Ustalavs acknowledge magic exists but it is seldom seen.

Local legends regarding arcane magic often associate it with fiendish pacts or equate it with necromancy. The memory of the Tyrant still casts a pronounced shadow, a constant reminder of the dangers of magic. Thankfully, spellcasters are seldom

hunted and there have not been reports of one being burned at the stake in decades. However, they are generally unwelcome in villages, and those seen practicing magic are shunned and encouraged to reside elsewhere. Folk will refuse to sell them goods, ignore them in the street, raise their taxes, and do whatever they can to make life uncomfortable without actually drawing the ire of the arcanist.

Despite this dislike, wizardry is not uncommon in the nation. The Tyrant and his servants left a multitude of magical tomes behind, which were scattered during the revolution. Many an arcanist has been created after the discovery of an ancient grimoire. Wizards from across the Core journey to Ustalav, hoping to discover some lost arcane lore or delve into local libraries.

This fascination with the legacy of the Tyrant is particularly evident in the cult known as the Whispering Way: a group of

### Secret Society: The Whispering Way

A necromantic cult, members of the Whispering Way believe that undeath is the pinnacle of existence, freeing the intellect from the concerns of pain, fear, and hunger. Living creatures are viewed as pitious wretches while death is seen as a waste. Members of the cult strive towards undeath as a means of immortality, and work towards perfecting necromantic rites that would allow them to "transcend" death. The majority of Whispering Way cultists are wizards or those aspiring to become wizards; sorcerers seldom possess the necessary arcane lore required by the cause, but the cult's leaders are not beyond using sorcerers to advance their goals. Some clerics of the Eternal Order have been swayed by the cult's teachings and have joined the cult.

The activities of the cult vary depending on their immediate goal. Morbid cultists seeking to refine their necromantic lore are often grave robbers, stealing bodies for use in their foul experiments. Others work to free the Tyrant from his prison under Gallowspire, believing the knowledge of powerful lich will aid their efforts. Some cultists seek to snuff out all life in Ustalav, hoping to recreate the Requiem that killed Il Aluk and allow everyone to experience the gift of undeath.

For more information on the Whispering Way, refer to the *Pathfinder Chronicles: Faction Guide* and *Pathfinder Adventure Path #45: Broken Moon*.

fanatics who believe undeath is the purest form of existence and aspire to "transcend" death. It's a rather morbid philosophy that stubbornly resists all attempts to eradicate it. It appeared to have finally vanished three decades ago, until the Requiem occurred and the cult suddenly returned with a renewed vigour, attracting undead beings from Necropolis into its ranks. The occasional cultist will try and brave the shroud surrounding Darkon's dead city, but the general philosophy of the cult is that this is an unacceptable method of achieving undeath, and that immortality must be earned.

Gypsy magic is seen as different from other magic, and the common folk are wary but accepting of Vistani enchantments. Many foolishly believe that all Vistani are able to cast spells and whisper that magic comes as naturally to them as walking. The power of the Vistani is still feared, and Ustalavs are careful not to drive them to anger. The Evil Eye causes Ustalavs far more dread than knowing that a Vistani might be able to cast a spell.

Fortune telling has a long history in Ustalav. The locals make use of a regional variant of the Tarokka, known as *Harrowing Decks*. Ustalavic histories refer to Vistani performing Harrowing readings for centuries prior to the lands unveiling, and skilled users are known as *harrowers*.

Divine magic is seen slightly more favourably, provided it comes from the worshiper of an accepted god. In the last few generations, the Lawgiver has become the primary faith of Ustalav and other gods are discouraged. Thus, clerics of the Lawgiver are seen as righteous and commonly accepted by the Ustalavs, especially those in the southern region and larger cities.

Small hamlets sometimes continue to worship local gods that are unknown

elsewhere in the Mists, especially in the northern half of the nation. These gods have names such as Pharamasma, Desna, or Urgathoa, and are unfamiliar to me. This reverence is personal and unorganized, and there are few shrines to these hearth gods let alone churches, but a commoner might whisper a quick prayer when they feel it necessary.

**Lawgiver:** Following the death of the Forgotten God, the Vaasi faith of the Lawgiver rapidly spread throughout the nation. That the nobles subtly pushed and encouraged its spread as a means of maintaining their power also helped the religion. Obviously, the church's dogma of accepting one's place in the world and submitting to authority appealed to those in charge. As mentioned earlier, acceptance of hardship is an Ustalavic trait, making the teachings of the Lawgiver readily accepted, even by those of lower status. The comfort of its firm authority was well received by the common folk, who were desperate to fill the void left by their absent deity.

**Eternal Order:** In the past, there were several local hearth gods that warded away death or appeased the other world. When Ustalav was revealed by the Mists, these faiths mingled with the teachings of the Darkonian state religion, and a variant of that faith took root in northern Ustalav and Caliphas. The tenants of the Eternal Order are seen as heretical by the Church of the Lawgiver, but many superstitious Ustalavs continue to practice its rites and make sacrifices to ward against the Pale. Conflict over religion is rare in Ustalav, but not unknown. However, as there is a strong presence of the Eternal Order in the capital, there is increasing tension from the Church to rededicate the Maiden's Choir cathedral to the Lawgiver.

**Hala:** The witches of Hala found ready acceptance in the rural regions of Ustalav,



## The Ustalavic Hero

This section provides some information that might be of use in creating PCs native to Ustalav.

**Races:** Humans are the dominant race in Ustalav. Races that share human blood are also common, with half-Vistani being found throughout the land, and caliban often sighted in Versex. Other races are slightly more common compared to other lands in the Mists. Of the non-human races, most noteworthy are the dwarves and elves, who tend to live in human communities rather than founding their own settlements. However, these races still tend to confine themselves to distinct neighbourhoods rather than freely mingling. As a result, despite the high number of elves in the land, half-elves are rare.

**Classes:** Fighters, rogues, rangers, wizards, and clerics are the classes most common to Ustalav. Clerics of the Lawgiver are highly respected, and are often members of the clergy. Rogues are a common threat in urban areas, but banditry in the wilds is not unknown. Rangers can be found in farms or small towns, guarding civilization from the horrors of the wilds. In the rural stretches of Ustalav, especially in the mountains and woodlands, barbarians, sorcerers, druids are sometimes found. These are often of Terg descent and seldom accepted by the "civilized" folk.

**Male Names:** Alexandru, Basarab, Gabriel, Gheorghe, Mihail, Mircea, Nicolae, Radu, Simion, Stefan, Vlad, Viktor

**Female Names:** Arghira, Doamna, Elena, Catherine, Constantina, Ioana, Maria, Milica, Ruxandra, Smaragda, Teodora, Voica

replacing some local beliefs and faiths, mostly in the mountains and foothills. The Tergs accepted some witches of Hala into their ranks, mingling Halan teachings with their local faiths or replacing them entirely. In isolated rural regions, lone witches have been known to live at the fringes of a town, selling charms and tonics. A worshiper of Hala I spoke with told me that the ley lines and monoliths of Ustalav have great spiritual energy, and empower their rituals, so it is not unknown for small covens to conduct rites at these sites during special occasions.

**Ezra:** The Church of Ezra is seen as a manipulative, expansionist tool of Borca. Initially popular in the southwest, the faith fell out of favour following the Great Upheaval, with Borca's annexation of

Dorvinia. The religion is not banned or illegal, but support is not widespread and there are no large churches dedicated to Ezra. However, as in other lands, the Church of the Lawgiver condemns and persecutes followers of Ezra.

## The Realm

Ustalav is a deeply divided nation. While Prince Aduard III is the ruler, his authority over a third of the nation is tenuous at best, and the loyalty of the remaining local counts is dubious. While the recent history of Ustalav is relatively peaceful, its future is less certain.

The aging leader of the nation has little interest in fostering peace or controlling the growing influence of the nobles, doing

nothing to rein in their aspirations. There is lingering resentment remaining from the revolutions and civil wars. Neither side in the War Without Rivals was satisfied with the outcome, although both are unwilling to anger the prince by restarting the wars. As Prince Aduard III lacks an heir, when he dies, there will be a succession struggle, which the nobles know all too well, and they are already preparing their claims and alliances themselves, while weakening the position of their rivals.

Prince Aduard III's rule is also disputed. Mircalla Caliphaso, the former consort of the

Prince Valislav Ordranti, gave birth to a bastard, whom she claimed was the child of the former prince. Mircalla disappeared shortly after his birth (under mysterious circumstances of course) and the child, Reneis Ordranti, was adopted by his aunt, Countess Carmilla Caliphaso, who has been trying for years to place Reneis on the throne.

Currently, Prince Aduard Ordranti III is seeking a wife, in the hopes that she will give him an heir. This is primarily done on the advice of his advisor, Diauden, and the prince's heart does not seem to be in the search. However, at this point, it seems unlikely that a royal heir will prevent conflict and will only add another faction to the fray.

## Government

Since it was founded, Ustlav had been ruled by a king, until the original royal line was severed during the reign of the Tyrant. The current lineage consists of distant relations. Because this new royal line did not include members of House Ustlav and only indirect descendants of Soividia Ustav, they were not crowned kings but instead retain the lesser title of "prince". This is

primarily a formality, and the authority of the Prince is absolute.

The current ruler of the nation is Prince Aduard Ordranti III, who has ruled Ustlav for almost four decades. Since taking the throne in 720 BC, Prince Aduard has proven to be an indifferent ruler, more of a soldier than a king. The younger brother of Prince Valislav Ordranti, the Eunuch King, Aduard was not raised to be a ruler. When a decision requires subtlety or discretion, Prince Aduard heavily relies on the experience of his brother's advisor, Diauden.

The actual running of the nation falls on the shoulders of the lesser nobility. Traditionally, each region was ruled by a count that effectively had absolute control over their lands but swore allegiance to the king. The title of count is hereditary, and passed down family lines. Typically, the first born child becomes the count or countess. However, reigning counts can appoint a different heir if they feel their second or third-born is more worthy. In the event of a dispute over succession, it falls to the prince to decide the next count.

The two counties that rebelled against their noble rulers gave authority to councils of prominent citizens. These councils tend to be well-off citizens who are not quite aristocrats, but are still significantly removed from the common folk. Since the revolutions, the day-to-day lives of the populace has not greatly changed. Many of the councils are only slightly less corrupt than the counts, and the revolutions traded ineffectual or inattentive rulership for leaders prone to nepotism and self-interest.

## Economy

Ustlavs pride themselves on their self-sufficiency, not relying on trade to support their nation. It helps that crops, livestock, stone, ore, and lumber are all available



within the borders of the nation. Ustalav is still a hub of trade, as goods pass through the land from the north, south, and east. Ustalavic merchants do good business buying goods that will never be used in their homeland, ferrying the products across the land for a profit. Due to its proximity to Barovia, Borca, and Nova Vaasa, the capital of Caliphas is particularly well off, filled with merchants of all varieties. It has been noted that everything is sold in Caliphas.

Grains, fruit, and lumber are among Ustalav's cash crops. The orchards are especially lucrative, producing not just fruit

seldom produces fine clothing, but Ustalavic textiles can be found in fashions across the Core.

Some crafted goods come from the larger cities, but mostly remain within the nation, being made in the cities and then sold in the countryside. Ustalav is not known for selling any particular finished products or craftworks. Caliphas produces some goods that are shipped south to Barovia, but this is more due to proximity than quality.

Operating out of Caliphas is the merchant company known as the Aspis

### Organization: Aspis Consortium

A trading company that operates in Darkon, Nova Vaasa, Barovia, and Ustalav, the Aspis Consortium has a willingness to do whatever is required to increase its influence and profits. Despite being based in Ustalav, the Consortium has no allegiance to that nation or its court, and its members are expected to show loyalty only to the Consortium. They present themselves as neutral agents in any conflict, but typically support both sides equally in the dispute: the Aspis Consortium does not limit itself to selling weapons, to both Falkovnian and Borcan communities, but also spreads rumours of troop movements, encouraging sales at the risk of warfare. The Consortium is more than a little to blame for the War Without Rivals between Ardeal and Varno, with Aspis weapons supplying local troops, while promises of their mercenaries defending the cities and farms freed more guardsmen to move to the front line.

In addition to its primary mercantile army, the Aspis Consortium operates a series of mercenary companies. While these hired soldiers work for whomever pays them, their primary purpose is to defend the caravans, operations, and assets of the Consortium. Aspis soldiers do not hesitate to betray their employer when there is a conflict with another Aspis operation, or if they discover something more profitable to the Consortium than immediate employment.

For more details on the Aspis Consortium refer to the *Pathfinder Chronicles: Faction Guide*.

but a number of beverages and liqueurs. Its quarries also bring much money to the land, selling stone to both Darkon and Nova Vaasa. Ustalav also does brisk business selling leather, hide, and cloth. The nation

Consortium, which controls a great deal of the trade that passes through the nation. While their operations are currently limited to the central Core, the Consortium is always looking to expand their mercantile

reach. The organization is currently engaged in a trade war with the Boristi Trading Company for the goods of Barovia, Hazlan, and Nova Vaasa.

## Diplomacy

At the center of the Core, Ustalav neighbours many lands and has diplomatic ties to many nations. The reigning prince has little interest in diplomacy, and less for trade agreements and tariffs, and so relations have largely remained static for the last generation.

**Barovia:** Long mountain passes connect Caliphas and southern Ustalav with the Old Svalich Road. However, most of these routes are almost as bad as the Svalich Pass, and stretches of the only road are currently being reconstructed and widened. Barovians display their typical xenophobia, even for the folk of Ustalav, who possess a language and heritage similar to theirs. But while Barovians are not friendly, they do not turn away Ustalavic coins.

Vistani traders regularly come from the south, moving across Ustalav to northern destinations. The alliance Barovia has with the Vistani means they are always welcome to cross the two lands, allowing an easy flow of goods and people.

**Borca:** Ustalav claims strong historical ties with Dorvinia and thus views Borca with suspicion, declaring them invaders and usurpers. This has soured recent relations between the two nations. The short mountainous border between the lands also prevents easy communication and trade, save along animal trails and narrow mountain paths. It is rumoured that Lady Ivana Boritsi is playing matchmaker with Prince Aduard III, trying to pair the Ustalavic ruler with a noblewoman of Borca. These diplomatic efforts have not yet met with success.

**Darkon:** Owing to their similarly diverse and varied populace, Ustalav has a passable relationship with Darkon. I believe the Darkonians enjoy the buffer Ustalav provides between their nation and Barovia. The Ustalavs would be more cordial with Darkon if not for the rumours regarding the nature of its king. The rule of the Tyrant was not so long ago that the Ustalavs are entirely comfortable with a nearby necromancer. Much of the travel between the nations is trade related rather than travellers. There is some brisk academic exchange, and the gnomes of Mayvin are frequent travelers, as they venture to Lepidstadt to take advantage of the University's libraries.

**Falkovnia:** Relations between Ustalav and Falkovnia have long been cool, with Drakov historically viewing them as another weak nation to conquer. Past attempts at diplomacy have ended with the Ustalavic ambassador slowly descending down a sharpened length of wood. Prince Aduard III is doing what he can to change relations, and it seems the King-Führer is accepting of Ustalav as a potential ally, if only one of convenience, as there are no easy routes between the nations. I suspect if Falkovnia ever chooses to invade Borca, they will do so with the support of Ustalav.

**Keening:** This dark and haunted land is avoided and feared by Ustalavs. Travellers avoid the mountains close to Keening whenever possible, and there are numerous local superstitions and rites directed at avoiding ills from the northeast. Local legends claim the scourging of Keening was the work of the Tyrant and that forces loyal to him remain in the land. Curiously, the Whispering Way has shown little interest in the land. I am uncertain if this is simple racism over the elven and fey origins of much of Keening or if there is



some more mysterious reason the necromancers avoid the land.

**Nova Vaasa:** A reliable trade partner, despite the absence of connecting roads, Nova Vaasa buys Ustalavic stone, lumber, and fruit. There is brisk river trade between Ustalav and Bergovista, and Vistani are commonly found along the border. The shared religion makes Ustalav comfortable for Vaasi merchants and travellers. However, Vaasi traders object to Ustalavic attempts to act as middlemen in trades, preferring to travel across the land themselves and sell directly to Darkon and Lamordia. Also causing tension is the weak rule of the prince, which is viewed with disdain by Vaasi aristocrats.

**Tepest:** The untamed forests and fey of Tepest restrict trade with the nation. Tepestani themselves are wary of Ustalav due to its magical history, and the assorted demihuman peoples are unwelcome in Tepest. The folk of Tepest actually blame Ustalav for many of their problems, claiming fey creatures and undead swarm across the border into their lands. This has given rise to the expressions "nothing good comes from Ustalav" and "a house with a rotten foundation will not long stand".

## Sites of Interest

My clockwise tour of Ustalav introduced me to many sites and locales around the nation. As fall was rapidly ending, I did not tarry long in any one location, not wishing to winter in some remote locale, when I could spend it in Lepidstadt, researching the Shadow Rift and interviewing witnesses. My northern trip across the Hungry Mountains proved the most dangerous, so close to Virlych, with early snows threatening to seal the few wagon trails through the mountains.

## Ardis

Ardealianians will tell you that their city is the true capital of Ustalav, and that it's only a matter of time before the royal court returns. In the meantime, the city has shrunk, as waves of nobility depart for the south, along with their armies of servants, retainers, and staff. This exodus prompted businesses and craftsmen alike to follow. With less than half its former population remaining, Ardis is empty and unnaturally quiet. The outer streets are eerily still, with entire city blocks abandoned. Many vacant buildings have been claimed by squatters or expatriates from neighbouring lands.

The remains of the city are majestic, with soaring stone buildings supported by sturdy buttresses and covered in leering gargoyles. Many buildings are capped by the traditional Ustalavic onion domes, their bright hues fading with age and neglect. There are ample green spaces and paved squares, often decorated with elaborate statuary, but most is overgrown and pockmarked by age and weeds. Without

### **Ardis (small city):**

Conventional; AL ; 15,000 gp limit; Assets 4,530,000 gp; Population 6,040; Isolated (human 93%, half-Vistani 4%, dwarf 1%, elf 1%, other 1%).

*Authority Figures:* Countess Solismina Venacdahlia, (female human aristocrat 9).

*Important Characters:* Ailson Kindler, (female human bard 9/Pathfinder Chronicler 4); Father Ossmander, (male human cleric of the Lawgiver 8); Venture Captain James Weylan.

people, entire neighbourhoods feel more like elaborate graveyards than a living city.

The most dramatic site is the fortress of Stagcrown, named for its spiky vaulted roofs, and the former home to the royal court. At the center of the fortification is the blackened spear of the Palace Tower, a watchtower constructed by Siovidia Ustav. Following the completion of Stagcrown, the Palace Tower became a prison for the nobility and traitors to the crown, as well as a makeshift asylum for anyone of the royal bloodline.

The remaining locals are those with too much pride to leave their homes, or not enough money to relocate. There is a strong resentment towards the traitorous nobility that killed their city, and crime is rampant. Many turn to alcohol or Hazlani opium to escape their unfortunate lives. The youths born into this anger form gangs that fight amongst themselves, or target the rare elites that wander into their territory. I was almost waylaid by a group of ruffians myself, but a small display of magic sent their scurrying back to the alleys.

## Where to Stay in Ardis

Most visitors to Ardis simply claim an abandoned house at the edge of town for the night. But travellers seeking a warm hearth and hot meal can turn to The Iron Gauntlet Inn (good quality rooms, poor quality food). The inn is housed in an abandoned manor of a dead bloodline, and thus is spacious and opulent despite the infrequent cleaning and inadequate chef. For more appetizing fare I recommend the Shadow of the Spire Pub tavern (good quality food), named for its proximity to Stagcrown; the lengthy shadow of the Palace Tower regularly falls across the tavern.

## Caliphas

Constructed behind the safety of a natural breakwater on Lake Encarthan, Caliphas has long been Ustalav's wealthiest city, a hub of trade and travel. It was because of this wealth that the royal court relocated to Caliphas and made it the new Ustalavic capital.

Despite having been the capital for less than four decades, Caliphas is an old city. It is one of the oldest in the nation, and possibly even one of the oldest cities in the Core. The city has been rebuilt several times and is significantly higher than it originally was, with layers of old streets and sewers beneath the paved roads. The architecture of Caliphas is grim and ominous, with the standard Ustalavic architecture features of flying buttresses, statuary, and sharp gables. Fog off the lake and centuries of smoke have coated every surface in a thick layer of ash and grime, giving the entire city a grim monochromatic hue.

One of the largest buildings in the city is the Maiden's Choir, a cathedral to a former Ustalavic deity that has been rededicated to the Eternal Order of the Grave. Officially, it is the Cathedral of St. Gesengethe, whose bones are interred within the sizable silver reliquary in the center of the chapel, but to the locals it retains its original name. The harsh iconography of the Darkonian faith seems at odds with much of the carvings and statuary in the cathedral, but the focus on death remains. The Church of the Lawgiver has been petitioning the royal court to secede control of the cathedral to their faith, but so far these requests have been denied.

At the heart of the city is Castle Stryithe, built by the Countess Carmilla Caliphvaso to house the newly relocated



**Caliphas (city):** Conventional; AL N; 40,000 gp limit; Assets 23,460,000 gp; Population 11,730; Isolated (human 90%, half-Vistani 5%, dwarf 2%, elf 2%, other 1%).

*Authority Figures:* Prince Aduard Ordranti III, (male human aristocrat 3/fighter 8).

*Important Characters:* Countess Carmilla Caliphvaso, (female human aristocrat 4/rogue 11); Diaudin (male human rogue 10); Luvick Siervage (male vampire aristocrat 2/fighter 15).

royal court. An elegant spired building of crimson stone, highlighted with large stretches of stained glass, it rises like a flame from the surrounding thicket of buildings, its buttresses protruding like ribs on a starving beast. Castle Stryithe houses the audience chamber and throne room of Prince Ordranti, the royal archive, and a majestic portrait hall known as the Gallery of Ancestors. There is a veritable hive of conference chambers, salons, private rooms, and more inside the sizable keep.

Of primary interest to me in Caliphas was the Quarterfaux Archives; It took me some time and numerous deceptions to gain access to the library's private collection. Access is limited, even for the nobility, and for good reason: the archive contains a wealth of documents and correspondences relating to the crown, and is filled with scandalous diaries and letters. While illuminating in terms of local history, the true treasure is the wealth of tomes and notes seized during the revolution against the Tyrant. I managed to tarry long enough to transcribe a few spells of note into my own spellbook and make notes regarding a few arcane rituals. I regret not having more time to investigate the archive's secrets.

I would concern yourself more with completing your task and less with expanding your repertoire. The true measure of a wizard is being able to skillfully employ the spells they already know and not adding unneeded chaff to their spellbook.

## Where to Stay in Caliphas

Well within the heart of the noble ward, The Majesty Hotel (excellent quality rooms, good quality food) is favoured by visiting nobility opting not to stay at Castle Stryithem. It has its own private company of guardsmen and is decorated in styles meant to emulate neighbouring lands, albeit far more opulently. Unless one reserves a table months in advances, dining at Dalliance (excellent quality food) is unlikely. The restaurant specializes in Vaasi cuisine and the menu, which changes nightly upon the whim of the chef, is kept secret.

For commoners, the Alabaster Minister Inn (common quality rooms), the Bold Pheonix Hall (good quality rooms, poor quality food), and The Pilgrim & The Ratcatcher (poor quality rooms and food) are possible options. All were unremarkable, but the food at The Pilgrim & The Ratcatcher was particularly dubious, and motivated me to rely on rations for a week. There is also The Hound's Tooth (poor quality food) that caters to local artisans and is known for its cheap and only marginally watered drinks.

## Carrion Hill

Often omitted on maps is the surprisingly large town of Carrion Hill, possibly the largest population center in Versex. The city is almost comically

stereotypical of the region, with its marshy terrain, ugly cropland, unfortunate looking livestock, and disproportionate number of caliban. Surrounding the city for several miles is a vile swamp known the Wrythe, which was some of the least pleasant terrain I have ever had to traverse.

Carrion Hill describes itself as the "isle of 10,000 temples" but I counted under 200, most being small shrines or single room chapels. The town is divided into three districts: the Filth, the Tangle, and the Crown. The Filth is aptly named and home to the local tanneries and fisheries. Also produced here is the local construction material known as "middenstone". The Tangle is the residential district where the majority of the populace lives. Most operate a shop or business on the ground floor of their home. The district is named for the labyrinthine alleyways that serve as its streets. The Crown is built atop the highest and firmest ground in the region. Here there are cobblestone roads and the buildings are built from imported timber and stone. Unsurprisingly, the wealthy residents live exclusively in the Crown, literally looking down on the lower class.

Earlier I mentioned middenstone, the local building material used to erect much of the city. With the local lumber being prone to rot and quarried stone being an expensive import, Carrion Hill relies on bricks of clay, bone, gravel, and the powdered remains of a local roach. While more durable than local wood and less susceptible to moisture, the unpleasant material requires constant maintenance, so much of Carrion Hill is in a perpetual state of decay and repair.

I did not stay long in Carrion Hill for the area made me feel supremely uncomfortable in a way that I cannot easily describe. There is something unnatural here. My investigations unearthed enough

#### **Carrion Hill (small city):**

Conventional; AL NE; 15,000 gp limit; Assets 517500 gp; Population 6,900; Mixed (human 82%, halfling 5%, caliban 4%, gnome 4%, dwarf 4%, other 2%).

*Authority Figures:* mayor Ruler Vanton Heggry, (male human aristocrat 8).

evidence to suggest that the city is unconnected to the seminal event of the land, so I abruptly ceased my investigation. I feel more comfortable living the rest of my days wondering what was going on in Carrion Hill than spending another day there to satisfy my curiosity.

### **Where to Stay in Carrion Hill**

There are a number of boarding houses in the city, most of which are pubs with a few extra rooms. Vawker House (poor quality rooms, common quality food) proved an adequate place to eat, but its bedchambers scuttle when you enter. The Snooks Home (common quality rooms, poor quality food) was warm and clean but their food was coated in a thick layer of grease.

### **Karcau**

The Village of Voices is seen as a city of hope and dreams to Ustalavs, but dismissed as "little Kartakass" by foreigners. I found this comparison apt, as the settlement is a place of whispers and secrets surrounded by wolf-plagued wilderness.

Throughout the city, local musicians can be found practicing their art on garden benches or on balconies, eager to earn an apprenticeship or win the favour of a wealthy patron. Despite its rural location, the local dress is more opulent than the capital, with opera dress being the daily attire: capes, gloves, tall hats, and opera



glasses are common accessories. However, with mosquitoes and other marsh insects being a common nuisance, theater masks and veils are also commonly worn. Village of Veils might have been a more appropriate epithet.

Built on a muddy delta and surrounded by bog, Karcau is surprisingly pleasant. After the horrors of Keening it proved to be a lovely introduction to Ustalav. The city feels spacious despite being built on islands, and the local architecture emphasises this openness with wide balconies and archways. The streets are lined with trees, and there are numerous small gardens. The city is kept dry through a series of caverns that have been reappropriated as sewers, which are several layers deep, to accommodate flooding and prevent overflow. In the summer and fall, the sewers are dry, and a common hidden route into Ustalav for smugglers. For this reason Karcau is home to a large thieves' guild known as the *Onyx Scabbards*.

Near the center of the city is the The Karcau Conservatory, which trains both the Karcau Opera and its accompanying Livgrace Orchestra. The prestigious school is reported to have a number of secret passages and a subterranean labyrinth that

#### **Karcau (large town):**

Conventional; AL N; 3,000 gp limit; Assets 768,000 gp; Population 5,120; Isolated (human 91%, elf 3%, half-Vistani 3%, halfling 2%, other 1%).

*Authority Figures:* Countess Sasandra Livgrace, (female human aristocrat 3/bard 7).

*Important Characters:* Vennel Endronil, (male human rogue 4); Zeffiro Lesiege, (male human cleric of the Lawgiver 5).

serves as an ossuary for the school's esteemed alumni. Unsurprisingly, competition in the Conservatory is fierce, and many students abruptly drop out, leaving town without warning.

### **Where to Stay in Karcau**

The village is used to housing students planning on staying for many months, and visitors are uncommon, so finding short term accommodations can be difficult. The Warbling Rook tavern (poor quality rooms, common quality food) has a few rooms that it rents, but sleeping above a tavern full of drunk singers is an interesting challenge. The Darlington Boarding House (good quality rooms) offers adequate housing for various lengths of stay, if one can withstand the constant gossip and whispering of the patrons and staff. Food is easier to find, with the Blanketed Pig (common quality food) providing cheap yet filling meals, while the Gilded Hard (good quality food) offers more elaborate fare for wealthy clientele.

### **Lepidstadt**

Lepidstadt is more than just a university, but not by much. With the growing prestige over becoming the center of education for the Core, the neighbourhoods around the University were renovated, with boutique shops, Dementlieuse cafés, and brick streets around wide plazas. The palatinates council invested a staggering amount of tax money from the entire region on this one city, well lining their own purses in the process.

Yet, beyond these new streets and refurbished buildings is a worn and aged city with winding dirt roads, crumbling walls, and dilapidated structures. The majority of residents seem unimpressed with the University and its students, dismissing them as overeducated and

possessing too much free time. The lives of these commoners have changed little despite the growth of the city and the revolution against the nobility. In fact, the city's newfound prestige has only raised the cost of living, making it harder for the commoners of Lepidstadt to support themselves.

The University espouses the "mortal sciences" of medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry. Students are expected to complete a set curriculum of studies, achieving a mastery of multiple disciplines before finishing their education on a single focus. The institution also eschews magic of all forms, and is critical of superstition. The school is known for a number of dueling fraternities, who teach members honour and swordsmanship. There are pronounced rivalries between fraternities, owing to different philosophies or political values. Many brotherhoods have elaborate initiation rituals and there are rumours that most conduct secretive rites beneath their fraternity houses. I suspect these are the usual debaucheries common to most fraternal organizations.

You are showing your bias again, my little scholar. There is no place in my service for people controlled by petty grudges.

The University itself is quite good and deserving of its reputation. Despite the heavy focus on the sciences, its labyrinthine library and archive had many historical books and foreign tomes. However, as mentioned above, the University discourages research into the arcane, and their library was quite devoid on occult manuals. While ill-suited for my research, the space and facilities allowed me to cross-reference my notes and summarize my

### **Lepidstadt (small city):**

Conventional; AL LN; 15,000 gp limit; Assets 733,500 gp; Population 9,780; Isolated (human 92%, half-Vistani 5%, dwarf 1%, elf 1%, other 1%).

*Authority Figures:* Alpon Caromarc (N male human alchemist 13).

*Important Characters:* The Beast of Lepidstadt (N flesh golem barbarian 6); Acciani Viacarri (LN male expert 6).

interviews for both Ustalav and my following report on the Shadow Rift.

## **Where to Stay in Lepidstadt**

The University houses its students in dormitories and visiting scholars in the professor's residence, leaving few places for common travellers. The Olyphant (common quality rooms, poor quality food) is commonly used by students seeking a moment of privacy outside the dormitories. Closer to the edge of the city in the oldest part of town is the Midnight Bell (common quality rooms, good quality food), which was surprisingly hospitable despite the weatherworn exterior.

A favoured pub of the university's assorted fraternities is the Brazen Skull (common quality food), which places the rapiers of favoured alums on its wall. The food is good but the atmosphere is intolerably smug.

## **The Monastery of the Veil**

Hidden among the precipitous slopes of the Hungry Mountains is an unassuming monastery that is actually among the oldest libraries in the Core. The attendant brotherhood have been ceaselessly



## Secret Society: The Anaphexia

The Monastery of Veils was founded as a sanctuary for lore and a place to record the unfolding history of the world. However, the order was eradicated centuries ago, with every member past and present hunted down and executed. In their place is an order of scholar-assassins known as the Anaphexia.

A branch of the Ba'al Verzi, the Anaphexia is largely independent from the Teufeldorf branch of the guild, although the two have an agreement to avoid the other's members. For most, the Anaphexia are a mystery: a series of seemingly unrelated killings stretching across the Core, for the assassins do not merely kill their victims, but remove their heads so they can never again reveal their secrets, even to magical probing. The order is sometimes even confused with Jacqueline Montarri and the Headless Horseman. Those who do know of the assassins live in fear, for it is said that even speaking their name will draw their attention, summoning a killer to erase the knowledge of their existence. The guild values secrets higher than gold, and takes contracts for knowledge as much as conventional payment. They venture out into the world in small teams, seeking to claim and preserve secrets in danger of being forgotten, and occasionally silencing those delving into lore best left forgotten.

Like all Ba'al Verzi, members must prove their absolute lack of mercy by killing a family member, and using their victim's skin to fashion a scabbard. Additionally, upon acceptance into the guild, the recruit has their tongue cut out, so they can never again speak a secret. Only their leader, Bishop Senir, retains the ability to speak.

For more information, consult *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Rule of Fear*.

maintaining, copying, and expanding the collection for centuries. The monks store their expansive library of rare volumes in a series of catacombs under the monastery.

The monks themselves have taken vows of silence, and I did not even hear a whisper during my stay. Only the head of the brotherhood, Bishop Yasmardin Senir, is permitted to speak in order to accommodate their uncommon visitors.

Individuals are granted entry into the monastery once each year. When a visitor leaves they must wait the full span before they return. Entry bares a simple cost: the visitor must share with the monks a secret or gift them a valuable book. The rarer this secret or book, the more accommodating the monks will be, prioritizing that visitor or transcribing passages. It is said that visitors

can visit the library a second time if they share a truly rare and valuable secret or a unique and precious tome.

The monastery's library has an interesting collection of books. There was the *Krivbeknih*, *Book of Eibon*, *Dhol Chants*, a complete and uncensored version of *The King in Yellow*, *The Pnakotic Manuscripts*, the *Puahotic Fragments*, the *Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan*, *The Ghoull's Manuscript* detailing their Charnel God, and the *Whispers of the Immortal*, purportedly written by a disciple and apprentice of the Tyrant.

Something about the monks did put me ill at ease. I wondered if the library was a front for the Order of Guardians, but I cannot imagine those monks accommodating any visitors. If I had not

### **Ravengro (hamlet):**

Conventional; AL N; 100 gp limit; Assets 3,110 gp; Population 311; Isolated (human 85%, halfling 5%, half-Vistani 5%, elf 3%, other 2%).

*Authority Figures:* Councilman Vashian Hearthmount (male human aristocrat 1/cavalier 1); Councilman Gharen Muricar (old male human expert 3); Councilwoman Mirta Straelock (female human commoner 4); Councilwoman Shanda Faravan (female human expert 3).

*Important Characters:* Vauran Grimburrow (male human cleric of the Lawgiver 7); Sheriff Benjan Caeller (male human ranger 2), Sarianna Vai, innkeeper (female human expert 2).

spent the last year travelling the land, I would dismiss this feeling as simple paranoia, but now I am more aware of people with secrets.

## **Ravengro**

Harrowstone was a bleak and sizable prison, built to house prisoners from across Ustalav. This was done for a fee, and thus fed the coffers of local count. The entire town of Ravengro was built to support the prison, providing food and supplies, as well as housing the staff. Built near Lake Lias, the residents of the small hamlet supported themselves with both farming and fishing. With the prison having burnt down in 706, the town has lost what little importance it had, and is now little more than a way stop between Ardis and Tamrivena.

I stopped at the town to visit a local scholar, Professor Petros Lorremor. I found him agreeable and well-travelled, with a thirst for knowledge. He proved

enlightening in my quest, answering many questions on Ustalav and providing information for future reports. I was saddened to hear that he died mere days after I departed. He was in good health, so I suspect some form of foul play, but my duty takes priority. I will leave solving his death to more adventurous sorts. Perhaps when I am finished cataloguing the seas...

Do not let yourself become distracted. Your task is far from over.

## **Where to Stay in Ravengro**

I stayed at the Outward Inn (common quality rooms, common quality food), which came highly recommended, but was merely adequate. The food was overspiced, to mask being past its prime. An alternative is the Laughing Demon tavern (common quality food), which is primarily known for the somewhat amusing names the cook gives its meals. I would rather know what I am eating than be entertained, and thus found the menu distracting.

## **Sincomakti School of Sciences**

Located on the south of Lantern Lake, in the county of Versex is the Sincomakti School of Sciences, established in the small town of Rozenport, along the banks of the Danver river which separates Versex from the county of Caliphas.

Rozenport is itself unremarkable and unworthy of an entry in this Doomsday Gazetteer. If not for the presence of the Sincomakti School, it would not be worth visiting. It is a small town atop a steep slope down to the river valley. The most noteworthy features of the village are its twisting, illogical streets and its buildings with their gambrel roofs that are often capped by steeples. In 732, the town was hit hard by an epidemic of enteric fever and



lost a fifth of its citizens, and is still recovering.

The student body of the Sincomakti is all-male, an unfortunate situation to say the least. There is talk of relaxing the gender restrictions, but so far this has shamefully not occurred. The campus is dominated by three castle-like structures: Bhaltvrest Hall, the Grey Tower, and the Hermitage.

The School focuses on a diverse curriculum, and rejects the general education requirements of the University of Lepidstadt, encouraging students to be the "architect of their own education". The professors advocate the virtue of a broad and comprehensive education but also selective ignorance, warning that there are some things better left unknown. The library and special collection is renowned for its collection of bizarre and esoteric books, especially those focused on the occult. The collection includes *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* by Friedrich von Junzt, fragments of the *Book of Eibon*, and even a copy of the infamous *Kitab al-Azif* by the so-called Mad Pharazian, Abdul-al-Hazrat.

If my memory serves, that poetic title translates as Book of the Approacher, although I am far more familiar with it as the Book of the Dead or The Necronomicon.

## Tamrivena

Constructed to defend against the savage tribes to the west, Tamrivena has rebuilt and increased in fortifications over the last few decades to defend against invasion from Falkovnia. A sizable fort is built around the northern gate into town with the majority of the town surrounded by tall, thick walls. Passages run between the walls, allowing defenders from the keep to rapidly reposition themselves. The local

town watch is known as the Wallguard, and their reputation for efficiency is matched only by Mordentish Lamplighters.

Ironically, the town has become so gripped with fear over invasion and enslavement by a foreign power that they have given away their freedom by increasing the authority of the Wallguard. The watch have ceased to merely be a constabulary and have instead become its master. The Wallguard strictly enforces the law, favouring the letter over the spirit of the law. Anyone who opposes their rule or breaks the law is taken to Fort Vhiled to rot in its expansive dungeons.

The townsfolk continue life as normally as possible, doing what they can to ignore the restrictions placed upon them. Traders and shopkeepers suffer the most, with their

### **Tamrivena (large town):**

Conventional; AL LE; 3,000 gp limit; Assets 315,000 gp; Population 2,100; Isolated (human 95%, half-Vistani 3%, halfling 1%, other 1%).

#### *Authority Figures:*

Balton Rhasrakin, Captain of the Wallguard (LE male human ranger 7), Councilor Taladda Jhovanki, (male human bard 6); Councilor Zoenessa Thell, (female changeling rogue 5).

#### *Important Characters:*

Daladmin Quin, Captain of the Foreguard (LG male human cavalier 8).

expert 3); Councilwoman Mirta Straelock (female human commoner 4); Councilwoman Shanda Faravan (female human expert 3).

#### *Important Characters:*

Vauran Grimburrow (male human cleric of the Lawgiver 7); Sheriff Benjan Caeller (male human ranger 2), Sarianna Vai, innkeeper (female human expert 2).

goods required to meet requirements of morality and safety. A number of stores have closed or been heavily fined for failing to uphold the increasingly restrictive laws.

## Where to Stay in Tamrivena

Most of the inns in Tamrivena have been closed for indecency, having the potential for allowing unwed couples to succumb to temptation. Outside the town walls is the Tabard (poor quality rooms, good quality meals), a crowded place that houses travelers of all sorts. It cannot serve alcohol and so its common room is quiet, doubling as a sleeping chamber for merchants in need of a bed. Despite the dour patrons, I found it peaceful and an excellent place to work.

## Gallowspire

For over six centuries, the fortress of Gallowspire has stood at the heart of the dead city of Adorak. The city was initially ruined by the Tyrant and further shattered by his fall, and has remained abandoned for the following centuries with no attempts at reconstruction.

While the common folk believe the Tyrant is dead, I need not explain to you, my patron, the difficulty in permanently dispatching a lich. And the Tyrant was reportedly powerful beyond measure. As such, he is not truly dead by merely caged. As such, Adorak is not just haunted by common spirits, but also the unnatural dreams of the imprisoned Tyrant, whose power is not entirely contained within the tower. Undead roam the ruins with impunity, killing all those they encounter. The mad cultists of the Whispering Way are sometimes spared by the walking abominations, but even these necromancers sometimes run afoul of the dead and become their prey.

The tower of Gallowspire is 400 feet tall and constructed of a dark basalt and iron. Long since stained red from exposure, its outer wall is a nightmare of spikes and dangling chains. A branch of the Whispering Way makes its headquarters in several aboveground levels of the tower, continuing their magical research. They do not control the full extent of the tower, however, and many floors are sealed or have been claimed by other beings and monstrosities. Beneath the tower is a massive dungeon, sealed by protective magics that keep the remaining essence of the Tyrant at rest.

I ventured as close as I dared to the tower but my courage faltered and I did not enter. Given that the Tyrant had been imprisoned for centuries prior to Ustlav's seminal event, it seems unlikely he is the lord of the nation, and thus risking my life to examine the ruins was an unnecessary gamble. But even from my distant vantage point I could feel the dark magical energies surrounding the tower and I witnessed unnatural creatures stirring. The most chilling was the massive form I saw prowling around the tower, which could only be the remains of a dragon! Just seeing such a beast would normally have been enough to give me pause, but more terrifying was the realization that it was skeletal, that the monster was animated by magic similar to that of a lich. I fled immediately.

## Parting Thoughts

Ustlav is a land of legends and stories, whispered myths told and retold by a superstitious populace until the truth is lost. It is also a land ready to tear itself apart. The palatinate revolutions are still a recent memory to both the commoners struggling to make a living and the nobles looking to expand their power. Bitterness remains



from old wars, fought both for land and the throne, which threaten to start anew with the impending death of the Prince. And much of this tension is fueled by one conspiracy or another.

Until I finished compiling these notes, I had considered Ustalav as a land ruled by its legends. But now, upon further review, I wonder if it is truly a land of hidden factions, a nation ruled by power groups. The wars and struggles for the crown are certainly driven by factions of nobles, and the influence of other groups cannot be underestimated.

I wonder now if my unsuccessful efforts to find a dread lord were not a direct failure, but the result of looking for an individual. Perhaps it is not a person that rules the land but a cabal. Perhaps the Whispering Way, although the darker legends of the Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye might also be true.

A fascinating concept but, alas, not the truth. The evidence points to a different master of the land.

In any event, my report on Ustalav is complete and now I must turn my attention back to the fabled Shadow Rift and then the eastern sea. Whomever the master of Ustalav is, he, she, or they are no longer my concern. Already the land is out of my mind, the details of what I had seen slipping away like a dream.

Regards,

S

## Who's Doomed

This section presents the darklord of Ustalav. Statistics are omitted to allow the domain to be used in multiple game systems. Should a statblock be required, the master storyteller (Pathfinder RPG NPC Codex, 234) serves for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, possibly applying a couple Mythic tiers or the Arcane Mythic simple template from Mythic Adventures. Meanwhile, the mage works for 5th Edition, applying the darklord template from the Fraternity of Shadows 5e guide.

## Venture Captain James

### Weylan

Leader of the Pathfinder Society in the Land of the Mists, James Weylan is an experienced scholar and magic user who has dedicated his life to unraveling history and unearthing forgotten lore. In his role as Venture Captain, he dispatches agents on missions across the Core and to lands beyond, seeking mystical relics and trying to solve mysteries of the past.

Cold and distant, Weylan cares little for his Pathfinders, valuing only the secrets they unearth. Society members are simply means to an end, and he does not hesitate to send them on suicidal missions if he believes something can be gained in the process.

A half-elf, Weylan has a century-and-a-half of experience as a Pathfinder, and has travelled to every corner of Ustalav. He retains distant memories of faraway lands and cities he visited in his youth, and hopes to one day rediscover these wonders, especially the seemingly lost headquarters of the Society in the city of Absalom.

Despite being almost 180-years-old, James Weyland retains a relatively youthful appearance. His elven longevity keeps his

features smooth and relatively devoid of lines despite his advanced age. However, his formerly flaxen hair is now as much grey as blonde, and Weylan moves with the slow careful motion of the elderly: his joints and old wounds painfully ache. After decades of life, even elven vitality wanes. Few half-elves live to be over 150 years, and Weylan has passed this milestone. With so much left to see and so many mysteries to unlock, Weylan is anxious of the future. He has not yet begun to use the Society to research immortality or seek ways of expanding his lifespan, but he pays close attentions to rumours and legends related to restoring one's youth.

Weylan dresses in simple clothes. He often wears simple black suits like the upper class of Ustalav, especially when dealing with the nobility. While meeting with his Pathfinders, Weylan dresses in the sturdy garb of a traveler, albeit clothing that has never seen the road.

## Background

Born in the great city of Absalom, James Weylan was the son of a local merchant and a seamstress. Listening to his elven father's tales of faraway places enflamed young James' imagination. The wonders of the open road appealed to him, driving him to join the Pathfinder Society. During his training, James discovered a passion for history and he admired experienced Pathfinder scholars, such as the Master of Scrolls and Master of Spells.

Following his Confirmation – the formal initiation into the Society – James' first few assignments took him across several nations in the region known as the Inner Sea. He was thrilled to finally be exploring the world. James partnered with a coterie of other Pathfinders, each relying on the others for success. This band of young adventurers

confronted danger with the invincible bravado of youth.

After several years of adventuring, James Weylan and his band were asked to investigate several of the barrow mounds of Ustalav, reporting on their origins and seeing if they did indeed predate the rule of the Whispering Tyrant. The adventurers laughed before they entered the barrow, confident that their abilities and prestige within Society would ensure that they left the ruin alive and unharmed.

Instead, only Weylan emerged.

The barrow indeed predated the rule of



the Whispering Tyrant, but during his occupation the residents of a nearby hamlet had breached its entrance and took refuge inside. When the Tyrant's forces discovered them, there was nowhere to flee. They died screaming in the dark, and their souls remained captives of the magic of the barrow.

Exploration of the tomb had begun normally: a few spirits that were easily dispatched for the prepared delvers were their first encounter. Weylan was excited by the ancient writing and pictographs along the wall, pausing to examine some text



around a looted sarcophagus while his companions continued forward. His investigation revealed a hidden chamber behind the false tomb, which housed the intact burial chamber of an ancient king, the forgotten monarch of an unknown people.

Weylan was wrenched from his revelry over the discovery by excited cries from farther in the tomb: his companions were being assaulted by the dead villagers and in need of assistance. The Pathfinder paused. His companions had been his friends and allies for years, but this was his discovery, the first he did not have to share. And if the danger was as great as it sounded, they might be required to flee or summon more members of the Society to fully catalogue the tomb. After all, what little Weylan had recorded already proved the age of the ruin and fulfilled the requirements of their mission.

Without hesitation, Weylan stepped over the magical warding and into the safety of the burial chamber. Lost in thoughts of single-handedly changing history and filled with anticipation over being the first person in millennia to examine the ancient scrolls, he was oblivious to the Mists swirling around his feet, and the increasing screams of his companions. The following dawn, when Weylan exited the chamber, he stepped forth into a very different Ustalav.

## Current Sketch

A historian and scholar, Weylan is obsessed with piecing together history, but is trapped in a land without a coherent past. The forces of the Mists toy with him, revealing mysteries and clues to new discoveries that inevitably contradict with established history and are irreconcilable with the facts. What he discovers of his neighbouring lands also casts doubts on his assorted timelines and historical treatises.

Trapped within the borders of Ustalav, Weylan can also no longer venture into the world, and must rely on others to explore in his stead and report back. The sights and wonders that fill the returning journals fill Weylan with jealousy, but he cannot help but read.

Prior to the Grand Conjunction, Weylan's personal history had been forgotten, his past was little more than a series of hazy dream-like recollections. He could remember names, sights, and sounds but few other details. This uncertainty was maddening, especially when these locales eluded the investigations of his Pathfinders.

During the Grand Conjunction, Ustalav briefly returned to the world of Golarion, overlapping and mingling with the original land. There, Weylan was confronted with his past and the lost lands, a wealth of new opportunities to explore. Then, as quickly as it began, the Conjunction ended and Ustalav was again snatched by the Mists.

Weylan realized that this could mean but one thing: the Inner Sea had been moved elsewhere in the Mists. His birthplace of Absalom was lost somewhere beyond the borders of the Core. His Pathfinders had a new task, and had to find his missing homeland, no matter the cost.

## Combat

His days of being an adventurer are long behind him and Weylan eschews combat. If forced into a conflict, the Venture Captain does not hesitate to order his Pathfinders to defend him, buying time to escape with their lives.

If cornered without chance of escape, Weylan relies on his spells and whatever magical items he has available to defend himself. A century of dispatching Pathfinders to distant lands has provided Weylan with a wealth of magical trinkets, although most are kept secured in the

sprawling catacombs hidden under the Pathfinder Lodge in Ardis. If given time to prepare, Weylan is capable of countering virtually any threat.

## Lair

The palatial Pathfinder Lodge in Ardis is home to both Weylan and the Pathfinder Society. The estate houses visiting Venture Lieutenants and other important Pathfinders. Housed inside the Lodge is a massive library, which contains every surviving volume of the Pathfinder Chronicles: collected reports from Society field agents and summaries of their discoveries.

Every year, a Grand Convocation is held at the estate, welcoming as many Pathfinders as are able to attend. There, the findings of the past year are related and important discoveries shared.

Underneath the Lodge is a secret catacomb, discovered by Weylan shortly after he moved into the mansion. Built as a familial crypt for the manor's original owners, the tunnels connect to an expansive cave system stretching deep underground. Weylan sealed off the catacomb from these side tunnels, but built a few escape routes and hidden chambers. He uses the catacombs as a massive vault for relics and personal treasures.





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Authors: Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, and Skip Williams, based on material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

# Quoth the Raven

22

ENTER THE WESTERN  
SEAS OF THE CORE, EXPLORE  
THE DARK LAND OF USTALAV PULLED  
FROM A DISTANT WORLD, MEET  
AGENTS OF THE KARGAT AND EXPLORE  
LANDS LOST TO TIME. STEP AGAIN  
INTO THE MISTS AND SEE THE  
HORROR OF RAVENLOFT

Ravenloft

d20  
system

