

Quoth the Raven

25

A Ravenloft
Netbook

FRONT MATTER

Quoth the Raven #25

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INTRODUCTION

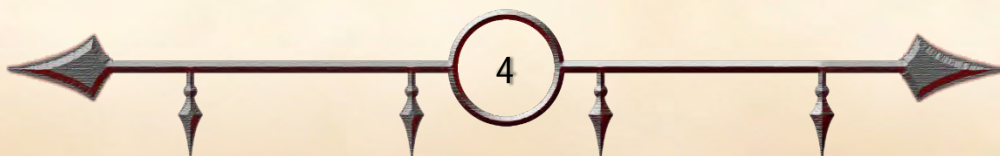
The end of October again? Where did the time go? I blame the Mists, shifting when I am and sending me to uncertain futures.

Here is another issue of *Quoth the Raven*, the Ravenloft netbook/ e-magazine. By the fans and for the fans.

This is my fifth issue of *Quoth the Raven*, and I barely knew what to write in the introduction of the second through fourth. So I'm going to stop writing here and let you delve into the pages of this digital tome, exploring Verbrek and Richemulot again, for the first time. Or looking at death knights in a new and interesting way. Or perhaps even incorporating a certain cannibalistic barber into your campaigns.

Enjoy!

"Jester" David Gibson
October, 2018



VERBREK

Land of predators and opportunity

by Mistmaster

When you are a sheep in a land full of wolves who can you trust? This is a Dread Alternative to Canon Verbrek.

Tropes

The evil of civilization against the evil of savagery. In Verbrek you can see both; who are more dangerous, the wolves who hunt in the forest or those who hunt in the business trade? Some werewolves are acknowledged, someone prefer to keep it a secret, who can you trust?

Domain Overview

The land included between the two rivers, the Arden (with the Wolfen River) and the Musarde (with its sources and tributaries included: the Arkan and the Noisette) is covered in thick forests; rocky hills dot the otherwise plain land.

The City of Arkandale Town sits at the conjunction of the rivers Arkan and Musarde, at the mouth of the eponymous Dale.

It is one of the most important trading hubs of the western Core; In the North, near the Wolfen River, sits Amoria, the second largest city of the domain in population; The Wolfen River has been recently linked to the Arkan River and to the Arden River with a channel, allowing easier communication between Amoria, Ludlow and the capital. On the banks of the Arden

River lay the towns of Ludlow, on the north, and Fylfot, Alyssum and Tricco in the south. Ludlow is the third main city of the nation, and hosts also the University of Ludlow, renowned learning center in the frontier, in particular on Werebeasts, especially Werewolves and Werepanthers. Alyssum is the only all-werewolves open community in Verbrek. Fylfot and Tricco are thriving mining and wood-harvesting centers. Siel, in the Northern Musarde River Valley, is currently the only fluvial city in the Free State not owned by a private company; Fang's Circle is the holy land for Fenris followers, Lady's Den is the same for the followers of Lady Moon; The two religions are equally discouraged by the government. Appropriately the two towns are pretty much insulated, as the Free state government is very weak far from the rivers.

Duskpeace is another fortified village, home of various Werebeasts worshipping Lady Moon near the Valachan Borders.

The People

Verbrekers are a hard people for a hard land and Werewolves have lived here since before human colonization began. For a period the two races hunted each other, until they reached a standstill, and a common threat, that of an Invidian invasion, presented itself; Invidians had their chosen champions, the Wolfweres, and



Culture level: Chivalric

Ecology: Full

Climate & Terrain: Temperate river plain along the Musarde River, the Noisette River, and the Arkan River

Languages: High Mordentish, Dementlieuse.

Religions: Church of Ezra (LN), Cult of the Wolf God, Cult of Mother Moon.

Races: Human (Verbrekers) 47%, Werewolves 50%, Other 3%.

Governement: de jure Parliamentary Republic (Each village and town elects a number of representatives in the General Congress), de facto Oligarchical Plutocracy, (landownership and property are required to vote and to be voted into public offices.)

Ruler: Chairman of the Musarde River Company and President of the Executive Council of the Free State of Verbrek, Captain Nathan Timothy.

Darklord: Nathan Timothy.

Lightlord: Noah Timothy

Analog: American Frontier, end of eighteenth/start of the nineteenth century.

Capital City: Arkandale Town (LE, Non-standard, 82,000)

Important towns: Amoria (Standard, N, 22,000), Lady's Den (Non-standard, NG, 9,000), Tricco (N, Standard, 17,500), Gillsburg (N, standard, 20,000), Alyssum (NE, Standard, 18,000), Fylfot (LN, Standard 13,500), Fang's Circle (CE, Non-standard, 7,900), Ludlow (N, Standard, 17,000), Duskpeace (LG, Non-Standard, 6,500)

Borders: North-East: Borca; East: Invidia; South: Sithicus; West: Valachan; North-West: Mordent; North: Richemulot.

only Werewolves' help saved the colonists from annexation. From then on, the two people mingled, even if many werewolves preferred, and still prefer, insulation in their forested communities; Humans are still wary about Werewolves, and so few of them declare it publicly if they live among human communities, with the principal exception being the Arkandale Pack whose members are a very powerful faction in the Arkandale City government. While they are wary of strangers, once you get the friendship of a Verbreker, it will last forever. Usually Verbreker clothing is practical and simple, even if the richest landowners and mineowners and their relatives can afford more elegance. Small weapons with silver blades and silver heads for arrows and quarrels are fairly common, but frowned upon in mixed communities. Avoiding carrying silver items is seen as a sign of trust regarding werebeasts.

Religion

The two main religions are the Cult of Fenris (CE, favored weapon: dagger/bite, symbol: a wolf head, Domains: Animal, Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Madness, Strength.) and the Cult of Mother Moon (NG, favored weapon: short bow, symbol: a Full moon, Domains: Change, Charm, Good, Healing, Protection, Weather).

The Cult of Fenris promotes hunting and savagery, and preaches the superiority of the beast over humanity. Other than werewolves, it also appeals to savage hunters and poachers, who dream to be turned and work as spies for the cult.

The Cult of Mother Moon favors integration and adaptation, sees change as a positive thing, promises prosperity and fertility for the merciful and the generous, and is favoured by woodcutters, farmers,



good-aligned werebeasts, midwives and travelers.

The Cult of Ezra has a small but well-organized following concentrated in the main cities.

History

Verbrek folktales talk about the age of creation, when Fenris, the Wolf-God, and Mother Moon fell in love, and generated two children: Freki, the First Wolf, and Freya, the first human woman; Freki and Freya loved each other, so, their mother gave Freya the ability to turn in a Wolf. Their son Timothy was the first Werewolf; however, in the age of heroes, when empires were born and died, Fenris grew jealous of the human descendants of Freya, and urged the wolves and the werewolves against them; Mother Moon gave mankind the gift of silver, and urged werewolves to defend their brethren. From the bloodline of Timothy, twins were born, Cain and Abel Timothy; Cain Timothy chose Mother Moon, while Abel choose Fenris. Cain slew Abel and bound Fenris' spirit in the circle of Fangs.

In the age of darkness, when the Tergs invaded the core, the Werewolves and human tribes lived in relative peace, intermingling and turning werewolves quickly into the majority.

Packs and Clans established themselves, with the Timothy, the Whitmoor, the Whiteye and the Brightfur clans being among the most influential.

In the modern age, two centuries after the expulsion of the Tergs, the discovery of gold in the waters of the Arkan and Musarde rivers brought human colonists into Verbrek; the werewolves initially fought the invaders, but, the colonists and natives had to join together against the Invidian invasion of Verbrek. Invidians had their own champions, the Wolfweres, and only the

Werewolves could oppose them; following the defeat of the Invidians, the Werewolf Packs and the Human settlers made a treaty, under the auspices of Mother Moon's Cult, who gave werewolves equal rights in the then nascent state, and granted the packs full possessions of their hunting grounds.

In recent times, werewolves managed to even take over the major trading companies of the human settlers, and at least two acknowledged werewolves, Captain Nathan Timothy and Alderman Meogon Whiteye are the Presidents of two powerful companies.

The Famed and the Infamous

Argent Whitmoor

(LG Adult Male Human Werewolf Paladin 7)

Argent is the scion of the Whitmoor Clan, a clan of Werewolves who worships Mother Moon. He is also the Alderman of the town of Duskpeace. He and his wife Celia reside in the fortified estate of Duskpeace Lodge, near the Valachan Border.

Adventure Hook: Valachan authorities have protested incursions of Verbreker poachers in their territory; as the Alderman of Duskpeace, Argent is offering rewards to any brave adventurer who can help him to stop the poachers.

Patrick Connor

(NG Adult Human Barbarian 8/ Ranger 5)

Patrick is a trapper and an enemy of both the Cult of Fenris and of the corrupt Government; a worshipper of Mother Moon, he is feared both by evil Werebeasts and by human poachers.

Adventure Hook: A woman runs into the adventurers, claiming to be stalked by an evil brute; in truth, the woman is a cultist of Fenris, and the stalker is Patrick Connor.



Broderick Bonebreaker

(CE Adult Caliban Werebear Barbarian 10)

Broderick is the head of a small clan of Werebears and he has managed to bully into submission the majority of the other non-wolf clans of Werebeasts in Verbrek, to form the Brood of the Purple Moon, which rules the desolate hills of the Bleedingbarrows in the north-east.

Adventure Hook: The Brood of the Purple Moon is starting to raid beyond their hunting grounds, disturbing mining operations sponsored by the Musarde River Company; an officer of the company approaches the adventurers offering a generous sum to help defend the mine.

Meogon Whiteye

(NE Adult Male Human Werewolf Ranger 8)

The Alpha of the Whiteye Clan, and the Alderman of Alyssum, Meogon is cunning and diplomatic. He is interested in keeping the Noisette river under the control of the Noisette River Company, his family being the major share-holders. He has developed Alyssum into one of the mayor trading point in the nation, and he appears as a competent and reliable manager, however, he still has a sentient-eating habit, which he tries to satisfy with discretion.

Adventure Hook: The adventurers meet by chance a frightened, ragged boy who claims his little sisters have been abducted from their slum. In truth, the girls' abductors work for the Alderman.

Ambrosius Brightfur

(NG Venerable Male Human Greater Werewolf Cleric of Mother Moon 10)

The Alderman of the Lady's Den, Pack-Leader of the Ladychildren Pack, leader of the Brightfur Clan and Arch-Priest of Lady Moon, Old Ambrosius is ailing, but his leadership is still uncontested; his wisdom is sought by many, even by werewolves from

other packs or humans. He has the aspect of a white-haired, white-bearded old man, with penetrating auburn eyes, dressed in a silver tunic, wearing the moon shaped symbol of his faith; in wolf form, he is a towering white wolf, slowed by age but still exuding majesty. While Alfred Timothy is more magically powerful, and surely younger than Ambrosius, his lack of control in wolf form and his weaker physical body have allowed the older wolf to get the upper hand in many a confrontation.

Adventure Hook: Ambrosius is dying; knowledge of his weakness will upset the balance of the packs and cults in Verbrek, as his heir apparent is still too inexperienced; thus he is trying to keep this news a secret as long as it is possible; but someone has stolen proof of his illness and intends to reveal it at the next packs' meeting. The adventurers are tasked with finding the traitor and recovering the stolen proof.

Alfred Timothy

(CE Adult Human Werewolf Cleric 11)

The firstborn son of Captain Nathan Timothy, in his youth he was a gentle soul, who sought to free Verbrekers from his father's iron grip; he joined the Lady's Children Pack, and became a priest of the Moon Lady. However, his disgust for civilization grew and not even the love of Elaria Brightfur could quench this hate; when he destroyed a village who was negotiating settling rights with the Pack, he lost the lady's blessing along with his family. He ran into the heart of the forest, where he arrived at the Circle of Fangs, the circle of blood-stained dolmens, where, legends said, Mother Moon chained a force of evil. He killed the two guardians and entered the circle, where he was blessed by the imprisoned deity, Fenris, the Lady's first mate. Since then, he has been the



Archpriest of the Fenris Cult, and the leader of the Bloodfang Pack; however, the Lady cursed him for this betrayal, and now, he reverts to human form every time he feels strong emotions.

Adventure Hook: Alfred Timothy is marrying again; his new mate is a daughter of the Redpaws Pack, Lara. She is unwilling, and her mother has paid the adventurers to rescue her; doing that they would also foil the pernicious alliance between the Bloodfangs and the Redpaws.

Natalia Vhorishkova

(CN Adult Female Human Werewolf Slayer 9)

The Alpha of the Vhorishkov Clan, a Clan of Darkonian origin, and the second largest shareholder in the Musarde River Company, Natalia is a dangerous predator, not only as a Werewolf and as a bounty hunter, but, more so, as a business woman. Even Nathan Timothy affords her an ounce of respect. Her cruelty and her underhanded tactics, combined with her cunning and cold-bloodedness, make her an effective negotiator.

Adventure Hook: The adventurers are on the trail of a smuggler from Mordent; they want him alive, but someone else wants him dead, and has paid Natalia to be sure to have that man killed.

Tremeur Hollowmore

(LN Adult Male Human Fighter 5)

Tremeur is Arkandale Town's City Watch commander, a native of Fylfot. He is honest and zealous - too much so for the job, maybe.

Adventure Hook: Tremeur is investigating the murder of a wealthy shareholder of the Musarde River Company; as he is getting pressure to close the case quickly, he intends to task the adventurers with investigating in his stead.

Noah Timothy

(NG Young Adult Male Human Greater Werewolf Barbarian 13)

The Champion of Mother Moon, he is the son of Alfred Timothy and Elaria Brightfur, and believes in peaceful coexistence between Humans and Werewolves, between Werewolves and other Werebeasts, and between Civilization and Nature. Noah does not resent his father nor his grandfather for their sins; instead he is a firm believer in the idea of offering them a chance for redemption. When all attempts for a peaceful resolution have been made and have failed, then he turns into his 10 feet tall, white- and gold-furred hybrid form, and allows the Lady's righteous fury to be unleashed on her enemies. His own burden is also his strength: a merciful heart; not even when the righteous fury possesses him will he finish off a sentient being, no matter how dangerous they are.

Adventure Hook: During their first night in the forest, the adventurers are attacked by a pack of wolves. A white- and gold-furred direwolf saves their life and starts to follow them from a distance; with time they will learn that their faithful companion is something more.)

Yellowfang Sisters

(Amanda Yellowfang, N Young Adult Female Human Werewolf, Expert 3, and Caroline Yellowfang N Adult Female Human Werewolf Expert 4)

The Yellowfang sisters are the bartenders at the Gorging Wolf Inn, the most frequented Inn in Ludlow. They are not widely acknowledged as Werewolves, and they prefer to keep it this way.

Adventure Hook: Amanda Yellowfang is kidnapped, and her sister pays the adventurers to rescue her, but she tries to prevent them from uncovering their little furred secret.



"Madskinner" Lyle Harks

(NE Adult Male Human Skinchanger Hunter 7)

Lyle "Madskinner " Harks was once a member of the Woodcutter's Axe, but today he is a poacher, a serial killer of both humans and werewolves, and a rapist. Thanks to his many crimes, the Mists gifted him with the ability to steal the appearance of people and animals he kills; he is, however cursed with a strong bloodlust which, if not sated at least once a week, turns him into the last predator he killed until he quenches the thirst. He is Verbrek's public enemy number one, with a bounty of 10,000 Golden Fangs, dead or alive.

Adventure Hook: a man matching Madskinner's description has been spotted in Flyfot; a manhunt patrol has been organized by the Alderman. The adventurers have been invited to join.

Mathias Frand

(CN Middle-aged Male Human Werewolf Ranger (Tamer) 3)

Frand is the owner of the Pit, a casino on the banks of the Arden, in Tricco. His activity includes an arena of fighting dogs, fighting humans, and fighting werebeasts; while greedy, Mathias is far less malicious than he used to be in his prime, and he tries to avoid useless deaths.

Adventure Hook: Someone has stolen the prized champion Hound from Frand's kennel; the aged Werewolf wants it back and he pays very well.

Noella Marshfold

(LG Adult Human Paladin (Holy Liberator (see below)) of Mother Moon 4/Ranger 6))

A former follower of Ezra, Noella converted to the Cult of Mother Moon after she was almost killed by cultists of Fenris, and saved by Noah Timothy. She joined the

Woodcutter's Axe and swiftly became its unofficial leader.

Adventure Hook: when the village the adventurers currently reside in is attacked by Fenris' Fangs, Noella come to investigate.

Organizations

The Musarde River Company

This LE Trading Company is the owner of 74% of Verbrek's land; The Timothy Clan and Arkandale's Pack's leader Captain Nathan Timothy is the majority share-holder of the company, its Chairman, and the de facto solo candidate in every Verbrek Free State's Executive Council Presidency election (since the company has the majority of the seats in Verbrek General Congress, the legislative Assembly). The Musarde River Company employs a squad of 300 Werewolf thugs, the River Boyz (Human Werewolf Warriors 4) commanded by 6 Werewolf Betas (Human Werewolf fighters 7), usually orphans taken in by Captain Timothy. The organization can also afford the services of bounty hunters, poisoners, mercenaries, and elite crafters.

Dread Possibility: The River Boyz are all orphans; their parents died before they could remember; but how did they die? Captain Timothy killed them; if he can't trust his children, he will have children not of his blood to rely on. But some of the Boyz's parents did escape from Nathan's fang and they are still looking for their children.

The Woodcutter's Axe

This CG secret society, whose members are recognizable by the silver axe tattoo they bear on their chests, works to protect Verbrek citizens from evil Werebeasts, and from the Cult of Fenris. It has no official structure, and any member can induct



another; the Axes have three duties: mutual assistance, protection of the weak, and killing of evil werebeasts and their allies; their unofficial leader is Noella Marshfold.

Dread Possibility: The Bloody Axe is an extremist fringe of the brotherhood, whose goal is the extinction of werebeasts, no matter their behavior. Their members sport a second, red axe tattoo on the interior of their legs. They are currently helping in hiding Lyle "Madskinner" Harks.

The Darklord : Nathan Timothy

LE Middle-Aged Medium Humanoid

(Shapechanger) Rogue(Rake)

Hit Dice: 14 (128/146 HP)

Speed: 20

Initiative: +7/+9 (+8/+10 on the Virago)

Armor Class: 22/26 (+4/+6 Dex, +8 Armor, -/+2 Natural Armor) (+2 Deflection on the Virago)

Space/Reach: 1 square /1 square

Combat Maneuver Defense/Combat

Maneuver Bonus: 28 (32 vs Trip)/+17(+21 Trip)//32 (36 vs Trip)/+19 (+23 Trip) (+2 on the Virago)

Str: 13/17, **Dex:** 18/22, **Con:** 14/16, **Int:** 17,

Wis: 14, **Cha:** 16.

Saving Throws: Fort: +9/+10, Ref: +15/+17, Will :+8 (+2 on The Virago)

Special Qualities: Shapeshifter Traits, DR 5/Silver and Magic, SR 28, Invisibility Field, Mastery 2. Sinkhole of Evil 2, Evasion, Alternate Form (Wolf or Hybrid), Alpha, Howling (Calling, 6 miles, 1d8 round, call 3d6 of Werewolves of the River Boyz), Scent, Lowlight Vison, Bravado's Bade, Rake's Smile (+4), Improved Uncanny Dodge, Uncanny Dodge, Rogue Talents [Another Day, Befuddling Strike, Charmer (2/day), Honeyed Words (2/day), Redirect Attack, Skill Mastery (Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Perception, Sense Motive, Swim), Surprise Attack]; Curse of the Darklord, Regeneration 5 (on the Virago), Control Virago.

Special Attacks: Sneak Attack (+7d6), Disease (Lychantropy, only with Bite Attack) (DC 22 Fort Negates), Howling (Fear) (Frightened 1d6 round, Will Negate, DC 22, 24 on the Virago)

Attack: Melee: +3 Dagger +21/+16/+11 (1d4+4) (+2 Hit Rolls and damage Rolls in Hybrid form, +2 on The Virago),

Ranged: +3 Hand crossbow +21/+16/+11 (1d6+3) (+2 Hit rolls in Hybrid form, +2 on HR and DR on the Virago). In Hybrid form he also has a natural attack, Bite + 17 (1d6+3+Desease Fort Negates DC 22).

Skills: Bluff (+27), Diplomacy (+27) Intimidate (+31), Perception (+34), Sense Motive (+26), Swim (+25), Profession (Sailor) (+26).

Feats: Combat Expertise, Weapon Focus (Crossbows), Weapon Focus (Light Blades), Greater Improved Feint, Greater Improved Trip, Improved Feint, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Weapon Finesse, Iron Will.

Challenge Rating: 18

Proprieties: +3 Hand Crossbow, 20 Quarrels, +3 Dagger; Key to the Engine Room of the Virago.

Background

The son of moderate, conservative Werewolf Alpha Eowin Timothy, whose greatest concession to integrationism was marrying a human woman, Emily Gerhardt, Nathan's werewolf nature stayed latent, making him an outcast in his own community. At sixteen, he left his village in the forest, and decided to integrate himself with the human community, in the capital, Arkandale Town. Back then, he was blissfully unaware of the legacy of the Timothy clan, and of the brothers Cain and Abel Timothy, his many times great-Grandfather and many times great-Greatuncle, respectively.; Cain Timothy VI, Nathan's Grandfather was the first Werewolf to fight alongside humans during the Invidian Invasion. While his sister Irene took over the mantle of bridge between



human and werewolves from their Grandfather, Nathan worked hard to thrive in the human world, and, starting as an humble sailor, he became a successful businessman. However, belonging to such a notorious werewolf family, Nathan was shunned by many in the human elite; his seething resentment for his werewolf family grew stronger; plus, he started to develop an unhealthy fascination with gambling. However, in spite of these problems, he managed to hit the bigtime, entering into society with a progressive trade leader and landowner called Jacob Lee. At the age of 26, he met Annabelle Lee, 20 years old, and fell in love with her, and with the flagship of Lee's fleet, the Virago. He managed to woo her and got her hand in marriage from the ailing Jacob; Nathan's sister took part to the celebration, bringing him the clan's felicitations. Wishing to reconcile with the Werewolf side of his family, he decided to celebrate the marriage on the night of full moon. It was in the moment he kissed Annabelle, that, under the bright eye of the Lady, he started to turn, for the first time. Jacob quickly fell victim to Nathan jaws. Only his sister's swift action prevented a worse tragedy from happening, but Annabelle was understandably shocked by this turn of the events and stricken with grief for her father's death. Thinking she would surely file for divorce, he blamed his sister and the werewolves for his plight, and with a cold-blooded fury, he poisoned them with aconitum, and then killed them, skinning his own sister alive with a silver dagger. In truth, Annabelle was not going to leave him, because, with Irene's counsel, she had found the strength to forgive her husband for something he could not control. But that changed when Annabelle discovered what he had done willingly; they were alone on the Virago, when she found the horribly disfigured corpse of Irene. She tried to

escape, but fell in the water and was mangled by the Virago's paddlewheel; He could have saved her, but doing that would have meant losing the money, the Virago, and all the things he had always wished for. He decided that his greed counted more than his love for her, and thus sealed his fate as the mists crowned him as new Darklord of Verbrek.

Current Sketches

Using his dead family connections, Nathan took control of the Musarde River Company, and through that, of Arkandale; he appealed to the most ambitions of the Sheepskinner werewolves clan and quickly extended his influence in all of the Free State. He is the richest man in Verbrek and one of the richest in the Core, he has married again and had several sons and daughters; all of them, as part of his curse, revolted against him. His primary concern is to extend his control on the totality of Verbrek; the other one is to satisfy his greed and his compulsive gambling. Nathan Timothy conducts himself as a proper gentleman, but under the façade, a predator lurks, ready to tear apart any opposition.



Combat

Nathan usually pays people to do his dirty work for him, but, sometime, circumstances force him onto the field; when it happens, he concentrates on the stronger opponents, trying to demoralize them. He assumes wolf or hybrid form only if forced to. In wolf form he is as black furred as he is black-hearted.

Special Abilities

Howling (Su) Only in Wolf or Hybrid Form, Standard Action, effects: Calling or Fear (See Special qualities and Special Attacks).

Control Virago (Su) Nathan Timothy can move, fuel, and repair the Virago with a move action.

Curse of the Dark Lord: Nathan's Curse is threefold: 1) He can never win in any gambling he does if he does not gamble the Virago itself, which he is always loathe to do; 2) He wishes for stable mates, which invariably leads to children who will rebel against him, and ultimately the suicide of those mates; 3) each time he leaves the Virago (going more than 600 feet away from it) he is forced into his Hybrid form; should he go more than 3600 away, he will be forced in his wolf form instead. He utterly dreads this circumstance, but to keep his business going, he is often forced to do so.

Lair

The Virago is the paddlewheel boat and the primary home of Captain Timothy; He keeps a skeleton crew of ten River Boyz on it, but he can control it at will. The Virago is a rank 2 Sinkhole of Evil, which can bestow the Rage and Despair condition (DC 21 Will negates).

Holy Liberator Paladin Archetype

Alignment must be Chaotic Good, Substitute Knowledge (Nobility) with Bluff as a class ability.

Holy Liberator Code: The Holy Liberator must fight oppression and defend freedom; she must oppose authority every time this authority does not have the approval of the people, as long the people are not manipulated in any sense against a just authority; she must refuse bindings and obligations, while not hurting innocents. She must work with lawful people only as long it is necessary for her cause. This replaces the Paladin Code.

Level 3: Resolve: The Paladin is immune to Charm Spells and spell-like abilities This replaces Aura of Courage.

Level 5: Holy Ally: the Paladin can invoke an Holy Ally similar to a Druid's Animal Ally, but with the celestial template and the intelligence of the Paladin's Mount. This replaces the Mount Holy Bond.

Level 11: Righteousness: A Paladin is immune to Compulsion Spells and Spell-like abilities. This replaces Aura of Justice.

Spell List: Replace Zone of Truth with Invisibility at 2nd level, and Mark of Justice with Freedom of Movement at 4th level.

Closing the Border

If someone tries to cross the closed borders of Verbrek, they are attacked by 3d6 Wolves + 1d4 Werewolves, +3 Wolves every Round they advance; People can, theoretically, force through the borders, fighting off the wolves and Weres, or escaping from them. Nathan can close the border up to a maximum of two days, every week.



THE CONFERENCES OF VICTOR GAGNÉ

Part the Second: The Wormbringer

by Benjamin Bauml

Many years ago, when I attended the University of Dementlieu, I came to know a bright young scholar by the name of Nikolai Kazić. He greatly desired to travel the world, so he primarily studied history in order to familiarize himself with the development of foreign cultures. He and I were good friends; we debated academic topics, divulged details of our personal lives to one another, and even got away with a few childish pranks that embarrassed the most stodgy of our professors.

Sadly, something changed. One day, Nikolai seemed particularly bitter, and he wouldn't tell me what was the matter. He became withdrawn and obsessive to the point where I scarcely saw him, despite my most valiant attempts. Eventually, he simply vanished. An investigation was launched, but neither hide nor hair was turned up.

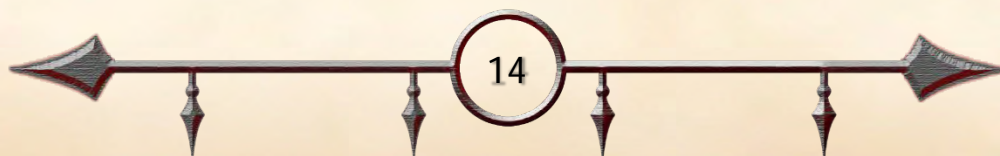
In the aftermath, I traveled to Levkarest and broke the news to his parents. Needless to say, they were incomparably heartbroken—the loss of a child brings a pain no parent should have to bear. Seeing their grief struck me, and the fear of their suffering, which I carry to this day, has prevented me from having children. It was horrid enough to lose my comrade.

Early on in the time which intervened between then and now, I had known myself

to put forth explanations of why Nikolai disappeared. Even the most irrational of them did not approach the truth, not that I expected to ever learn it.

As misfortune would have it, the very night I fled from Qualensturm was the night I found the answers I had been sure were lost to me. As I said, I emerged from the wood out of sight of civilization, with naught but a campfire in view. Scrambling and tumbling with what little energy I had left, I hastened to that small sign of life, normality, and sanity. Thinking back, I realize with no small amount of irony that none of these awaited me.

As I drew nearer to the light, details came into view that had been obscured by distance. A sturdy, closed carriage of oak, hitched to a large, dark draft horse—perhaps one of the Vaasi Jernryge, but I am not an expert in the finer points of equine breeding—stood off the left side of the road. By the edge, defiant tongues of flame writhed in the detritus of wood. A lone man, clothed in drab traveling attire, sat with crossed legs by the fire, his neck craned to set his gaze firmly in his lap. Closer still I came, and I saw a foot-long churchwarden pipe bridging the gap from his left hand to his mouth. His other hand turned pages in a



heavy-looking book that sat in the cradle of his legs. In that moment, I supposed he was skimming its contents, for he was flipping through at a rate no human could read.

When I entered the nebulous edge of the controlled blaze's glow, he looked up at me with eyes the same dark brown as his clothing. No concern or surprise escaped his visage; if eyes are indeed the windows to the soul, his was unfathomably deep within. Patiently, silently, he took in and expelled smoke with rhythmic precision as he waited upon my next move. His lips sealed tight on the inhale, but they flared wide enough on each exhale that I could see his small, orderly teeth clamped down on his pipe. Just before I launched into a gale of babbling, I took note of the fact that his forehead was unbranded.

I think I was trying to warn him about the spectral horror I had left behind. Perhaps I was just explaining that I wasn't dangerous, only lost. Or maybe I endeavored to interrogate him as to whether he meant me harm. More than likely, I believe I tried to do all three at the same time. For the first span of those awkward moments, he registered no change in expression. I stumbled closer as I kept up my deluge of mad locution, and his eyes widened slightly. He drew the clay pipe out of its resting place, and I observed that its end was jagged and cracked. Distressed though I was, I suddenly realized that it had probably been significantly longer, but his tight jaw had worn at it for a long time. His break from pattern caused me to trail off, and in the silence, he began to speak Mordentish.

"You're ..."

Then he jammed his pipe back in place with an audible, clicking crunch. His free hand levered the book shut and deposited it on the ground as he got his feet underneath

him. In spite of his swift concealment of the tome, I glimpsed its blackened cover of parched, split leather and felt a glimmer of the unease I had become acquainted to in Untenturm. The man rose and closed the distance between us. Whatever he smoked had the aroma of fenugreek, but with something acrid in the background. He came to my left and used his right arm to guide me to the fireside, wordlessly continuing to puff forth that sweet smoke with something vile hidden inside.

After getting me to sit, he walked to the carriage, stooping to collect the book on his way. He vanished into the vehicle's interior, leaving me a few moments to collect myself. The fire was a comfort against the chill of the night, and I even began to feel safe and calm. The horse lazily turned to look me over, its dull gaze disturbingly reminiscent of Qualensturm's servitors. It was a look I only saw in sedated beasts.

As its detached scrutiny passed from me, the man emerged, a wooden bowl with a spoon sticking over its edge in one hand, and a wineskin sharing the other with his pipe. He sat on my left and passed me the bowl, which brimmed with a stew of root vegetables and red meat. The wineskin stayed on the earth to his left, beyond my reach, and he presently resumed his fuming as I gratefully, albeit slightly uneasily, began consuming the succulent fare. He simply watched for a short while, lips closed as he pulled smoke in and parted as he expelled it, then he released his dental death-grip on his pipe and asked, "What is your name?"

I gulped down the mouthful I had been working on, and replied, "I am Victor Gagné, citizen of Mordent. I—" An abrupt crack from his pipe startled me into silence, as the staccato report came from the bowl in his white-knuckled fist.



As the tortured mouthpiece of the churchwarden slid back toward its home, he interjected another query, "Why are you on the Scythe Road?"

Attempting to collect myself, I inhaled deeply with the intention of slowly exhaling, but the smoke in the air around me turned my relaxation technique into a disappointing dry cough. Eventually, I got my lungs under control and elaborated, "I was invited to Falkovnia by an alchemist, however he turned out to be a spectre which could wear a man's face. I have only just escaped from his execrable domicile."

With a sharp pull, the pipe grated out from between his teeth. A look of slight concern played across his visage. "Was this place nearby?" he said as he tapped the ashes out of his pipe and stowed it in his clothes. "It may not be safe to linger here."

My brow furrowed as I thought on the matter. "I traveled north from Silbervas for an hour before I found that place, and I am exhausted almost to death after my flight. I expect we are comfortably removed from it."

"An hour north from Silbervas ..." the man repeated contemplatively as his cavernous pupils strayed out of focus. Together, they looked through me at first, then his left eye deviated from their united fettle. I had started to feed myself again, but the spoon slowed to a stop before it reached my mouth. Strange looks were becoming far too prevalent of late.

Suddenly, the focus returned to his gaze, then his eyes slid back into kilter. There was a deliberateness to the motion that made his correction seem more conscious than automatic. Casting his sight to his left, he spotted the wineskin and finally passed it to me before rising one more time. "I daresay you need a better rest than I do, so I will make the inside of my carriage habitable for

the evening. You can sleep there, and I will stay out here."

"I am most thankful," I replied, then I took a good swig from the wineskin as he turned on his heel and went back to his mobile residence. The concoction was some sort of mead, and it had an eerily familiar flavor to it. Thinking back, I now remember where it came from, a small Borcan brewery with beehives on its roof. Whenever a term began at the University and the few students who took the liberty of visiting their relatives were called back, I would be given a bottle of the stuff, and it would be gone within the week. Never had I actually been to the establishment that produced it, though I had heard it was a unique and curious place. I saw it on my only trip to Borca long ago, and I could not bear to enter with the memories weighing so heavily on my mind.

For this reason, though I did not know at the time, the fine mead from that wineskin made me slightly melancholy. My now somber repast continued for several minutes, with almost nary more than the fire to occupy my eyes. Occasionally, my benefactor would lean out of his carriage long enough to dump out some container, alternately dusting the ground with dregs of powders or staining it with murky fluids. A few I recognized as compounds that should be handled with greater care, and no small amount of alarm arose when a greasy liquid that had been spilled over some crumbling, dry mushrooms gave rise to a blue vapor. Before I could swallow and call out, he smothered the reaction with a dash of ochre sand. He seemed to know what he was doing, but he evinced little regard for the long-term consequences of leaving a mess of reagents in the environment.

After perhaps a score of careless disposals, he came forth from his dwelling with a bedroll under his arm and returned



to the fireside. He began to spread the cloth bundle out next to the dwindling flame, addressing me concurrently. "You may go in now. Be respectful of my possessions and privacy."

"Again, you have my gratitude," said I, and I stood with my now empty bowl and half-empty wineskin and walked to the carriage. Its iron-banded door stood open, but it was not inviting. Rather, somewhere deep inside of me, I felt as though that door waited to snap shut like a rat trap, and though I would be safe within from that which is without, I would never leave the coming confines. I shrugged this off as residual paranoia and claustrophobia from my short stint in Untenturm, then mounted the back step.

The interior of the carriage—visible in the glow of a single lantern hanging from the middle of the ceiling—was claustrophobically compact. It couldn't be very big in any case, given that it was meant to be pulled by one horse, but the austere furnishings choked its space further. Metal shelves stood out like ribs on the walls. They were made shallow to be slightly less intrusive, so thin chains with hooked ends were lashed across bottles and jars that otherwise would have teetered precariously upon their perches. The end of the vehicle opposite the door was dominated by a stomach-height, wooden worktable with its top surface plated in brass. The back of this table was packed with a row of thick tomes, the black book among them near the left end.

Stretching from beneath the workbench to my feet at the door was a plump bedroll. It seemed new and unused, which struck me as quite odd. The roll he had taken outside for himself had been far thinner and more ragged. Was this a replacement? Did he plan to use the other one to exhaustion before he moved on? The way he used his

pipe, this was not altogether unlikely, but it still appeared an unusual practice.

Ultimately, exhaustion won out over suspicion, so I began the process of situating myself. First, I looked around for a place to stow the bowl and wineskin. There was not much in the way of free shelf space, and I did not feel like braving the chain web to secure them. The tabletop was the best of my options. Using a mild cantrip, I sanitized the bowl, then I placed the wineskin in it and set both before the black book. It was as though I thought whatever was within could be held at bay by barricading it behind food paraphernalia. I then removed my outer layers of clothing and continued to apply my magic to the effort of making my clothes clean. Soon, I felt ready to rest—until I remembered what else I had failed to do recently.

Stepping out of the carriage after garbing myself more completely, I glimpsed my host sitting at the fireside. His back was turned to the blaze, and he looked out into the forest on the far side of the road as the smoke of his pipe billowed about his head. The utter lack of motion he demonstrated made him look like a stylized furnace rather than a man. I elected to avoid bothering him as I slipped into the privacy of the treeline for a few minutes.

When all was taken care of and I had returned to the carriage, I stood at the tips of my toes and gave a sharp blow to the lantern, plunging all into darkness. Gingerly, I got on all fours while keeping my head clear of the workbench. Once I was sure I was safe, I turned over and lay back, causing my cranial vault to thump hollowly against the wall. As I massaged the ache and adjusted myself toward the door, I supposed the emptiness which I had caused to reverberate was the space beneath the driver's seat. The pain faded soon enough, and I was able to drift off in short order,



entering the mysterious, primeval vales that linger beyond the mercurial veil of the subconscious.

I was running. Running through the forest with the abandon of the terrified. At the back of my heels, upon my shoulders, on the nape of my neck, I could intermittently feel an attempt at a gelid grasp. I knew it too well, though I had felt it only once before. Knotted roots made me stumble. The Voice, the Voice of steel upon stone, called from the nadir of my mind. I heard it as I precariously kept upon my feet. *Stop hiding.* The chill of the night faded from my senses as the icy fingers of the Voice slashed at me. *Do not make this difficult, Victor.* Charging headlong, a break in the trees came into view. I veered toward it, and the Voice followed. *I see it too, Victor. You cannot get away that easily.* My run broke for a second when a low branch clipped my upper arm. *My stride never falters.* Nearer the break came, not as fast as it should have. *Can you feel the futility, Victor?* I could have reached it twice in the time that passed, yet it remained distant. The prickles of his cold hands slid over the back of my skull. *Not ahead for long.* I pushed, and the forest edge came within a few steps of me. *Look familiar?* I burst through, leaping onto a road. Looking up and down its length, I saw that it crumbled and vanished into the wilderness at its ends. Only then did I notice what lay directly before me. *You do not leave, Victor, you only return.* A burned-out campfire stood before a dilapidated carriage. *Are you not going to welcome me?* My feet skidded across the dirt as my static body spun and rushed to the carriage. Vision blurred as I impacted and was held fast, then he came into view. *Rather impolite.* Across the road, the fleshless wraith was suspended in midair: Qualensturm. His perpetual grin

taunted me from behind his wiry spectacles. *No one leaves Untenturm. Not against my will.* I looked to my right—the end of the road. *Indeed it is, Victor.* My gaze turned to the left. Miraculously, the road now stretched beyond the limits of my sight, though it had gone back to the underbrush only moments before. A figure clad in ragged hides stood in the middle, his face aimed away from the scene of my terror. A stitched skin cowl removed all distinction from his head, but it turned as though he were trying to listen to the silent menace of my assailant. The figure rotated on his heel and began to approach. Under his hood, his face was concealed behind a cracking mask of stretched leather, with only unrevealing slits over the presumable locations of his eyes, nose, and mouth. *What are you gawking at, Victor?* I returned my focus to Qualensturm, who in turn set the intent of his hateful eye-sparks upon the interloper. *This one is mine, worm. Leave us be.* The well-wrapped stranger raised its thick-gloved hands toward Qualensturm, and streaking bolts of energy leapt from his twitching fingertips to punch holes in the spiteful spectre. The spirit's Voice howled with pain and rage, then he gathered his focus. Winds screamed about him, and suddenly Qualensturm's assailant began to jerk and convulse, as though some unseen pugilist were returning the attacker's earlier favor. Once the assault came to an end, the Man of Hides lifted his arms back into position. *I will break your mortal shell under the heel of my intellect!* Again did force fly from the hands of the Hide Man, but this time the missiles came in the shape of fanged jaws that tore incessantly at Qualensturm. *No! Let me go! LET ME GO!* Red light seeped from his bones and gathered about him, taking the shape of some horrid fiend, and some unseen agency knocked the Man of Hides to the ground



and wrestled his arms to his sides. *You fight a losing battle, worm!* Unable to gesture forth his sorcery, the Hide Man began to emit a hissing whisper, and from the oral slit of his mask came even larger force bolts. Even as the disembodied jaws gnashed and rent at Qualensturm, these new weapons struck him with explosive force. With each hit, he shrieked and wailed, his ghostly body shuddering and fading out. *NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO...* The final blow tore his form asunder, leaving nothing but ectoplasmic wisps that fled back into the forest. By this time, I had quite forgotten my own existence, but my sight shifted toward the Man of Hides. Now released, he rose to his feet and looked at me. With one hand, he reached to peel back his mask. Instead of completing the action, however, he collapsed into a pile of tanner's scraps. Self-awareness returned to me as my breath caught, and I stared at the refuse transfixed. My lungs jerked back into action as something stirred among the hides, and my breathing became more laborious with apprehension. I felt stifled, paralyzed. I tried to squirm, and though Qualensturm ceased to hold me, I could not move. Panic rose, wracking itself into a hideous crescendo—then I awoke.

Wheezing and self-humidified by the dread of my dream, I came to blurry cognizance and sat bolt upright—halted by the underside of the workbench. I lay curled into a ball, clutching my head for several minutes, the dream banished to the back of my mind by the pain.

As the throbbing subsided, I became more acutely aware of a tightness in my chest. Every breath I took was somewhat shallow, as though there was not enough room for my lungs to expand all the way. I thought perhaps that it was a manner of effusion—any number of materials kept by

an alchemist or wizard could cause the buildup of fluid, and I had slept in the confines of a minor cache. I had cured a few such illnesses before, but when reagents were at play, I knew better than to act uninformed. I needed to know what I had been exposed to. My torso heaving uncomfortably, I delicately rose to my feet and made my egress from the carriage.

Outside, the early morning scene had changed little from the night before. The dazed horse lolled its head over to glance at me as I surveyed the now dead coals and the stock-still back of my host. His bedding was unrolled and unoccupied by his side, and his head bowed forward, as though he simply fell asleep sitting up.

I called out moderately as I approached him, partially to ease him out of slumber, and partially because I did not have the air to speak much louder. He did not react by the moment I came to stand right behind him, so I gripped him by the shoulder and attempted to jostle him awake.

To my horror, he fell back upon my shins and stared up at me with a face more dull than that of the horse. The stench of blood, previously barely concealed behind the lasting stink of his clinging pipe smoke, now came to my attention as my eyes locked upon the gaping wound that laid bare his abdominal cavity. I backed away, tangled my feet together as I stumbled over the remains of the campfire, and landed hard on my back. What little wind I had was knocked from me, and all I could think to do was to roll to one side and pull my feet from the ashes. Outwardly, I am sure it looked identical to my morning posture that followed my knock to the head, but this had the additional effect of keeping my shoes out of whatever warm core may well have sat among the bones of the fire.

Slowly, a few sobbing breaths came back to me, and I got to my hands and knees.



Not yet ready to assume a standing posture, I crawled back to the side of the corpse. Bile rose in the back of my throat, but I choked it back to get a gulp of air. Though his cause of death was likely right before my eyes, I needed to examine him.

I sat on my haunches and proceeded to unbutton his shirt, then I peeled it back to survey his torso. He was strikingly thin, with his ribs protruding almost akin to the shelves in his carriage, but what truly captured my attention was the panoply of bruises that marred him. He looked as though he had been on the losing side of brutal fisticuffs with a gang of thugs. The imagery of my dream returned to me—the sight of the Hide Man being battered by Qualensturm’s rage—and then a voice broke into my thoughts—the Voice that sounded like a blade against a whetstone:

That was much less a dream than you thought it to be, Victor.

Surprised, and still lacking enough coordination to rise up, I awkwardly scabbled backward with my chest to the sky, my head whipping back and forth to scan for the fossilized presence of Qualensturm. Suddenly, a stabbing pain carved its way across my shoulder, and I went down for the third time that day.

I told you that you would never escape, that no one leaves Untenturm. The Voice cackled, and that is when it broke into a new form. Instead of a grinding malice, it became a kaleidoscope of piecemeal sights, sounds, and other sensations. Under the chaos, a deep voice—a voice even less human than the Voice of Qualensturm—hummed forth a continuation of its train of thought. ***Credulous vermin. The dream and the welts are my doing alone.***

Disoriented with fear and confusion, I endeavored to pull myself in the direction of the carriage, but I ended up inching at an angle that pointed squarely at the treeline.

The horse continued to watch me sedately, registering no concern at my antics.

Trying to think a question back at the voice won me another jolt of pain, this time in the right side of my abdomen, causing me to forsake my movements. Apparitions of gnashing teeth, accompanied by guttural roars and the taste of a monster’s breath in my face played over the angered voice.

Don’t think to me. If I want something out of your head, I’ll take it. I can barely stand to hear humans talk anymore. But your voice is one I have not heard in a long time. Let me make using it a little easier on you.

At that, I had the grotesque feeling of something moving inside me, making more room for my lungs to draw in air. As I gasped down a deeper breath, I came to the disturbing revelation of my predicament: at that very moment, some unnatural creature had physically taken up residence in my body. I took a few more breaths as flickering images of dark, windswept wastelands danced in the back of my head, augmented with the sound of whispered utterances and the feeling of fur and scales under my fingers. The inhabitant shifted again, and I sensed it was getting impatient. Hauling myself into a seated position, I took a shuddering gulp of air and spoke. My voice was cracked and tentative, as I feared more torment. “What are you? What do you want?”

I could feel it squirm as it considered its response. ***I am a traveler, and I want you to escort me on my errands. After all, we must catch up after all these years.***

My brow furrowed as I tried to imagine how this thing seemed to know me. As a parasite, it seemed possible that I could have been in its presence without knowing, but there was no way to narrow down the number of people it could have infested.



Trying to identify me? The voice resounded beneath familiar snippets of conversation and locales, fragments of experiences that my unwelcome passenger and I both seemed to share. ***Don't you remember our time at the University? Don't you remember Nikolai?***

My psyche reeled from this impugment of my old friend's memory. The thought that a being this cruel could have violated Nikolai so was beyond abhorrent. "No," I said. "You lie. You are stealing my memories and using them to torture me."

The voice chuckled under flickers of Nikolai's face and the wafting scent of decay. ***Believe what you want.*** The flow of thoughts began to recede, and visions of impalement groves and the touch of blood-dampened wood slid into focus even as they faded away. ***We are going north to Lekar. Clean up and shove off.*** At that, the roiling transmissions left my mind.

I sat there for several minutes, too offended by the circumstances to muster any will. When I finally managed to take action, that action was to weep. The abomination within me did not interrupt. I suppose it took some diseased glee from it all.

Eventually, I found my resolve and set about erasing the campsite. This may sound like submission, but I prefer to think of it more pragmatically. I did not know what this monstrosity was, nor did I have any idea of how to be rid of it, but I did know things that gave me a form of grim hope: It was arrogant, and it was keeping me alive. Perhaps it needed to preserve me, and perhaps it did not, but regardless, it sought to harrow me for its amusement. To me, this seemed like a recipe for its downfall, as it had left plenty of time to make a mistake, to tell me too much. I knew it could read my mind, but if human thoughts were as distasteful to it as it implied, then I had a

chance of catching it by surprise. Until the moment came, I could only bide my time.

Clearing away the campfire was simple enough, but deciding how to deal with the body was a slight conundrum. Burying it deep would take quite a while, and I certainly did not want to be caught in the act by the Falkovnian military. However, I couldn't stomach burning it to a cinder with magic. Eventually, I settled on conjuring a small pack of wolves out of the woods. They dragged it away, and I am certain they made good use of it.

Though I had no bond with the horse, it was extremely obliging, setting off to the north at the lightest flick of the reins. I suspected that the influence of my invasive rider was what made the creature so strangely docile.

With every breath I took, I could still feel the creature within, pressing on my organs. I wrestled with the temptation to address it, to ask about Nikolai. I knew I could not trust it, yet the mystery that had nagged at my soul for so long demanded that I investigate. I desperately wanted to hear an answer, but how could I expect anything but agony? Truth was not the monster's obligation.

After at least an hour of travel—during which I had been regarded with suspicion by a few passing merchants, a mounted courier, and three lepers begging on the roadside—I broke my silence. "How did you come to know Nikolai?"

The rustling of pages and the smell of must preceded the voice in my mind. ***Nikolai wanted the same thing I want now: to leave this world. Once he found out that he could not, he asked my master for help. I was sent to assist him.*** The thing writhed, and I forced myself to hold down what remained of my evening meal. Fog banks took form in my



mind's eye, and a distorted argument rang in my ears. ***His plan got me stuck in this place. All of this—my plight and yours—is his fault.*** The external thoughts stuttered into the shape and sound of armored men. ***Pay attention. A team of men is coming around the next bend. I suspect a troop of soldiers.***

Indeed, as I returned my attention to the world around me, I heard armored boots becoming audible even as the noises and simulacra surrounding the evil voice slunk out of my brain. Through the screening trees, I could see hints of scale armor and brown tabards, and soon enough a squad of six soldiers was led into view by a tall, scowling officer with a long white scar in place of a left eyebrow. Spotting me, he appraised me with a cold glare, then pointed at me with a three-fingered hand, yelling first in Falkovnian, then in Balok, and finally in Mordentish: ***"Papiere! Scripte! Papers!"***

Pulling the horse to a stop and looping the reins around my wrist, I scrambled for my travel papers, the ones Qualensturm gave me before the outset of this terrible voyage. Once I found them, I undid the leather ties and handed them over with an ***"Absolutely, sir."***

He inspected them with a furrowed brow, not registering the normal aversion that had come with the papers before. Suddenly, his eyes widened, and he cast the bundle of pages to the ground. There, I saw the ink running and making patterns, turning into a swirling skull—Qualensturm's protection withdrawn. Baring his longsword and stepping back, the officer hollered, ***"Steig ab! Get down!"***

Fright and uncertainty dancing through my mind, I climbed down from the driver's seat. Whether I would be arrested or simply cut down right there, I did not know.

The officer kept me at the point of his sword, then issued orders to his subordinates. ***"Fang der Überprüfung an! Mach voran!"*** They split into two lines of three men and made their way down the sides of the carriage.

I shivered with terror, frozen before the iron-eyed man before me. I doubted they could identify any of the compounds on the shelves, nor even necessarily read the books therein, but I fully expected them to assume the worst, burn the carriage, then drag me behind my borrowed horse all the way to the Central Prison in Lekar.

As this brutal vision of the end of my life pranced before my eyes, the phantom of a dark-walled town and the odor of a butcher's shop emerged from the shadowy crevices of my mind. The barest glint of a moment afterward, the voice of the parasite followed. ***Touch your hand to the side of the horse.*** I hesitated, unsure of the purpose and unwilling to move before the livid Falkovnian that was staring me down. ***Touch. The. Horse. NOW!***

Momentarily more afraid of the creature's ire than the steel barely an inch from my throat, I jerked my arm outward and connected with the horse. Simultaneously, I heard a buzzing chant through my bones, vibrating from my chest. Alarmed by my sudden motion, the officer tensed his arm and prepared to drive the sword into me. Just before I could feel the bite of the blade, the world bent around me, and a tunnel of curled light spirited my body, the horse, and the carriage away.

Several tall, dark columns swirled into being from the warped space. Shortly beyond them, muddy colors coalesced into great blobs and a network of spidery lines. A dot of blackness shot out to the sides to form a horizontal band that curled away into the distance. Directly adjacent to me,



the horse—lazily unfazed as always—and the carriage were perfectly clear. As reality unrolled, definition came to each feature of my surroundings. The columns branched and took on a woody appearance, the blobs became more angular and peaked, the lines took on the appearance of a lattice of skeletal totems, and the black band took on a rugged, stony countenance. When the last of the distention receded, fine details came into focus. I realized that I stood in the edge of a forest, on ground covered in patchy grass, but a stone's throw away from fenced fields and farmhouses. Behind it all stood a tall wall of black stone. From the wisps of smoke that curled from the ground beyond, I was reasonably sure I was gazing upon a walled city.

Welcome to the Butcher's Burg. The voice emerged among images of hanging meat, the scent of tanner's supplies, and the nervous lowing of cattle, all sloshing about in my brain. ***What sort of stupid maneuver of yours nearly got my carriage inspected?***

I placed my hands on my knees and took several deep breaths before calming down enough to respond. "My travel papers. They were given to me by Qualensturm. I suppose he decided to cease easing my passage."

Phantasms of buildings packed like crowded teeth and the sounds of urban life danced in my mind. ***We must get back on the road. I traded some time to arrive at Morfenzi, but now Lekar can be avoided. Only Stangengrad stands between me and Darkon.***

"How do you expect me to get about without travel papers?" I queried in a frustrated tone.

Another buzzing incantation arose within me, and the impression of itchiness spread from the center of my forehead, slowly encroached upon my entire face and scalp,

then flowed over my whole body. Looking down, I saw the color run from my clothing, and it reshaped itself into a simpler, dun-colored outfit. I touched the epicenter of the effect and found an irregular patch of raised skin above my eyes. Running my hand through my hair, it felt slightly shorter than I was accustomed to. As the tactile perception faded, the voice broke in again. ***Now that you look live a native, we might just avoid suspicion. If a soldier does ask for your papers, I'll get creative. Don't fret, it will wear off.***

I was still unsatisfied with the situation—to say the least—so I straightened up and persisted with my questioning. "How is it that you don't know Stangengrad or Lekar well enough to teleport there? You have to pass through one or the other to reach Morfenzi on the road."

A disjoint procession of forest scenery and University workrooms marched through my mind before the voice answered. ***Go into the carriage. I want to show you something.*** I moved to acquiesce, and it continued. ***Before I became involved, Nikolai had done plenty of research on his own. He believed that it was possible to leave this world by trading places with a being on another. Not just any being, mind you; it happened naturally when a creature of evil sought to spread its corruption, and overextended itself.*** I mounted the back step as the smell of musty books billowed into my imagination. ***He couldn't wait for it to just happen, so he acquired my help in speeding along the process.*** Now inside, I tentatively stepped over to the workbench with its complement of tomes, lighting the lantern with a magic phrase as I passed. My eyes locked onto the black book, still impotently restrained by the bowl I had set in front of it. ***Under the bench, you will find a loose board in the***



Dread Possibility: The Biding Codex

After Nikolai and his parasitic acquaintance parted ways, another group intent on plumbing the mysteries of the Demiplane arrived from outside the Mists: an octet of keepers (Fiend Folio page 111). Following a pattern known only to them, they began to dissect every aspect of the Domains as best they could, slowly building up a trove of lore.

This relentless inquisition swiftly drove the Dark Powers to engineer the demise of the keepers. After a year spent granting false security, the shrouded masters of the Dread Realms sprung their trap during an examination of a Mistway, scattering the keepers across the plane.

One keeper was deposited in the Valachani town of Hebelnik, bewildered and distressed at being cut off from the minds of its companions. As it got its bearings among the streets at night, it happened upon a local woman. Strangely unperturbed, she brought it back to her house, offering to shelter it. In truth, the woman was inhabited by Nikolai's former colleague, which recognized the keeper for what it was. It knew that keepers never revealed their secrets, so it concocted a scheme to extract them by magical force.

Busy examining maps and books provided by the woman, the keeper failed to notice her weaving a powerful spell. Too oblivious to resist, its body and essence were sealed into an old, black book—the Codex.

With the Codex in hand, a reader may peruse the knowledge of the imprisoned keeper, gaining otherwise inaccessible wisdom about the planes. Bound within, the keeper can only wait until the magic fails or it is released. It believes that its fellows may still be out there, looking for it. Woe to anyone in possession of the Codex should that be true.

forward wall. Stop admiring the Codex and get to it.

Mystified though I was, I did as I was instructed. After I found the right panel, a little jostling got it out of the way, and I realized that a secret, enclosed space existed under the driver's seat. I had found it with my head just a few hours prior, yet I did not attach surreptitious notions to my discovery at the time. I reached in and took hold of something hefty and solid. It was too wide to make it through the gap I made, but I found that this access point allowed me to loosen a couple more boards. Soon, I had prized a small, sturdy chest from the hiding place. ***Allow me to knock that for you.*** The buzzing reverberated through me yet again, and the chest, which had no obvious sealing mechanism, just seemed to sigh, as though it were relaxing after some effort.

Slowly, I pulled it open, and an amber glimmer replaced the fleeing shade of the rising lid. Within, lying on a bed of green velvet just beneath the lip of the chest, were several long crystals, each engraved with a nearly incomprehensible word. I saw them twice—once before me, and once again as flickering precedents to the voice. ***Together, Nikolai and I created the first contact crystal. It was supposed to initiate the connection between a mortal and another being.***

Suddenly, the sensations sent by the voice overwhelmed my actual senses, and I saw Nikolai before me, his black hair and dark brown eyes glaring out of a dour face that I had only seen in the last year before he disappeared. He held out a slim crystal, which I took in a hand that was not mine. ***He couldn't leave his studies for an extended period, and it was not safe to***



Contact Crystal

Price (Item Level): 3,300 gp (8th)

Body Slot: —

Caster Level: 11th

Aura: Moderate (DC 20) Divination

Activation: Standard (Command Word)

Weight: —

This slender, hand-length, translucent crystal bears an unfamiliar word etched along its side.

A contact crystal is a vile device created to initiate fiendish transposition. If a person holding a contact crystal speaks the name of the fiend etched upon it, he or she enters the first stage of transposition with the named fiend. Following successful activation, the crystal shatters.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, interplanar telepathic bond (Spell Compendium page 125), a fiend's name.

Cost to Create: 1,650 gp, 66 XP, 4 days. Crafting this item requires a powers check with a 12% chance of failure.

test the crystal nearby, so I stole the body of a beggar and struck out for Morfenzi. We figured that any ... incidents that arose would be associated with the infamous Morfenzi murders. The smell of dead leaves and the sound of them rustling in the wind manifested as the scene shifted to a walk through an autumnal forest. *I had no papers, so I forged through the Seelewald. I suspect I passed rather near to the home of Qualensturm, based on the estimate you gave.* Once again did I see the farms surrounding Morfenzi, but now a weathered, starved corpse laid at my feet, its belly torn open by a monstrous exit wound. *Upon my arrival, I traded the beggar for a soldier. I had selected a particularly brutal Talon to*

be the test subject, so I needed to use one of his subordinates to get close to him. Then I stood in an office, handing the crystal over to a pockmarked man with metal bracers welded around his arms. Vocalizations that were not mine came out of my throat, telling him I found it on a traveler whose papers were in disarray. I then asked what the word on it meant. *Lower echelon soldiers are only passingly literate, so he believed I was genuinely curious.* The Talon cupped his chin in one hand as he held the crystal in the other, his eyes boring into it. They narrowed, and he mumbled a single word: *Pauthrael.*

The crystal shattered in his hand, raining glittering shards over his desk. *With that, he was bound to the demon. At its goading, he became even more excessive in his savagery.* I saw the Talon flash before my eyes in a plethora of different venues, and in each one, he seemed to take on a physically darker cast. Progressively, his skin turned to pitch. His fingers became claws. Horns peeked from his temples. *It took several weeks for the transformation to set in this far. Ultimately, he was too pained by sunlight to remain in Morfenzi, so he fled to this forest, the Vigilla Dimortia. His blood lust was tremendous, though, so he made a habit of slinking back into the town at night to slake it. Rumors spread, insinuating that this was another Morfenzi murder spree. Surprisingly, those who stepped in to end the Talon's reign of terror were not all soldiers.*

Then I was in the forest, the barest crunch of leaves beneath creeping feet audible ahead of me. I spied several men dodging from tree to tree, pursuing a



shadowy shape. Soon enough, they had it pinned against the side of a towering fir tree. From my vantage point behind a rocky outcropping, I slowly came to recognize the dark, ephemeral monster the men had surrounded as the former Talon, now literally but a shadow of his old self. *They had been gathered by some other mysterious force, another being of shadow. Together, they fought the Talon, and at the height of the conflict, the transposition completed.* I saw the men, standing around and watching as a winged fiend of pure darkness tore into a wingless shadow figure. *Their master seemed ill equipped to fight something like itself, and likely would have been destroyed if Pauthrael had not cut its punishment short with the rising of the sun.*

The visions of the umbral conflict retreated to the back of my mind, and I was able to see the inside of the carriage again. *Anyway, story time is over. Get onto the road.* The depths of my consciousness went quiet, save for the echo of the parasite's dictum.

I knelt in silence for a few minutes, feelings of betrayal washing over me. How could Nikolai have been an accessory to bringing such heinous damnation? How could he have changed so drastically? Blankly staring at the chest with its crystals, my mood shifted to despair. This horror within me was orchestrating something truly awful—something I could not allow to happen.

My resolve regained, I quickly inventoried my assets. They were few, but they presented a slim chance. First and foremost, I remembered what magic I had prepared for the trip into Falkovnia, the majority of which remained unused. Most applicable now was a spell of *sending*,

Exacerbation Manacle

Price (Item Level): 6,000 gp (10th)

Body Slot: Arm

Caster Level: 15th

Aura: Strong (DC 22) Conjunction

Activation: —

Weight: 2 lb.

The surface of this crude iron wristband is writhing with dark runes of calling.

An exacerbation manacle forces the bond between a transposing fiend and its host to deepen at an alarming rate. Every week that a person on the path of transposition spends with an exacerbation manacle on his or her wrist advances the transposition process by a stage. No magic can reverse a transposition when an exacerbation manacle is spurring it on. An active exacerbation manacle is difficult to remove. It clamps down on the arm painfully, and few things can put the barest scratch into it, let alone break it. Severing the extremity might free a person so afflicted, but there are less severe methods. If the manacle is broken by a holy surge weapon (Magic Item Compendium page 36) upon the sanctified altar of a good deity, the victim is free. It would be best to melt down the remains of the manacle in a brazier, then drench the molten metal and glowing embers in holy water, just to be safe. The Dungeon Master may consider other methods, such as those tailored to the incoming fiend.

Afflicting another person with this item is surely an act at least as evil as creating it in the first place, if not far more so.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, greater planar binding.

Cost to Create: 3,000 gp, 120 XP, 6 days.

Crafting this item requires a powers check with a 20% chance of failure



which I had felt to be an important precaution when traveling abroad in a hostile state. In an episode of truly fortuitous foresight, I had readied it to be cast silently—a gesture and some innocuous odds and ends are more easily hidden than speech when under scrutiny. However, I lacked any acquaintances whom I could call upon for aid. Therein lies the importance of my final asset, that which the parasite had so conveniently let slip: the name and appearance of the demon. If the creature residing among my innards thought this world to be a prison, perhaps Pauthrael would be resentful about being brought here. The rough sketch of a plan which formed was hare-brained and likely to end with my death, but it was all I could do to stop my enemy.

The biggest hurdle was the *sending* itself, which would take time to work. The monster stirred impatiently, for I had not moved since it issued orders to me. Gently springing into action, I teased a bit of copper wire out of my pocket with my right hand and began making the arcane signs with my left. Of the myriad ways I could have possibly stalled my gruesome guest, I opted for the least wise way—open defiance.

“Story time is not over!” I said just below the level of a shout. “I am not taking you anywhere until you tell me what became of Nikolai!”

Stillness reigned in my thorax, stillness that menaced like a watching serpent. For an eternal moment, I anticipated a sudden end to the wait. I almost forgot to keep moving my fingers, but I managed to avoid freezing up. I was making progress, but I was still far away from the end.

In an instant, the situation changed dramatically. Without warning, I felt something coil about my lungs and squeeze hard, winding me and subjecting me to nigh

unbearable agony. As I toppled over backward to the ground, it took every ounce of my concentration to maintain the spell.

My mind erupted in the sound of a ghastly, bestial roar, pairing nicely with the very real taste of blood that came into my mouth. ***Do you care to retract your meaningless demands?***

The pain became my advantage, forcing me to wait a significant amount of time to respond. With the progression of my magic, I could feel the copper wire degrading in my hand.

Feeling the agitated twitch of the creature again, I felt I could postpone no longer. “No,” I breathed.

The howling assault on my audition abated, replaced by a low growl. Flashes of angry eyes swam in my vision, and from the midst of it all the voice came again, now even lower pitched than normal. ***Very well. Pull back the velvet and see for yourself.***

Had I put effort into it, I might have been able to rise up then and there, but I elected to gather my strength for another couple of minutes. Once I was more than halfway done with my spellcasting, I rolled over and spat blood onto the floor before I weakly got back to my knees.

Back at the side of the chest, I did as I was asked, using the copper-bearing hand. Beneath the layer of crystals sat an equal number of poorly made iron bands, each decorated in runes. I had previously seen similar symbols in conjuration treatises, so I guessed at their purpose. “Do these speed along the transformation?”

Jumbled snippets of Nikolai’s voice bubbled forth in my psyche, and I could vaguely see him and a stranger working in a candlelit chamber. ***After I returned in the body of a foreign traveler, he decided to leave the University and focus on***



his project. We stowed away aboard a ship bound for Ludendorf, then spent two years working in the basement of an inn—the proprietor was very obliging after I took his body. By the end of our stay, we had developed what you see before you: the exacerbation manacle.

Nikolai recognized the need to test it, and I could not agree more. With a little dominating magic, he could not agree more with my proposal. Now I saw Nikolai, a vacant expression upon his face, slipping one of the iron bands onto his

wrist and taking a crystal in his hand. He spoke an almost unpronounceable name, causing the crystal to fragment and the band to tighten in response. *I had been preparing my own crystals. Crystals naming not fiends, but brethren further removed from human understanding.* Nikolai passed by me in lapsing time, his limbs becoming distorted and tentacular, insectoid legs extending from his chest. His face lasted the longest, but even it eventually lost its eyes and became an unrecognizable lump fused to what had been his torso. The vision was so hideous, that I barely managed to keep up

Far Realm Transposition

Stage One: A psychic bond between the victim and a Far Realm aberration is formed. The insane whispers that slip through this connection cause the victim to take a -1 penalty on all Wisdom based checks. This stage also brings minor aberrant features that can be covered up with difficulty, plus minor aches and pains.

Stage Two: The aberrant features become glaringly obvious, and the pain causes the victim to take a -1 penalty on all skill and ability checks (thus bringing the Wisdom based check penalty to -2). The growing connection with the disturbing mind of the aberration causes the victim to become psychologically damaged. One possibility is that the victim experiences periodic episodes of the “unhinged” minor Madness effect. In any stressful situation, the character must make a Madness save (DC 10 + half the aberration’s HD + the aberration’s Charisma modifier) to avoid having an episode. Alternatively, the character could gain the “nightmares” or “revulsion” moderate Horror effects on a more constant basis.

Stage Three: The victim gains unmistakable aberrant traits. The victim also gains the “pseudonatural” template. Additionally, the victim’s madness deepens. He or she gains a moderate Madness effect in place of the Stage Two mental afflictions.

Stage Four: The victim is heavily warped by the alien pressing in on reality. The “pseudonatural” template is replaced with the “half-farspawn” template (*Lords of Madness* page 151). The Dungeon Master should feel free to alter the template to better represent the specific aberration that the victim is bonded with. Madness effects should thematically deepen, or perhaps progress to the “schizophrenia” major Madness effect.

Stage Five: The victim is siphoned into the Far Realm, and the aberration spills into Ravenloft.

Far Realm transposition can be reversed in the same way as fiendish transposition. A reversed Stage Three transposition results in the loss of the “pseudonatural” template, but physical changes remain. Formerly Stage Three victims also retain their Madness effects, and take 1d6 points of damage to their Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores. Once these points of ability damage are cured through standard moderate Madness recovery procedures, the Madness effect is removed.



the ritual motions of my hand. The copper had practically dissolved, but I still needed more time. *After but four weeks, he was set drifting in the Outside with the Nine-Tongued Worm. In deference to his sacrifice and his responsibility, I have used his name ever since. Soon, more will join him, and I will break free as the walls of your reality come crashing down.* Maddening images frothed in my head. Impossible colors mixed with polyphonic sounds and a smell like the burning of preternatural flesh. Still I maintained my focus. Barely a quarter of the requisite time remained before I could finish the spell. Failure was unacceptable—I could not let this thing’s dreams of apocalypse continue. Even more importantly, I could not let it continue to use my old friend’s name, no matter what he had done. I would not stand for it.

Unless suffering is your greatest joy in life, I suggest you put the chest back and start driving. Or maybe you would like to see the majesty of the Far Realm yourself?

The alien scenery dissipated, and I shoved the chest back into darkness. Dropping the last corroded dregs of copper, I crudely reset the boards, one hand being insufficient to replace them properly. Standing up aching, I triggered a fit of hacking coughs. More blood stained the floor. By the time my composure returned, and I stepped out the back of the carriage, my hand traced the last sigil. Feeling the magic gather, I pushed a thought into the air. *Pauthrael, I carry the creature that brought you here in the forest by Morfenzi. We are heading toward the road. Catch us.*

There was no reply.

Whether the spell had failed to reach the fiend, or it refused to address me, I did not know, but I still held out hope—a

desperate, practically suicidal hope. I took my seat behind the horse and urged it into a slow plod, keeping to the shade of the trees for as long as possible.

I managed to waste twice as many minutes approaching the road as I spent in my casting, but still nothing came. Worry began to set in, for my internal captor surely could tell the difference between riding over rough ground and trundling across the logs of a corduroy road. Any minute, it might confront me, and I would be forced onto the sunlit road where the demon likely could not follow.

In the throes of panic, I could barely tell whether the movement in my body belonged to the parasite or my own twisting innards. To make matters worse, it turned out to be the former. I felt surrounded by fluid, the scent of ammonia burned my nose, and I could hear something sizzle. The voice was coming, and my guess as to what it would say was uncanny. *Get to the road. Now.*

“It’s just ahead. Not much longer.” I don’t know why I kept stalling, since I was sure it was over. Some new plan would be needed. My idea had been too desperate.

The phantom fluid became warm, and the sounds and smells intensified. *Soon is not good enough. Go now!* It must have been talking to the horse too, because the animal began to quicken its pace before I could consider flicking the reins.

At first, I thought the thing was expressing anger, but something in the tone was different. That is when I was seized by the lunatic notion that my enemy was panicking too. But why? What could possibly cause this unnatural thing to show fear?

Then it came to me: a familiar mind.

I launched myself from the seat, leaping into the deeper shade further from the



road. With all the energy I had left, I hastened away from the life, normality, and sanity the road would normally have connoted. If Pauthrael was coming, I wanted to give it a chance.

I managed to sprint a fair distance before I was disabled by pain. It was on the same scale as the harm inflicted upon my lungs earlier, but it roiled and tore in my stomach. My buckling legs caused me to hurtle headlong into the roots of a tree, but the feeling was entirely eclipsed by the agony in my gut. Screaming, I rolled onto my back to look—a hideous mistake. My abdomen undulated and bulged. Wicked spines ripped through my skin, slashing a deadly hole. Emerging from the gore was a spiny snarl of tendrils, a knot of malevolent, alien flesh that pulsed and contracted as it slid to the earth. The abomination was abandoning me to escape.

From the central morass extended several smaller, tangled appendages, which dragged the creature toward the carriage and the road at a frenetic pace. Most of these twisted limbs bore a passing resemblance to claws, but one strained forward, acting more like a degenerate head. A mouth, built somewhat like a fanged flower, hissed and buzzed at the forefront. Blood loss blurred the scene, but my vision did not fail before a large, dark shape swooped down upon the wretched thing.

I was fading fast, so I felt around in my coat feebly. My hand clutched at a glass bottle—a fortunately unbroken glass bottle—and I managed to bring it to my mouth. I almost lost consciousness as my teeth did battle with the cork, yet I succeeded in opening it and spilling the warm, lifegiving quintessence down my throat. It was enough to knit the cavernous wound with tender flesh, but I was still in no condition to do much more. Amid the

shrieks of the nearby conflict, I succumbed to my exhaustion.

From a blessedly dreamless sleep, I woke at the touch of deadly cold tracing along my jawline. At first, I thought it was the dead of night, for my field of vision was consumed by inky blackness. Strange features in the shadow played with the depth cues of my mind. I felt surrounded.

When my focus finally snapped in correctly, it gave me a start to find I was staring directly into the face of a demonic shade, its dark wings walling me in against the side of a knotty maple tree. It regarded me in total silence as its clawed finger pulled away from my face.

My jaw worked up and down for a few seconds, then I found my voice. "Is it dead?"

It was hard to make out, but the fiend scowled. "No," it replied hollowly, "the writhing wretch barely escaped into the light, clinging to the side of its limping horse." I deflated greatly, sorrowful that the thing was still at large, still dangerous. The demon cocked its head. "Your gambit was impressive. I would never have expected a mortal to risk its life in such a way."

I locked eyes with it. "I couldn't let it continue. It is trying to wreak havoc beyond even the wildest imagination of your kind."

It smirked. "It is a race, then. All worlds come to an end, but the honor is up for grabs." Pauthrael laid a chilling hand upon my shoulder. "I think you have earned the privilege of meeting the winning team."

Without regard for my protests, I was carried away.

The End



“Nikolai Kazic” (Zaxxott Ssentroi)

Tsochar Wizard 10/Geometer 5: CR 17;
 Size S aberration; **HD** 4d8+16 plus
 15d4+60; hp 135; **Init** +4; **Speed** 20 ft.
 (4 squares), climb 20 ft; AC 27 (touch
 19, flat-footed 23); **BAB** +10, Grapple
 +10; Atk Tentacle +10 melee (1d4);
Full Atk 4 tentacles +8 melee (1d4);
Space/Reach 5 ft/10 ft.; **SA** Constrict,
 improved grab, poison, powerful
 spellglyph, take spells, wear flesh; **SQ**
 Book of geometry, damage reduction
 5/adamantine, darkvision 60ft., pass
 sigil, resistance to cold 5, sigilsight,
 spellglyph, spell resistance 14, telepathy
 100 ft.; **AL** CE; **Saves** Fort +9, Ref +9,
 Will +22; **Str** 10, **Dex** 18, **Con** 18, **Int**
 22, **Wis** 21, **Cha** 16.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +7, Climb +12,
 Concentration +19, Craft (Alchemy)
 +10, Decipher Script +16, Disable
 Device +15, Hide +8, Knowledge
 (Arcana) +21, Knowledge
 (Dungeoneering) +10, Knowledge (The
 Planes) +21, Move Silently +8, Search
 +15 (+34 to find magic traps based on
 runes), Sense Motive +9, Spellcraft
 +21, Spot +9, Use Magic Device +11;
 Combat Reflexes, Iron Will, Weapon
 Finesse, Scribe Scroll, Mindsight (Lords
 of Madness page 126), Practiced
 Spellcaster*, Craft Wondrous Item,
 Sudden Silent*, Sudden Still*, Sudden
 Maximize*, Craft Contingent Spell*,
 Energy Substitution (Acid)*, Energy
 Admixture (Acid)*.

Tsochari have a +8 racial bonus on Climb
 checks and use their Dexterity modifier
 instead of their Strength modifier for

Climb checks. They can always choose
 to take 10 on Climb checks, even if
 rushed or threatened. Tsochari have a
 +4 racial bonus on Use Magic Device
 checks.

Feats marked with an asterisk are from
 Complete Arcane.

Languages: Tsochar*, Balok, Mordentish,
 Darkonese, Draconic

Wizard Spells per Day: 4/5/5/5/5/4/3/2/1.
 (Base DC = 16 + spell level)

Spellbooks: Nikolai’s spellbooks contain all
 wizard spells of zeroth to eighth level
 from the Player’s Handbook, plus the
 following spells from published
 Ravenloft materials:

1st — *dead man’s tell, insatiable thirst*; 2nd
 — *insight, locate mark, protection from
 curses, rheumatism, siren song, Strahd’s
 baneful attractor, wall of gloom*; 3rd —
*allergen, augment undead, death sight,
 diminish undead, immerse mind, see
 ethereal resonance*; 4th — *anesthesia,
 bone seizure, corpse whisper, eyes of
 the undead, induce lycanthropy,
 shackle, suppress lycanthropy*; 5th —
dark sentinels, lichbane daggers; 6th —
reanimate, steal vitality; 7th — *mystick
 cage, inviolate soul*.

Nikolai also bears the 2nd level spell
 whispercast and the 3rd level spell
 permeable form from Lords of Madness
 page 129. Furthermore, his spellbooks
 contain the following spells from the
 Spell Compendium:

0 — *amanuensis*; 1st — *backbiter, dead
 end, spontaneous search*; 2nd — *baleful
 transposition, bonefiddle, chain of eyes,
 dark way, entice gift*; 3rd — *anticipate
 teleportation, chain missile, manyjaws,
 skull watch*; 4th — *assay spell*



resistance, force missiles; 5th — *indomitability, reciprocal gyre*; 6th — *interplanar telepathic bond, probe thoughts, ;* 7th — *synostodweomer*; 8th — *avascular mass, blackfire, spell engine*.

Permanent Spells: detect magic, read magic, tongues

Contingent Spells: assay spell resistance when spell resistance foils one of Nikolai's spells; backbiter when a two-handed, wooden-hafted weapon damages Nikolai; indomitability when Nikolai falls below half his hit points; shackle on a spellcaster who successfully affects Nikolai with a spell, unless the spellcaster has been touched on each shoulder by Nikolai within the last minute.

Possessions: *Bracers of the Entangling Blast**, *Wand Bracelet** (contains four spellbooks), *Bracers of Armor +4*, *Retributive Amulet**, *Spellsink Scarab**, *Periapt of Wisdom +4*, *Ring of Protection +4*, *Ring of Nine Lives**, *Ring of Animal Friendship*, *Ring of the Forcewall**.

Items marked with an asterisk are drawn from the Magic Item Compendium.

Background

As a young boy, Nikolai was enamored with the idea of travel. He wanted to see the world—and then some. He was born in Levkarest to Balok Barovian parents, and when he was sixteen he traveled to Dementlieu with their blessing to attempt to gain entry to the University of Dementlieu. He had studied relentlessly in his free time to pursue what he perceived to be an important step in his dream, and it payed off. His entrance examination was so

impressive, that he was actually sponsored to attend. As part of his interest in the world around him, he chose to study mainly in the College of History. His interests were wide, however, so he spent plenty of time learning independently in libraries across the campus.

It was in one of these libraries that he came across the journal of a man who claimed to have come from another world. The fanciful ideas contained therein enthralled Nikolai, and he spent many an hour perusing and considering the contents of the journal. He hunted for other references to other worlds, and he discovered enough books on the subject to convince him that other worlds must exist. However, his research also taught him that no one can simply leave the Dread Realms. His dreams of travel to every place imaginable curtailed, he came to consider what had been his wide and wonderful home to be a vile and contemptible prison.

Fateful ideas such as these can lead a bright mind to darkness and ruin, and those swiftly became Nikolai's destiny. He became obsessed with escaping the Demiplane of Dread, but his inquiries turned up very little. Having run through all of the reputable and safe lore on the matter, he turned to blacker subjects, fiendish transposition among them. He gathered that the process, if taken to completion, yielded a certainty of slipping into the worlds beyond, but he solitarily bemoaned the uncertainty of initiating a transposition—if it were as simple as frequent gross misbehavior, surely the world would be overrun with demons.

Obviously, he needed an assured method of causing transposition, but his research hit a dead end. He needed knowledge that his books could not provide, so he sought the advice of something he had read about before he fell into this dangerous fixation.



He called upon Thlagderr Thraal, a gruesome and primordial tsochar great noble. Thraal forged a warlock's pact with Nikolai, granting him the magical might necessary to explore the arcane secrets of transposition. In addition, Thraal assigned a tsochar arcanist named Zaxxott Ssentroi to assist Nikolai in his endeavors. Nikolai grew to absolutely detest this parasite for the pains it gave him, and Zaxxott grew to loathe Nikolai for causing Thraal to send it to the Demiplane.

In spite of this mutual animosity, the collaboration was extraordinarily fruitful. Within a few months, they developed the first contact crystal, which Zaxxott took to Falkovnia to test. The observational experiment took a few months more, and it ended with the Tsvtieft Schattendertodd convening a small group of Lustmorde members to deal with what it felt to be an encroachment upon its territory. When Zaxxott finally returned with the full report, Nikolai left the University to focus on his project.

They labored in Ludendorf for two years, at which point they successfully made the prototype for the exacerbation manacle. Zaxxott turned on Nikolai and used him as a test subject, forcing him through transposition with a monstrosity from the Far Realm. Upon arrival, the creature stole a few people in the dead of night and vanished into the sea. Armed with its discoveries, Zaxxott appropriated Nikolai's name and took its work to the road.

Current Sketch

"Nikolai" desires two things: escape and vengeance. It believes that by using *contact crystals* and *exacerbation manacles* to call certain aberrations—in particular, a collection of dread entities associated with the Nine-Tongued Worm—it may trigger a major Far Realm incursion that will destroy

the Demiplane of Dread and allow it to slip its bonds.

For all its alien horror, Nikolai has started to exhibit more comprehensibly human traits. Whereas most tsochari inhabit humans out of hunger for power and magic, Nikolai has come to sadistically enjoy snuffing out and tormenting mortals. This causes it to take actions which are not at all productive with regard to its ultimate goals. Perhaps more distressing to Nikolai, should it ever register, might be its newly acquired habit of smoking—and its newly acquired pipe which mysteriously follows from body to body. Nikolai fancies itself to be a perfect impostor, but for reasons unknown to any but the Dark Powers, this strange tell has latched onto it, jeopardizing its secrecy.

Combat

Nikolai views combat as a dangerous waste of its time, and it avoids it whenever possible. In case it is unavoidable, however, Nikolai frequently carries numerous combat-oriented scrolls and spellglyphs (see below), in addition to whatever magic items it stole from its host. It holds onto harmful spells its host had prepared, saving them for truly dire situations. Its personally prepared spells tend to be largely for subterfuge and the avoidance of obstacles, though it knows that it is prudent to keep a few violent spells handy. It particularly enjoys using its seventh level spell slots to prepare an acid *fireball* and an acid *lightning bolt* (using its Energy Admixture feat). While in the process of making more Exacerbation Manacles, it uses its eighth level spell slot to prepare *greater planar binding*. If it thinks that assault is likely, it prefers to prepare *avascular mass*. It always has *permeable form* prepared, and it takes much glee from using *bone seizure*.



Special Attacks:

Constrict (Ex): In its true form, Nikolai deals 2d4 points of damage with a successful grapple check. When it deals damage by means of its constrict attack, it injects its victim with poison.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Nikolai must hit with two tentacle attacks. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 16, initial and secondary damage 1d3 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based. Nikolai's poison is delivered by dealing damage with its constrict attack.

Powerful Spellglyph (Ex): When Nikolai prepares a spellglyph for a spell, it knows how to strengthen the spell beyond its normal effects. Its caster level is treated as 1 higher for any spell it casts with the use of a spellglyph.

Take Spells (Su): While replacing a spellcaster (see below), Nikolai retains any arcane spells prepared by the dead character and can cast them as if it had prepared the spells itself. It must meet the minimum ability score needed to cast the spell based on the type of caster replaced (Intelligence for a wizard, for example), or else the spell is unavailable to it. If it replaces a spontaneous caster such as a sorcerer, it retains the available spell slots of the dead spellcaster and can use any spells the dead host knew. In either case, it cannot regain spells or spell slots it expends from the dead character's spellcasting ability.

Wear Flesh (Su): Nikolai can bore its way into a helpless living creature's body, slipping its ropy tendrils into the spaces between organs and muscles and

disappearing into the victim. The victim must be the same size as Nikolai or larger, and the process requires 1 minute. Nikolai can choose to replace or inhabit the victim (see below). Incorporeal creatures and constructs, elementals, oozes, plants, and undead are immune to this ability.

Nikolai can abandon a body it has inhabited or replaced with a full-round action that deals 3d6 points of damage to the host. Nikolai can be forced to abandon the body by a *remove disease* or *dispel evil* spell (the caster must succeed on a DC 20 caster level check to expel Nikolai, which deals damage as described above) or a *heal* or *limited wish* spell (which automatically succeeds and causes no damage to the host).

Inhabit: Nikolai leaves its victim alive and aware. Any time it cares to, it can inflict indescribable agony on its host as a standard action, dealing 1d6 to 6d6 points of damage and requiring the host to succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or be nauseated by the pain for 2d4 rounds. Nikolai chooses how much damage it deals with this attack.

Nikolai can take no physical actions while inhabiting a host, but it can use purely mental actions (such as communicating with its host by means of its telepathy power and threatening to injure or kill the host unless the host does as it wishes).

When the host takes damage (other than damage Nikolai inflicts on it), Nikolai takes half that damage. For example, if the host takes 28 points of cold damage from a *cone of cold* spell, Nikolai takes 14 points of cold damage.

While inhabiting a humanoid's body, Nikolai feeds on the creature's blood and tissues, dealing 1d3 points of Constitution damage per day. A successful DC 15 Fortitude save reduces this damage by half. Over the course of days, frail hosts sicken

and die, although Nikolai is clever enough to direct its hosts to acquire curative magic to keep themselves alive indefinitely, if the situation calls for it.

Replace: Nikolai bores out the victim's nervous system, killing the victim. It then animates the body, effectively acting as the nervous system of the dead host. The body remains alive, hosting Nikolai.

This functions like a *polymorph* spell into the victim's exact form, except that Nikolai can remain in the victim's form for up to a year, and it leaves the victim's corpse behind when it chooses to end the effect. Nikolai uses the victim's physical ability scores in place of its own, as described by *polymorph*. Nikolai can remain in this form indefinitely, but once it abandons the form, it cannot reanimate the body.

After replacing a humanoid, Nikolai slowly devours its new shell from the inside out. A replaced body takes 1d4 points of Constitution drain per month, which does not heal naturally and can be restored only by magical means. A successful DC 15 Fortitude save reduces this damage by half. Naturally, Nikolai chooses to abandon bodies it has replaced before they become too weak to be serviceable.

Special Qualities:

Book of Geometry (Ex): As a geometer, Nikolai uses a unique system for recording the details of a spell that drastically reduces the expense of maintaining spellbooks. Every spell it learns requires only a single page in its spellbook. It still takes 24 hours to scribe a spell into a spellbook and materials costing 100 gp per page.

A geometer's spellbook is difficult for nongeometers to decipher and use. The spellcraft DC to decipher or prepare spells from a geometer's spellbook is increased by

5 for nongeometers (see page 178 of the *Player's Handbook*).

Pass Sigil (Su): Nikolai can temporarily negate magical wards based on written symbols, sigils, runes, or glyphs. As a standard action, Nikolai can attempt to pass such a sigil. It must succeed on a level check (DC 6 + the sigil creator's caster level). If successful, it can suppress the effects of the device for as long as it maintains concentration (which might make it possible for others to pass the sigil safely, too). Nikolai must be able to see the device to be passed.

Sigilsight (Ex): Nikolai can use a Search check to find magic traps based on runes, glyphs, sigils, symbols, and other writings as a rogue can. It gains a bonus equal to its caster level on all Search checks to find traps of this sort. If it merely comes within 10 feet of a magic rune, glyph, sigil, or symbol, or the threshold of danger for such a device, it is entitled to make a Search check as if it were actively searching for a magic trap.

Spellglyph (Su): A spellglyph is an arcane diagram that substitutes for a specific spell's verbal and material components (if any). When a geometer casts a prepared spell in conjunction with a spellglyph scribed for that spell, it can cast the spell as if it were affected by the Silent Spell feat. The spellglyph replaces any material components (other than a focus) normally required by the spell.

A geometer chooses at the time of casting whether to use a spellglyph. An expended spellglyph disappears, just like any other material component.

Spellglyphs are normally scribed on parchment, much like scrolls. Preparing a spellglyph requires 1 hour and the use of rare inks costing 25 gp per spell level. If the spell normally requires an expensive material component (with a value of more



than 1 gp), exotic inks and treatments of equal cost must be used in the preparation of the spellglyph.

Telepathy (Su): Nikolai can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Author's Note

It is with great shame that I admit to a grammar error in the previous installment of

The Conferences of Victor Gagné. I used the word "vernier" (a form of measurement aid) instead of "veneer" (a thin coating). As a grammar fascist, I beg forgiveness for failing in my self-appointed duty of fighting the decline of the English language, whether it is real or simply imagined by me.



FIFTY SHADES

50 NPCs who are not what they seem

By Jack the Reaper

1. Melisa

A beautiful, haunted looking woman, is always on the run, never sleeps twice in the same place, for her undead former lover she killed is following her relentlessly, in slow but steady pace, intending to tear her apart.

2. The Hollow Knight

An intelligent, animated suit of armor with great magical power, is traveling the domains disguised as a knight, searching for the meaning of its existence and musing philosophically between battles.

3. Alan and Helen

look like pair of adventuring twins working in perfect harmony and seemingly telepathic. They are actually a single mind born in two bodies, using this condition to great advantage (see "Cheruvim", Quoth the Raven 18, pg. 52-54).

4. Mighty Maximus

A stage magician claiming to be a great wizard; the gullible believe him, the clever see him as a trickster and con-artist. In truth, he is indeed a most powerful good-aligned wizard, hiding behind the guise of charlatan showman. He keeps his true identity top secret, casting spells without anyone's notice, and leading the suspicious to "debunk" his real magics as elaborate tricks.

5. Goatrix

This black goat-headed creature looks like a devil. He has gathered around himself a group of amateur witches, taking part in their rituals in the forest and enjoying their offerings. Actually he is just a mongrelman from G'Henna who knows some magic and showmanship.

6. Colin

An orphan child, raised by the priests in a monastery in Borca. Unbeknownst to him, he is actually a powerful demon; the priests couldn't kill him, so they forced him into the shape of human child, making him forget his identity and believe he is indeed a child. Now they strive to keep him from recalling his demonic identity (e.g., by explaining away his strange nightmares, in which he does terrible things), while members of his former cult try to reach him and make him remember and re-awaken as their lord.

7. Guy Dartmoor

A noble, lawful-good and valiant knight in the light, but his personality shifts to a chaotic-evil, sadistic maniac when he's in darkness. He tries to stay away from society and keep many light sources at hand to stop his evil side from emerging, but doesn't always succeed.

8. Sir Alonso

The Knight of Sorrowful Countenance, is an aging, self-proclaimed knight who sees



monsters and demons everywhere, charging at windmills and attacking innocent people and animals. He is considered a pathetic, deluded lunatic by almost everyone. In fact, he has a Truth Sight, and the monsters he sees beyond their illusionary disguises are all real: the windmills are indeed giants, the merchants are hags, etc. He has been driven close to insanity due to his frustration in being unable to convince anyone else of the truth of the invisible threats.

9. Abigail

A succubus who redeemed herself after she fell in love with an angel, became a paladin, and eventually was drawn to Ravenloft. She struggles hard to keep her newfound virtues against all temptations, fight evil, and find a way to return to her beloved angel.

10. Black Tamanous

Looks like a savage man with long black hair and a skeletal face. He can only eat the flesh of cannibals, so he usually locks several people together in his basement without food, waiting for cannibalism to settle in, then eats the survivors.

11. Shavrır

This sentient sword convinces its owners they were chosen by the gods to save their people or the world, showing them "divine" visions to persuade them. It might tell them some other people are demons they must kill, or order them to rally a rebellion against the local darklord, helping them with "miracles" at first, but then abandoning them to the painful retribution.

12. Deadboy

An evil undead child. He looks like the withered corpse of boy about 8 years old, but can change his appearance to any living

boy about the same age. He loves playing with children and murdering them; he also loves to frame adults as murderers, by pretending to fall dead after a staged public skirmish, or by dropping clues pointing to someone as a murderer, then sneaking into his house and waiting in corpse form for the police to find him. After he's buried again, he'll crawl out to continue his fun and games.

13. Jack the Reaper

A mysterious, stoic young man in black robes. He stalks specific persons for reasons only he knows, killing them with his silvery sickle which turns their flesh into dust, or with his never-missing hand crossbow. When he is about to kill, his visage changes to that of a grim reaper.

14. Father Byron Silverhand

An anchorite leading a temple of Ezra. The young, good-looking priest works tirelessly to elevate the moral and spiritual state in his community, and has achieved great success: thanks to his preaching and activities, the local people have become much more pious, giving more charity, caring for the poor and sick, and even refraining from drinking. Father Byron oversees those endeavors, guiding his flock personally on the path to purity, and making sure to stand beside every member when he or she dies.

After all, the purest souls are so much more delicious for a soul-eater like him.

15. Hazel

can make herself not invisible, but unnoticeable; when she wishes it, nobody pays any attention to her. She can empty the bank, walk into an exclusive conference, or kill someone on broad daylight, and no one will notice or remember her afterward. No wonder she is such a successful criminal,



leader of the thieves' guild in her town and a dealer of secrets and information.

16. Shang

A giant, muscular man, master of the martial arts, and one of the cruelest, most notorious bandit leaders and mercenaries in Ravenloft. He was actually a weak lad, until he got his strength and power from the spirit embodied in the black dragon tattooed on his body. If he dies, the dragon spirit will pass to the one who defeated him.

17. Mara

A silent, reclusive child. Her parents were brought to Ravenloft by the Mists one stormy night, and sought shelter in the House of Lament. As the storm raged outside, the mother went into labor and gave birth to a girl, dying in the process. The father left the house with the baby, whom he felt compelled to name Mara. Part of the soul of the original Mara is in the girl, and therefore some part of the House followed her too, and it wants her back. As she grows older, scary phenomena manifest around her with greater frequency, as the House superimposes itself on her surroundings. Unless something is done, she and the people around her will eventually find themselves transferred into the House of Lament.

18. Cain

A strong-looking vagabond with wild hair and beard, stone knife, accompanying dog, and a strange red sign on his forehead. Any damage he should suffer as the result of attacks returns sevenfold on the attacker, while Cain remains unharmed.

19. Nuriel

An elven aasimar priestess, who uses her cloak of elvenkind to move unseen in the slums of Morfenzi, at great peril to herself,

healing the sick and bringing them some light and hope. Those who've seen or glimpsed her gave her the title "the Morfenzi Angel".

20. Don Girano

The infamous crime lord, carries in vials the distilled personalities and memories of several "useful" people - servants, guards, courtesans, etc. When somebody drinks the essence or is injected by it, that personality takes him or her over with all the proper abilities, and thusly Girano can recreate his entourage anywhere he goes.

21. Kami

A charming Rokuma maiden, and also a deadly assassin and a special breed of vampire able to control her hair, make it grow almost limitlessly, and use it in many ways. She might grapple people or objects with it, make strands grow to a hundred meters' length and strangle victims in their beds, or make her hair fill an entire city block, transforming it into impassable tangle trap. She can also control others' hair, make it grow, and turn it against them. Kami has honor and some compassion though, and will not kill innocents... usually.

22. Switch

An emerald wand with the power to switch minds between persons, transferring one's mind into another's body and vice versa, which he/she uses to create lots of havoc. It is unknown who was Switch originally, as he/she shifts frequently into new bodies.

23. Zak

A young man with inexpressive face, short cropped hair and the mindset of devoted secret agent. Since childhood, he has heard a buzzing voice talking to him, giving him information, orders, and



warnings, and he has always obeyed it, no matter how strange its instructions seemed. The voice may sometimes speak through him to others, and occasionally take him over, transforming him into an insectoid horror.

24. Sleer

Being an evil monster doesn't mean you can't do good. The creature calling himself Sleer (or The Sleer) is a kythone-like monster, a being out of madmen's nightmares, able to assume human shape. Though evil itself, it prefers killing only evil villains and monsters, considering them more challenging for its taste. That makes it a powerful ally for heroes, if they can stomach its vicious cruelty toward its foes. It loves playing the hapless victim, only to turn the tables on its captors and savor their shock and horror as it changes and tears them to shreds.

25. Pitz the Mouse

An anthropomorphic talking mouse, fearless and jovial. He is a scholar and adventurer, ever looking for people who need the help he is able to grant, along with his sparrow friend and mount, Chip. Many times he has proven himself much more useful than expected.

26. Marcus Khan

One of the richest, most powerful business tycoons in Ravenloft. He is a cold, calculated, and arrogant rakshasa, always in control and never seen surprised. In his human guise, he is a tall, impressive man with thick silvery sideburns and expensive suits. He lives in Nova Vaasa and is a collector of strange items and artifacts, often hiring adventurers for that purpose. Though leaning toward villainous undertakings, Khan is a practical person whose only interest is expanding his money

and power, and he'll side with heroes if he can profit from it.

27. Eddie Shanks

The one to call for the dirtiest, vilest jobs no other mercenary or assassin would take. A werehyena, he is a dandy, charming man in his 20s in human form, and a terrible beast in his animal and hybrid forms. He has a dirty humor and absolutely no morals and is always happy to colorfully describe his former profane jobs. In his beastly forms he can hypnotize his victims and breathe foul stinking clouds.

28. Evelyn

A half-Vistani of Zarovan origin, who can change her age to become younger or older at will. Her touch can change others' age too; she can return youth to virtuous people, make villains old and fragile, or return them to infancy for a second chance at better choices in life.

29. Mary Jane

A lovely girl with sad eyes. The invisible poltergeist of her possessive father accompanies her everywhere, eager to break the bones of anyone who treats her unkindly, but also of anyone who shows signs of romantic interest in her, dooming her to a life of loneliness.

30. Morton

Somehow affected by Necropolis' Shroud. Now he is surrounded by an invisible field that kills instantly any being in a 10 meter radius around him. He lives alone in a secluded forest to avoid hurting people. Strangely enough, his sister Lenoria is not only immune to the death field, but nullifies it while she's in the radius, so they always stay close together when he has to travel. (See Radius film)



31. Dolores Boudoin

A tomboyish young woman with chocolate skin, curly black hair and a top hat, who loves drinking, smoking, partying and adventuring. She claims to be the daughter of the Souragnian loa Baron Samedi, often styling herself as "Baroness Samedi", and painting a white skull on her face before battles or rituals. Her innate voodan powers and control over the dead give credit to her claim, and like her alleged father, she combines love for the pleasures of life with affinity for the morbid and macabre.

32. Rainbow

The stage name of an elf dancer of unearthly beauty, whose hair is colored like the rainbow. She performs in several clubs in Nova Vaasa, and her dances are extremely popular. She seems to be a frivolous girl, but secretly she's a Cloaked Dancer (see Complete Scoundrel) who can affect the minds of lookers with her dance, a capable assassin and a member of a secret organization working to bring down corrupted noblemen and criminals.

33. Seth and Marion

look like couple of dirty, sick junkies, which they are; but when they consume drugs, they can project their souls out as incorporeal spirits, helping people, fighting evil beings, gathering useful information and doing much good. They know the drugs ruin their health, but they are willing to make the sacrifice. Nobody suspects those two poor drug addicts are the fabled "good ghosts" of Nosos.

34. "Jane doe"

looks too perfect to be a real woman. She seems to be confused or shocked when encountered, wandering aimlessly and only repeating several short verses, including the

name "Endymion". She doesn't eat, drink, sleep, or bleed, healing instantly from any wound, and obeying most orders given to her. In fact, she's a mindless golem, created by the hedonistic sorcerer Endymion who works ceaselessly to create the "perfect woman", and he'd like to have her back. More experiments of her kind can be found in his house.

35. Gecko

A short, strange looking teenage boy, with pockmarked face, wide mouth, black bulging eyes, and wild hair which color shifts frequently. He was transformed into a werelizard by Dr. Vjorn Horstman, but escaped his lab using his new chameleon camouflage and wall scaling abilities. Gecko loves to shock both his friends and enemies, and make harmful pranks against the Talons. He knows every corner in Lekar, and has a small lab where he creates stuff like stench bombs, shocker rings, itching powder, and a solution that removes hair permanently. He always carries some of these in his utility belt that fits all his forms.

36. Gantia

the hag developed a potion that makes its drinkers grow permanently to gigantic proportions, many times their original size. She uses it to create giant animals, insects, and humans wherever she travels, enjoying the resulting havoc, confusion, and misery. She especially loves ruining weddings by changing the bride or the groom into a giant just before the ceremony.

37. Hirsch Volf

A travelling trapper and fur merchant from Verbrek, a heavily built man with a wild grey beard and characteristic fur hat and pipe. He has been everywhere and seen everything, and loves fascinating listeners with tales of his adventures.



Though rough-looking, he has kind heart and is always willing to help the needy.

38. Francine Beaumont

the prestigious Dementlieuse fashion designer, is well known for the high-quality garments she makes for those who are able to afford them. These clothes have personalities of their own, though, which gradually affect their wearers.

39. The Inevitable

A marut (of the 3.5th ed., not the 4th), programmed to enforce the universal law "All that lives, must die". He was summoned to Ravenloft by Falkovnian wizards to be put to fight against Azalin, but the presence of so many darklords and undead who cheat death, plus the influence of the Dark Powers, drove him insane. Now he believes his purpose is to end all life, period, and he is working on some grand plan to bring the apocalypse. He rumbles constantly like a doomsday prophet about him being the inevitable end of all life, and he is indeed an almost unstoppable force.

40. Lady Dulcinea

A Borcan patron of the arts, especially statuary. It helps a lot that she can change at will into a medusa, petrifying her models in the desired positions.

41. Old Makhuf

A feeble-minded, crazy old man, presumably a former wizard from Pharazia, always muttering to himself, trying to recall some forgotten arcane verse. Nobody knows what would happen if he would finally get it right, but some bizarre phenomena occur occasionally around him, and it's better to keep him away from corpses.

42. Enrique

Bards sing about the deeds of this handsome, heart-breaking womanizer. Originally from Invidia, Enrique was cursed to have every woman and girl who sees him fall irrevocably in love with him. Now strife, tears, and ruined relationships follow him everywhere, as women fight each other and their men over him. He was forced to pick the career of a highwayman and to travel all over Ravenloft to run away from all the angry men and desperate women coming after him. Though his curse has obvious advantages, it gives Enrique much more headache.

43. Nebuchadnezzar Mason

The Prophet of Evil, is a man even darklords fear. He looks like a pirate, with dark, tattooed skin, coins for earrings, a black beard, and shaved head with several braids in the back. He reads people like open books, knowing their deepest secrets in a glance, and has such an aura of evil charisma and genius that everyone feels like foolish children around him. Only the most strong-willed can resist his compelling voice and consider disobeying him. He loves destroying people's beliefs, showing them that there's nothing but evil in them and in the world, and everything else is self-delusion. Even a short conversation with him can scar one's soul for life.

44. The Sisters of Vow

The embodiment of mental illness in womanly shape. Their names are Paranoia, Schizophrenia, Insomnia, Mania-Depressia etc. A Sister enters into relationship with a man (romantic or not), becoming his perfect friend and soulmate - she seems to understand him like nobody else does, always saying the right thing, etc. In a short time, he will develop the symptoms of the Sister's respective disorder. He'll probably



talk about it with her, which will only worsen his condition. Only by cutting his relationship with her can he be healed, but that's easier said than done.

45. The Headsman

A notorious serial killer, a brute of a man with hangman's hood and big axe. He murders mainly youngsters, children, and even babies, though strangely enough, some witnesses have reported hearing him sobbing afterward. He is cursed with foresight, and kills those he knows are going to become exceedingly evil when they grow up, believing he's doing the gods' work with those preemptive killings.

46. Madam Luka

The patron of the Grave Pleasures "funhouse", located in the vilest part of Martira Bay, in which all the "entertainers" are zombies. Regular visitors perceive them as living humans (though the illusion falters occasionally, which could be quite shocking), but the VIP clients get to see them as what they are. Here the most debased, the necrophiliacs, cannibals, psychopathic, and the undead can slake their foul desires. Madam Luka herself is an avolakia in human disguise, animating the dead with her powers and using them as servants, food, and means to spread rotting diseases.

47. Miranda

A diminutive warrior woman, clad in ancient-looking armor, her height about 15 cm. She tells adventurers she was shrank to this size by evil wizard, and asks their help to find a means to dispel the magic and return her to her normal size (maybe Gantia's potion). In fact, it's a very bad idea, for she is not a human but an evil, human-eating titan from another world, who ruled tyrannically until her enemies

managed to defeat her. If returned to her normal size (25 feet height) she'll seek to reestablish her bloody reign.

48. Shirley

One may wonder why such an innocent-looking girl is hanging out in the company of villainous and corrupted men. Shirley is a True Innocent (see Heroes of Light), her soul so pure and her love for every being so strong, that she can actually drain evil with her kiss. The greater the evil, the longer it takes - but in the end, the target's soul is purified, his alignment shifts to good, and all his sins are absolved. She seeks out wicked people to cleanse them of their evil. Her power has no effect on undead, monsters, and darklords.

49. Dan Jonah "Dungeon"

looks like a normal man, though there's something unnerving about his eyes and smile. He has a mystical prison inside his body, and can inhale people or creatures inside, and exhale them out when he wants. Victims find themselves in an organic-looking maze from which there's no exit. Dan can hear them and speak to them mentally. There are some real villains inside, some innocents who happened to upset Dan, and some monsters he releases when it serves him. Though not a truly evil person, Dan enjoys too much playing the judging and punishing god, and his sanity is questionable.

50. The Man Who Wasn't

There is a figure you never meet in the present. People only recall meeting him in the past, whether it's one minute or 10 years ago. They'll remember his grey suit and hat, and that there was something disturbing about him, and but never his face; and they may recall things he told them - information, clues, threats etc.



Sometimes they find themselves having objects he gave them. He might visit certain people seldom or frequently, but no matter what they do, they can never experience the encounter at real time, only as a vague,

eerie memory afterward. Nobody knows who or what he is, or whether he's a single being or one of many.



MISTLANDS TOURIST GUIDE TO THE FROZEN WASTES

By John Berndt

This job has some downsides as well as its perks and I was recently sent to Vorostokov, certainly not my first choice to visit, though not as bad as I feared.

The first myth there is about Vorostokov is that it is always winter. It may seem that way, but the fact is there are six months of winter followed by six months of summer. For the first two months of summer, the ice melts, causing floods and lots of mud. The farmers manage to plant potatoes in the hills during those months along with some vegetables. It is tiring work, but they manage. A lot of quick growing plants sprout during this time and the animals slowly come out of hibernation. I visited in high summer, of course, as I am no fool. There is no way I am going to go here in the dead of winter, guide or no.

The second is, as shown above, that the only way to get food here is by hunting. In fact, many root vegetables are grown in summer such as potatoes, carrots, beets, and radishes. The food is stored in root cellars for winter. There are wheat fields in the plains as well. There is also fishing, as well as whaling. The sea fish here are large and tasty. The domain also imports a lot of food, paying for it via the fur trade. Meat

and potatoes are the main dishes here as they are the most readily had. Borscht, which is a kind of beet soup, is commonly made here, as beets grow very well.

This said, hunting is very important here and is the main source of food and income. Fur is very big here. Not only do the natives dress in fur all winter and for most of what passes for summer here, but they sell a lot of it abroad. They sell bear skins, deer skins, and rabbit skins all over the Mists. They are the best furriers in the Mists and people are well aware of it. Merchants all over the Mists trade food for their fur.

They not only sell the fur itself but fur clothing of all sizes. They ship them throughout the Mists where they are further fitted by local tailors. While here I bought rabbit skin gloves and a fox fur coat. They were beautifully tailored as they have lots of experience working with fur. Where there is a lot of game there is also usually a lot of wolves and that is certainly the case here. You can hear their howling everywhere at night. Along with the normal wolves there are dire wolves. Dire wolves are rare in most places, so I will tell you they are the size of horses. I wouldn't have believed it myself, but I have seen their pelts here and



they are indeed that size. Thank the gods I didn't see one face to face. There are also rumors of werewolves in this realm. I don't know if they are true, but I certainly don't want to find out.

Vorostokov has a number of small villages and hamlets, but it has only four towns of any note: Kargo, Nodvik, Torgov, and Vorostokov City. Although it is called a city Vorostokov City is a city in name only as it is just a large town of 2,000 people.

Kargo is right on the coast and is the main trade and fishing port, of 1,500 people, and it is also important for its salt production. Mining is very difficult in the permafrost of this land, so all the inhabitants' salt is made by boiling sea water. They have a bucket and pulley system that is hooked to oxen, which dumps the water in huge 8000-liter tubs. They boil it using the very large quantity of wood they have, as the realm is covered in forest. That produces 300 liters of highly saline water per tub, which pours out a sluice into open barrels where they allow the water to evaporate naturally before sealing and shipping.

It is a very efficient operation, with scores of tubs. It supplies the entire realm with plenty of salt to last the year through, even with the heavy salting of meat that is common here to preserve it over winter. Even in summer, the food is heavily salted here, as that is what people are used to. I drank a lot of water, despite the cool weather, due to the great deal of salt they cook with.

There are a number of pirates nearby that the locals haven't caught yet, so you should be careful when taking passage here. I didn't encounter any, but the fur trade cargo must be hard to pass up for pirate ships. Aside from that, the people around here can be pretty rough. If I didn't have two big bodyguards from Richemulot

accompanying me, I might have been assaulted.

The only inn here is the Boiled Cod. Like the name implies, codfish is the big dish here. It is quite good but like all Vorostokovian food, plain. Food here is simple, plain, salty, and expensive. Although people don't usually starve, there isn't a big surplus and so food is expensive. Along with the fish I had potatoes with reindeer butter. Not the tastiest meal I ever had but it stuck to the ribs. The innkeeper is a crusty old salt (N Ftr 3) named Pieter Lebronski. Still the place is reasonably clean. The national drink here is vodka. This is a very strong tasteless liquor that goes down like fire. Be careful with this stuff, as it will lay you flat in no time. I have to admit I drank a bit too much of it the first night and woke up with the worst hangover of my life the next day.

Nodvik is the lumber center of this realm. Although hunting is vitally important as well, most wood sold abroad is cut here as the surrounding timber is tall and strong. The lumber is traded mostly for food to various islands. The timber mill on the nearby Kuzov River is always busy. It is then taken straight to Kargo by wagon in summer and stored in big warehouses in winter, when the passes through the mountains are closed. Although its lumber is shipped to Kargo, raw timber is not, as it isn't used for firewood to boil the salt there. This wood is too valuable, they cut down the less valuable wood nearby for that. I have heard that the wolves and dire wolves are particularly thick here and everyone I saw had some sort of bow on their back when leaving town.

The Timber Wolf is the only inn here, as the town only has 1,200 people. It serves venison with potato bread and carrots. The venison is good and tender as the people here do know how to tenderize meat well, having lots of experience. The potato bread



came with reindeer butter as well and was quite good. The place is a bit rustic, but the people are nice enough. The innkeeper is a woman named Natasha Belinski (N Com2). She is a quite attractive human with long, black hair and brown eyes.

Torgov is the farming center, such as it is, of the realm and, surprisingly, the wealthiest place to live, for the average person. Although there are richer people in the capital, the average man here is wealthier. Considering how expensive food is here, it might not be that surprising after all. The big potato and wheat fields are here. It is not Falkovnia by any stretch of the imagination, but it usually grows enough food to help prevent the realm from starving. Like the rest of Vorostokov hunting is also a big thing here. The woods nearby provide enough caribou and moose to help feed the people over the winter months. In those woods, it is rumored that there are a number of complete maniacs running around killing people at random. Due to these rumors, the people around here now only enter the woods in armed parties.

The inn here is the Smiling Farmer, which is as rustic as it sounds, and which is run by a halfling woman named Elise Tunnelbury (NG Rog 3), who originally moved here for the fur trade. She is now looking to sell the place as she has made her money and is looking to move back to a place that is warmer and has better food. Apparently, she has had a number of offers and is in negotiations. The 800 people living in Torgov spend their money here, as the place is fairly busy, which is probably why she is finding the place easy to sell. I had the potato soup with rabbit. It was quite good although under-spiced. Vodka flows freely here, and I admit I got more than a little tipsy. I thought I had learned my lesson, but it is shockingly easy to get drunk

on vodka. However, that is common enough in this place that I just fit right in.

Vorostokov City is the capital of the realm and the seat of Tsar Gregor Zolnik II, who is a large, rowdy man with a great beard. He is loud and boisterous and prone to drink. I met him when I was at the capital and he does have some charm, but it is of the loud, overbearing kind. I guess it is fitting for such a backwards realm. In any case he has the reputation of being a fair ruler but an inept hunter. Puzzling as it is to me, this seems to lower his esteem in his subject's eyes. Maybe it is because so much of the domain revolves around hunting but, aside from his overloud manner, he seems a decent enough fellow.

The rich in Vorostokov City are really rich. The fur trade is run out of here and is very profitable. People often move here for a year or two to make some quick money hunting and selling the furs and then return home. Sometimes this works out and entire fortunes have been made this way. More commonly they manage to make little money as better hunters get most of the game and they wind up on the derelict side of the city, if not frozen or starved to death.

There are a number of hostels around which I won't go into as I never visited the dives but there is one great inn, The Great Caribou. It has a caribou motif, but aside from that it could pass as a good inn in almost any part of the Mists. It is the only place with genuinely great food. The prices are sky high but worth it. The inn is run by a pretty elf woman named Lalia Woodyly (NE Sor 4), with gold hair and pretty, blue eyes. There are rumors that people around here have come out of a daze with their money missing and unable to remember anything about it. I asked the innkeeper and she said that she has heard the rumors but doesn't know what to make of them.



In short, this realm is a backwater that has little to recommend it. The only reason to visit it, as far as I can tell, is to try and make quick money off of the fur trade. However, be warned that this plan is a crap shoot. In any case, it certainly isn't a place to visit on a whim. In winter it is cold, dark, and deadly. In summer it is cool, muddy, and dismal.

Sanguinia, on the other hand, isn't that cold along the coast. Inland it is a frozen wasteland where almost no one dwells, but along the coast there is a very warm ocean current that keeps things within a reasonable temperature up to 50 km inland. It keeps getting colder the farther you go inland, of course, but where people actually live it isn't any worse than the mountainous regions of Bavoria. Because of this, they grow plenty of food year-round and export their surplus to Vorostokov in exchange for its fur. The fur is then traded all over the Mists.

The only city is Mirceaovnia which is named after the prince's father and is a city of 15,000. There are a number of farming villages as well that support the main city, as well as provide food for the export trade. The city is a bustling merchant port town. Its main source of wealth is the fur trade of Vorostokov, as that domain has no harbors large enough to handle enough ships to export all of its fur and lumber and to import all of the food it needs. Three quarters of all the fur and lumber sold by Vorostokov goes via Mirceaovnia.

Mirceaovnia is known as a real party town and it lives up to its reputation. There is a weeklong festival at the end of every month which, by local superstition, keeps away the "Grey Death". It might just be an excuse to party. That said the tourist trade that comes in because of that fact more than pays for the festival. Nobles and rich merchants from all over the Mists come

here to party. Along with vodka from Vorostokov there is wine from Richemulot, beer from Falkovnia, brandy from Dementlieu, and ale from Mordent. As such, alcohol flows freely in this realm.

There are also many brothels, theaters, and opera houses. The women here have the reputation of being unusually free with their affections. And in fact, it is not uncommon for an attractive young woman of even the lower upper class to prostitute herself when young in order to provide for herself when older. Nobody seems to think there is anything wrong with this, which makes the area popular for certain tourists. Any offspring that come as a result are usually fostered out or sent to nurseries. This isn't the most moral thing to do, but the natives are a hedonistic lot.

If the theaters are not as sophisticated as Dementlieu, they are quite good in a ribald sort of way. I saw a comedy there at the Drunken Stag Theater about Vlad Drakov. He was shown as the strutting buffoon that he is. Outside of him commanding one doomed assault after another, it shows the many bastards he has had over the years. Unlike the by-blows here, his bastards are largely due to rape, something not tolerated here. The morals of this domain are pretty loose, but rape is treated seriously. The implication of the play was that this man can neither control his blood lust or his sexual lusts. The theater itself was quite nice with fine furnishings and the acting was quite funny.

If the singing there is not as good as Karakatass, it is more sophisticated. Karakatass might have fine singers but their music is rustic. The opera I saw was The Tale of the Milkmaid, performed inside the Hans Falcor Opera House. It was the story of a milkmaid in Richemulot who surprises a nobleman in the embrace of a common street prostitute. She uses this information



for blackmail and climbs her way up. But what goes up must come down and the nobleman uses his own machinations to ruin her. She winds up in the end the same milkmaid she started out as. It is a popular tale in Richemulot and it was turned into an opera here.

The best inn is the Golden Perch. It has fish you can die for. It is run by a cute halfling woman (CG Exp 3) who has a really sunny smile. Her place is quite upper class and expensive. It has the best wine and brandy The Mists have to offer. The rooms are finely furnished and there are nice paintings on the walls.

For more middle-class customers there is the Topsy Maid. It is a nice clean establishment run by a male dwarf (NG Ftr 6). Like most dwarves, he is a bit dour but has a good heart. His establishment is quite well run. It has good beer and ale and the rooms are clean and the furnishings decent.

On the other side of town is where the tanneries are, and you can smell it for miles. The stench there is overwhelming. The people in this area are quite impoverished as they aren't paid very much. Muggings are common here and I would stay out of this area at night. There are rumors of dangerous "things" that come out at night.

The ruler is a handsome young man named Prince Ladislav Mircea. He is quite the ladies' man from what I hear but he is also well liked. He is charming to a fault and is the height of culture and sophistication. When I talked to him, I was impressed by his knowledge of the arts and sciences. His tutors seem to have done a fine job. His palace is well staffed and is quite bright and well furnished

The Festival of Life happens every month between the 23rd and the 30th. Tourists come in by the boatload during that week. The festival starts out slow, with outdoor

concerts and juggling. As the week goes, on the festival gets wilder and the concerts get more numerous, the theaters conduct more plays and the alcohol flows freely. For some reason the natives spend the last day indoors; they still have parties but I noticed that no one who was native to the city left the inn during the entire last day of the festival. Something felt wrong about this, so I stayed in too. I was by no means forbidden to leave the inn. In fact, there were plenty of people on the streets, but I noticed no one who was native to the place, although I had seen them frequently during the earlier days of the festival walking around. Some even had favorite spots, but I didn't see them there that day.

Sanguinia is a good place to vacation for those who are on the hedonistic side. You had better be able to handle loud noises, as this place is loud. The morally upright will be uncomfortable around here as this place is known for its loose morals.

Tsar Gregor Zolnik

*CE (LE in human form) Male Loup de Noir
4th level Ranger*

Wolf Form: AC 18 hp 80 Atk +12 Dmg
1d6+2 Bite +4 vs Humans

Str 14 Int 12 Wis 8 Dex 18 Con 17 Cha 12
SQ : Track, Trip, Wild Empathy, Damage Reduction 10/silver and holy, Low Light Vision, Scent, Endurance

Feats : Handle Animal +10, Hide +11, Move Silently +12, Survival when tracking by scent +4, +6 vs Humans

Human Form: AC 21 HP 48 Atk +15 , +16
Within 30' Dmg 1d6 arrow +5, +7 vs Humans

Str 12 Int 12 Wis 8 Dex 14 Con 13 Cha 12
Favored Enemy: Human

Unlike most rangers he is unable to track in human form due to his curse



Feats : Combat Style Archery, Endurance

Animal Companion: wolf

Weapon Focus: Composite Long Bow,
Quick Draw, Rapid Shot , Point Blank
Shot

Skills : Climb +9, Handle Animal +9, Hide
+9, Move Silently +9, Knowledge:
Nature + 9, Bluff +5, +7 vs Humans,
Survival +7

Possessions : +4 Chain Shirt, +4 Mighty
Long Composite Bow with +1 Strength
bonus

Immune to charm and hold, +4 to all
other mind affecting saves

Gregor can summon 1d6 wolves or 1d3
dire wolves 3 times/day

Gregor can close the borders by causing
sorrow in anyone who crosses it. The
person hears voices telling him about
every inadequacy he has, getting more
embarrassing and intense with every
step forward, until he turns back.

As a young man, Gregor was a great
hunter, the best in the village. One year,
winter came early and it was hard to find
game, as the game was dying from
starvation themselves. Occasionally people
came upon wolf leavings but that was about
it. One day Gregor saw a wolf dying beside
a bull elk that had fatally wounded him
when it was taken down. Gregor thought,
"If I were a wolf I could feed myself and my
family." He thought of an old tale his
grandfather told him. It was a ritual one
could use to turn into a wolf. He used it that
night after killing the dying wolf and
skinning him, while performing the ritual.
The ritual worked, and he was able to find
enough food to feed himself and his family.
Eventually he found he could feed the entire
village. As a result, he became a hero to the

village. He was even married off to the local
duke's daughter.

But the call of the skin was too powerful
for him, because such dark magic is
addictive and he would sneak out at night
and use it to hunt in wolf form. His wife
assumed he had taken some peasant girl as
a mistress and found a lover of her own. He
found them in bed together and, in a
jealous rage, killed them and everyone else
in the house and then fell asleep due to
exhaustion.

He found himself in a palace the next
day as Tsar Gregor I. At first, he was quite
pleased but he soon found out that
although everyone recognized him as Tsar,
he was considered the lesser offspring of a
greater man, Boris II. According to the false
history of this land, his grandfather Boris I
conquered this land after discovering it in a
long sea voyage. The land was almost
empty, and the natives were forced under
his rule, with his prowess as a hunter well
known. His son was Boris II, a great hunter
of renown, who also formed the legal code.
His father was known for his vast intellect
and his charismatic personality. Although
neither stupid nor meek, Gregor is not
outstanding in any way. Worse yet, he is
cursed to have no luck in hunting while in
human form. In wolf form, he can find
plenty of prey but in human form all large
game flees from his presence and even
small game is scarce. The best he can find
is rabbit and the like, which bring little
prestige. His lack of hunting ability greatly
lessens the people's respect for him in this
hunting-centered domain.

Worse yet, his curse is to never be the
hero. Gregor loved the time he was seen as
a hero and longs for it. However, due to his
curse, no matter what he does he is never
seen as a hero. He either fails outright,
succeeds in a way that appears
unimpressive or looks downright



dishonorable. People follow him due to the respect they have for his forebearers, but he has little respect in his own right. This grates on his nerves exceedingly. The one thing he craves most, hero worship, is denied him and even absolute rulership pales in comparison in his eyes.

Darklord Prince Ladislav Mircea

10th level human Aristocrat (On the 30th of each month, he changes into an Old Vrykolaka Vampire and adds its template)

AC 11 hp 92

Str 12 Int 16 Wis 8 Dex 12 Con 16 Cha 18

SD: Undying, immune to aging, poison, disease, level, and ability drain even in human form.

Feats: Skill focus: Diplomacy, Bluff, Gather Info and Hide, Atk +8/+12 as a vampire, Disease carried is Grey Death (DC20 for non-natives, natives automatically fail. incubation: one day, damage 1d4 Str and 1d4 Con)

Skills : Bluff 18, Diplomacy 18, Gather Info 18, Hide 17, Move Silently 20 (Boots of elvenkind included)

Prince Ladislav Mircea was a selfish young prince, when a plague hit his kingdom. He locked himself away from the peasantry along with many nobles of the kingdom to avoid the plague known as the "grey death". For the first month, things went well for him. He was partying with his friends, feasting and drinking while the commoners wasted away from the plague. Then the plague started affecting the nobles and he had them thrown over the wall once they were infected. When he was infected himself, he tried using dark magic and the untainted blood of his guests to stave off the disease but nothing worked.

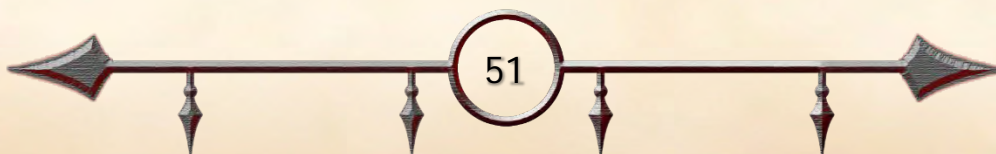
When he died, he rose as a Vrykolaka Vampire. That state lasted one day, after which he regained his humanity, but only for a month. On the 30th of that month, he went back to vampire form and that has happened every month since.

He appears to be a very handsome man in his mid-20s and is quite charming except for the one day a month when he changes into a Vrykolaka Vampire. He has a very good reputation with the locals as a result and is a hit with the ladies. He is far more upset about his ugliness once a month than the murders.

On the 30th of every month, which is the same day of the month as the day he died, he turns into a Vrykolaka Vampire and has to drain one person that day and pass on his disease. He then drags them away to use them in his experiments to cure himself. He conducts his experiments for an entire week and then gets discouraged. He goes out partying, but it feels hollow; it is more to forget his plight than for real enjoyment. He throws himself more and more into the festivities until the 29th when he returns home dreading the next day.

He always attacks the first person he sees alone and out of sight. He sticks to shadows and wears his boots of elvenkind. Due to his curse there will always be one or more people out alone. The town has not figured out that there is a vampire out there, they think the town is cursed. He conducts experiments over the next week and the survivors are broken ones, who he discards in the worst districts to keep them out of his sight. Those who don't survive are vampire spawn under his control. If they become too numerous, he simply destroys a few of them.

He is quite the ladies' man and has a lot of luck with them. If he sleeps with a woman, she needs to make a DC 10 Fort save the next day or contract the Grey



Death, on the 1st of the next month. This DC rises to 13 if his attraction to her is strong and 20 if very strong. The population will not connect it with him but instead blame the curse, as she will fall prey to it the same day that she would have if he passed it to her on the 30th. He has noticed the pattern, however, and is upset that women who he is attracted to tend to end up with the curse.

The Darklord can try to pass the Grey Death onto anyone he chooses, even in human form 3 times/day with a DC 20 Fort save. He also can close the borders, making it so that anyone who tries to cross the border immediately becomes ill, causing 1d4 Con damage each round until they turn back.

Thanks to MistMaster for helping me.



ON THE SUBJECT OF THE DEATH KNIGHT

by Tomokaicho

Dearest George,

I have come across these notes, hidden under the floorboards of Dr. Van Richten's old residence. The notes I found are not intact. I think that they were partially eaten by rats.

I myself cannot make head nor tail of it so I am leaving it entirely in your hands.

*Your friend,
Gregor*

From the fragmentary notes of Dr. Rudolf Van Richten, "on the subject of the death knight", as reconstructed by George Weathermay

Gregor ~ I am reconstructing these notes by making educated guesses about the missing words to the best of my ability. Some pages are lost entirely so Dr. Van Richten seems to jump from scene to scene.

My comrade Shauten and I had arranged an audience with Lord Soth through his retainer, a dwarf of wicked

disposition that my intuition tells me may be a lycanthrope. If the rumours of this Lord Soth are true, then he is the only openly undead ruler in any of the domains.

We were led into the throne room of Nedragaard Keep by the dwarf, who opened the door to the throne room, motioned us inside, and left closing the door behind us. Entering the throne room, the scene before me turned my blood cold, a sharp pang of fear rending my belly. That Lord Soth is undead was true; his retinue were also undead – skeletal warriors, and ghostly banshees wailing such obscenities that I felt as if I were covered in filth. Lord Soth's eyes were burning red orbs, somewhat like that of a lich, yet different.

There are two sentences here missing. Whatever is described in those sentences led to the following altercation.

We were in Lord Soth's hands, and utterly helpless. With a pointed finger and a single word Lord Soth froze Shauten in

place. To my utter shame I was frozen in place by my own fear, with no obvious magical compulsion from the undead knight.

Half a page is missing here. I wonder what happened to get Lord Soth talking.

It was only the courtly manners that I recalled from old Mordentish romance stories about knights and ladies that saved us. Had I offended Lord Soth he no doubt would have slaughtered us on the spot.

Lord Soth proved to be rather talkative and eager to tell his tale, which was repeatedly contradicted by his spectral servants. "Never believe anything told to you by bards or historians – or my banshees, for that matter", Lord Soth began. "For every sentence of truth they proffer, they demand that you accept a dozen lies".

I am unable to reconstruct this section. Whatever story Lord Soth told Dr. Van Richten is lost.

I have returned to Mordent. I fear for Shauten's health. Since our encounter with Lord Soth, Shauten is overly concerned with his mortality, as if death may come to take him at any moment. Perhaps a mesmerist could help Shauten overcome this traumatic experience.

There is another section about Shauten here that I can't quite work out. Shauten tried to sacrifice Dr. Van Richten years

later in an attempt to become a lich. I wonder if this "traumatic experience" had something to do with it.

I found a man with information about "death knights" and with Shauten away I was compelled to conduct the interview by myself.

The man's name is Lamarc. He is an outlander, from some place beyond the mists. Outlanders are deemed by alienists to have unhealthy humours of the mental sort but everything that I have discovered in my time learning of the secrets of our land has convinced me that the outlanders are indeed from other worlds.

Lamarc gave me a description of his encounter with a death knight on his world.

More missing here. I think it describes the leadup to the battle.

"The battle was joined. We were certain that we would win the day. We had ten mages from the Great Academy of Sorcery in addition to our knights."

There are words here – magic, weapons, dragon, but I cannot put them into context.

"And I despaired. The death knight, called Sir Reynald, strode confidently through the flame, ice, acid, and lightning that our mages cast at it. When the spells of our mages got close to the enemy, the spell simply winked out of existence without even touching

or harming it in the least. As Sir Reynald approached within striking distance, one of our mages brought into being a wall of force to vex the death knight and block its advance.

A few moments later I realized that it was all for naught. Sir Reynald raised his fist and with a waving motion brought down the wall.

In that instant I felt the mighty strength granted to me by the spells of my comrades leave my limbs and looking around I could see that the protections that the mages had armoured themselves with had also been defeated. Every single one. Then the slaughter began.”

An entire page missing here. I suppose that it describes the killing.

“And so, I turned tail and ran. A betrayer of my knightly vows and a coward. It’s an irony among ironies, for Sir Reynald whom we fought had been cursed by the gods for those exact transgressions. Is eternal damnation what awaits me? I fear it is so for the gods have abandoned me in this strange land.”

The rest of the information about Lamarc is gone, but I have been able to reconstruct the information about the specific powers and traits of the death knight! Keep reading.

– George

When we read the tales of Lord Soth in the Dragonlance and Ravenloft books, we were awed at his great power and charismatic presence. The showdown between Lord Soth and Strahd Von Zarovich in front of Castle Ravenloft is one of the great evil on evil battles. Yet mechanically the death knight template is weak compared to the vampire template, whether the Monster Manual 2 version or the Dragonlance Campaign Setting version. In Ravenloft the disparity is even worse – vampires have age categories and salient abilities that greatly enhance their power. Going strictly by the rules given, Strahd Von Zarovich would have made quick work of Lord Soth in their confrontation during the events of Knight of the Black Rose. For that matter, Lord Soth would may not have survived to confront Strahd Von Zarovich. First Lord Soth had to fight Duke Gundar and his son Medraut in Castle Hunadora. While Lord Soth won that encounter in Knight of the Black Rose, in a purely mechanical sense Lord Soth was evenly matched by Duke Gundar, an eminent aged vampire. The outcome of a Lord Soth and Azrael, versus Duke Gundar and Medraut battle is uncertain. Certainly, the fight would not have been as easily won as in the novel.

This is begging for correction. Death knights deserve a better treatment, a Ravenloft treatment. This Ravenloft-ized template allows for the death knight to acquire salient abilities as it grows in power (increases in level). Every change and addition to the death knight template has been painstakingly analysed for internal consistency and balance, and most importantly presents the death knight as it is in fiction.



| Characteristic | Die Roll |
|----------------|----------|
| Strength | 18+d100* |
| Constitution | 14+1d4 |
| Dexterity | 12+1d6 |
| Intelligence | 8+1d10 |
| Wisdom | 8+1d10 |
| Charisma | 10+1d8** |

* The death knight's Strength may improve (see below).

** Living beings may or may not find the death knight horrific in appearance, but there is no denying its presence or power of command.

Source: *Dragon Magazine* #222

However, as this article is from 2nd edition D&D it does not have the benefit of templates, like the one presented in this article.

In 2nd edition D&D the death knight had 75% magic resistance, and a chance to reflect the spell back on the caster.

'The ecology of the death knight' article in *Dragon Magazine* #360 reimagines the 4th edition death knight as an undead creature with its sword as its phylactery. In my estimation this iteration of the death knight divorces the death knight from its place in the popular imagination and makes too many fundamental changes. Perhaps this 'death knight' can be styled as another creature altogether.

Now we turn to the death knight in the 3.5 edition of D&D, which is the most relevant because this template is a revision of the templates in the *Monster Manual 2* and the *Dragonlance Campaign Setting*.

The death knight from *Monster Manual 2* does not have any of the most characteristic spell-like abilities of the death knight. Gone are the *symbol* spells, the *power word* spells and all the others. Instead the death knight can use an abyssal blast (Su) ability once

per day. The touch of this death knight deals hit point damage and constitution damage, an ability that was not present in the 2nd edition death knight. These changes move the death knight away from its traditional roots. This death knight has mechanic for getting undead followers that isn't undead leadership. Additionally, the MM2 template gives the death knight an anemic ability score bonus of +4 to Strength and +2 to both Wisdom and Charisma.

The death knight for the 3.5 edition of *Dragonlance* is much the same as the MM2 template, with two main differences. The first is that some of the spell-like abilities traditional to death knights are restored, so the *Dragonlance* version of the death knight has *detect magic*, *dispel magic*, *power word (blind, kill or stun)*, *symbol (fear or pain)*, and *wall of ice*. The second is the ability to create skeletal warrior (Su). A change is made to summoning a new mount after a mount is killed, from one year in the MM2 to 30 days in the *Dragonlance* version.

What is clear is that in the transition between editions, the flavor of the death knight has changed a lot. One thing that didn't change was the way the death knights have been presented in D&D fiction, so in making this new death knight template I looked to fiction for inspiration.

For purposes of comparison I will be using the *Dragonlance Campaign Setting* version of the death knight. In this template I changed or adjusted the following:

- Dropped the negative energy damage and constitution drain from the death knight's touch.
- Allowed the death knight to suppress its fear aura.
- Changed template entry requirement from 6 HD or higher to +8 BAB or higher. No creature of as little as 6 HD should be a death knight. Under the 6 HD requirement,





strange class entries are possible, such as a wizard becoming a death knight at 6 HD. Thematically, that is inappropriate. Under the new requirement a creature without a measure of physical combat ability will never become a death knight (it would take 16 levels of wizard to qualify, compared to 8 levels of fighter).

- Dropped the strange mechanic for undead followers, and simply gave the death knight scaling undead leadership.
- Dropped abyssal blast and restored *fireball*.
- Removed *power word kill* from the base death knight and allowed *power word kill* to be selected as a salient ability.
- Dropped create skeletal warrior and gave animate dead. Gave the ability to create a unique type of swordwraith in the second rank of gravedigger, which approximates the skeletal warrior (only more interesting).
- Gave see *invisibility* 3/day as detect invisibility was given in 2nd edition, instead of the *see invisibility* (Su) effect. The death knight can get *see invisibility* as a constant effect by selecting the first rank in the death knight's awareness salient ability.

- Slightly adjusted spell resistance so that spell resistance levels more evenly with the death knight. After 20th level the spell resistance is the same.
 - Dropped turn immunity, and called it turn defiance instead to mark it as different. Turn immunity makes the death knight immune to turning, but the death knight can be "banished with *holy word*, however, just as if it were an evil outsider. (The banished death knight returns to the plane of the evil god it serves)". This doesn't really make sense for the Dragonlance setting and is impossible in the Ravenloft setting. With turn defiance, when a death knight is successfully turned it loses its damage reduction for 3 rounds but is otherwise unaffected. Thus, turning leaves the death knight vulnerable but not helpless.
 - Beefed up bonus ability scores and gave the death knight some combat oriented feats to start it off. It's no coincidence that the combat-oriented feats are the same as the vampire.
 - Gave a charisma bonus to hit points via former valor (Ex). This is desperately

needed by death knights that are going to be in front line combat.

- Solidified the relationship between a death knight and its nightmare mount, with the nightmare and the death knight having a relationship like a paladin and mount.
- Gave the ability to rebuke undead in the form of a salient ability, as Lord Soth unsuccessfully displayed in *Knight of the Black Rose*.
- Gave the ability to shadow walk in the form of a salient ability, as Lord Soth displayed in *Knight of the Black Rose*.
- Created 23 salient abilities that are lore-friendly. The salient abilities either build on existing death knight spell-like abilities or are present in D&D fiction.

How and why are death knights created

In D&D cannon, death knights are created by deities or demonlords or arch-fiends. There are no references to necromancers creating any death knights. It seems that the creators of death knights do not control the death knights directly, rather they create them and set them upon the land, where they invariably do evil. In the Dragonlance novel *Dragon of a Vanished Moon*, Lord Soth is was asked to lead the Dark Queen's armies, and he refused. This indicates that when death knights make allies, they do so out of shared evil disposition and self-interest, not coercion or control. In your campaign you may wish to allow an epic spellcaster to create a death knight through the animate dead epic spell seed. If this is allowed, adjust the DC to cast the spell by +10. The death knight is not controlled by the creator because death knights are unique among undead in that they cannot be controlled.

Whether created by a god or god-like power, or an epic necromancer, the 'raw

material' for the death knight should be limited to those creatures that committed grave violations of their code of conduct (whether formal or self-imposed), oath breakers, or those that turned away from a holy mission and caused the suffering of many as a result. Another way for a death knight to be created is as a 'reward' for service to the unfathomably evil fiends of the outer planes. No one that didn't condemn themselves first should be turned into a death knight. If a creature that has not committed those misdeeds is subject to an attempt to turn it into a death knight, the attempt should fail. In this sense the 'material component' for creating a death knight is the wickedness of the creature itself.

The matter of salient abilities

When a death knight gains a salient ability, it doesn't consciously select it, rather their salient abilities develop organically. If for example the death knight often uses symbol then it will likely get at least one rank in symbol scribe. If the death knight is using animate dead often it will likely get at least one rank in gravedigger. A death knight that enjoys melee combat, especially if the enemies are the servants of good, then the death knight will likely get a rank or two in unholy knight, combat mastery, or fast healing. In this way death knights differ from each other in specific powers, temperament, and battlefield strategy. Salient powers assigned when a death knight is created is dependent on the character of the death knight as a mortal, unless the deity, demonlord or arch-fiend creator of the death knight intervenes to set a specific set of salient abilities.



Relationship with other forms of undead

To a death knight other undead are in three categories – fodder, enemies, and allies. Fodder are the death knight's weak undead servants or undead that pose no threat, to be disposed of in whichever way the death knight pleases. Enemies are undead of similar power that have shown themselves to be adversaries. Allies are those undead of similar power that are friendly to the death knight, or at least non-aggressive. How a death knight deals with other undead depends on their relative might in relation to the death knight itself.

Lesser undead like skeletons, zombies, ghouls and the like being fodder must serve or stay out of the death knight's way. Generally, they are beneath a death knight's notice except to fight for the death knight or obey orders. A death knight gravedigger is another matter altogether. Undead created by a gravedigger always have an initial attitude of friendly. This means that the gravedigger can fill his lair with undead that he doesn't directly control and are not hostile to him, but hostile to any living creatures entering his lair. The gravedigger might also use its *create undead* ability to fill to booby trap pits full of ghouls waiting to tear apart incautious intruders.

Incorporeal undead like spectres and shadows are generally ignored by death knights unless the death knight wants to bring them under its thrall. Many death knights have a few of these creatures under its control.

Vampires can be fodder, enemies, or allies, depending on the strength of a vampire individually. If a death knight knows what a vampire is (Lord Soth did not at the beginning of *Knight of the Black Rose*), then it will not make any

assumptions, but will test the vampire to ascertain its power.

Death knights are respectful of liches, never relegating them to fodder, and prefer to make them allies rather than enemies, if only because of the magical abilities of the lich. Few undead can resist the commands of a lich, and liches are usually surprised that they are unable to control a death knight at all. When a death knight and a lich are brought together as allies, often it is due to a lich using its *vortex of evil* power to draw creatures of evil alignment to its location. A death knight and a lich in alliance is a terrifying thing because they have powers that complement each other.

Unusual undead are dealt with on a case by case basis. Creatures like nightwalkers are too powerful to be controlled and are more like forces of destruction than something that can be categorized as an ally or an enemy. In cases like this a death knight will usually steer clear.

Designing a death knight villain

There are no 'generic death knights'. A death knight is not going to be a nameless mook that the game master will throw at the PCs. Rather, every death knight has a background that guides its personality and motivates it in undeath.

When a full background is unknown to the PCs, some idiosyncrasies can make a death knight villain memorable. Take Lord Soth, for example. Lord Soth will often cleave to the letter of the Oath and the Measure (the code of the Solamnic knights in the Dragonlance setting), but blatantly violate the spirit. Another example is in *Spectre of the Black Rose*, where Lord Soth chides Azrael for leaving prisoners languishing in the dungeons and not treating prisoners in the way a knight



should - ransoming nobles and putting the rest to work until they can earn their freedom. The following are examples of possible death knight idiosyncrasies.

- The death knight kisses the hand of a lady like he did when he was a living knight (this might require a horror check).
- The death knight refuses to harm children (after slaughtering their parents).
- The death knight still tithes a portion of his income to charity, in keeping with his vows (the only vow this death knight ever kept). Woe to any town or village guardsman that tries to stop the death knight and his retinue from entering town to give charity. If the village or town accepts the death knight, it may have the dubious honor of being under the death knight's protection.
- The death knight still wears the holy symbol of its former god, a blasphemous act that angers clerics. The death knight considers himself a holy man of this god and preaches heretical doctrines that do harm to the reputation of the gods of good.
- The death knight seeks a living bride. His bride must a noblewoman, as befitting the death knight's noble rank.
- The death knight shows mercy to surrendered foes.
- Does not use spell-like abilities unless enemy casts spells or uses magical items first.

If the death knight was a former paladin, or knight of some sort, consider using the fighter class for the death knight. While the fighter in 3.5 edition is considered sub-par by many, it is an excellent choice for the death knight, which has many other abilities and advantages. If the death knight is a cleric then it probably worships demonlords or other fiendish creatures. Prestige classes that have good BAB are highly recommended for these cleric death knights. It's unlikely that whatever creates a

death knight would choose an arcane spellcaster, as a straight wizard would be 16th level before it could be eligible to take the template. Even so, the 'classic death knight' is a fighter.

To give the death knight decent ability scores as suggested in the Dragon Magazine article, we will be using a modified version of the elite stat array presented in the SRD, which I call the heroic stat array. The heroic stat array is the elite stay array with +2 to each ability score, thusly - 17, 16, 15, 14, 12, and 10 (this corresponds nicely with Lord Soth's base ability scores in 3.5e, which are 18, 16, 16, 14, 13 and 10). We will for our purposes drop the lowest ability score (10) and use the rest of the scores to create our death knight. The death knight doesn't have a constitution score and so a death knight only has need of five ability scores. After the death knight template is applied to the character, the resulting ability score before any adjustments for level might be for example 23, 20, 19, 16, 12 arranged in whatever manner you please. My suggestion is Str 23, Dex 19, Con --, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 20.

As Dr. Van Richten's fragmentary notes reveal, facing a death knight is foolhardy even when prepared. Beware, for no two death knights are alike.

Creating A Death Knight

"Death knight" is a template that can be added to any evil humanoid creature of with a BAB of +8 or higher (referred to hereafter as the character). The character's type changes to undead. It uses all the character's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Hit Dice: All the character's Hit Dice (current and future) become d12s. Death knights also gain bonus hit points using



their Charisma modifier in place of their Constitution modifier (Former Valor).

Speed: Same as the character.

AC: The death knight has +5 natural armor, or the character's natural armor, whichever is better.

Special Attacks: A death knight retains all the character's special attacks and gains those described below.

Fear Aura (Su): Death knights are shrouded in a dreadful aura of death and evil. Creatures of less than 5 HD within 15 feet of a death knight must succeed at a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 death knight's HD + death knight's Charisma modifier) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell cast by a sorcerer of the death knight's level. A death knight may suppress the effect if it wishes.

Undead Followers: A death knight receives the benefits of undead leadership, as if it had the undead leadership feat. Death knights gain only undead followers but a death knight may choose to receive a living cohort or an undead cohort. A death knight never receives leadership penalties for mistreating undead followers, or for causing their deaths. These creatures are in addition to any undead creatures the death knight may command or rebuke if it has that ability. If a death knight's leadership score exceeds 25, treat as epic undead leadership.

Spells: A death knight can cast any spells it could while alive, unless alignment restrictions prohibit the casting of a particular spell.

Spell-like Abilities: Death knights receive the following spell-like abilities at a caster level equal to their HD. 3/day - *animate dead*, *detect magic*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *see invisibility*, *wall of ice*; 1/day - *power word stun*, *symbol of fear*, *symbol of pain*.

Special Qualities: A death knight retains all the character's special qualities and gains those described below.

Former Valor (Ex): A death knight gains a bonus to its hit points equal to its Charisma bonus (minimum +1) times its Hit Dice.

Damage Reduction (Su): A death knight's undead body is tough, giving the creature damage reduction 15/+1.

Immunities (Ex): Death knights are immune to cold, electricity, and polymorph in addition to those immunities possessed by undead (see undead traits, below).

Spell Resistance (Su): A death knight has SR equal to 10 + its HD.

Summon Mount (Su): As a full round action the death knight can summon a nightmare (see Monster Manual p. 194) to serve the death knight for an indefinite period. The nightmare benefits from its service to the death knight gaining abilities like a paladin's mount (except that its intelligence score does not change), with the death knight's HD used instead of paladin level. If the mount is slain, it immediately disappears, leaving behind any equipment it was carrying. The death knight may not summon another nightmare for thirty days after the former mount dies.

Turn Defiance (Ex): A death knight affected by turning, rebuking, or commanded is not turned, rebuked or commanded, instead a death knight is affected in the following manner: if successfully turned, rebuked or commanded a death knight instead loses its damage reduction for 3 rounds, but is otherwise unaffected.

Undead Traits: A death knight is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects. It is not subject to critical



hits, subdual damage, ability damage, ability drain, energy drain, or death from massive damage. A death knight cannot be raised or resurrected by anything less than a deity. The creature has darkvision (60-foot range).

Saves: Same as character.

Abilities: Only an exceptional individual ever becomes a death knight, so mortals eligible to become death knights start with the heroic stat array, which is 17, 16, 15, 14, 12, and 10 (drop the 10 and use the remaining ability scores to create the death knight). A death knight gains +6 to Strength, +4 to Dexterity, +2 to Wisdom



and +4 to Charisma on application of this template. Being undead, it has no Constitution score.

Skills: Same as character.

Feats: Death knights gain Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, and Lightning Reflexes, assuming the base creature meets the prerequisites and doesn't already have these feats.

Salient Abilities: A death knight gets one salient ability by becoming a death knight plus one salient ability for every 4 HD that it possesses.

Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground.

Organization: Solitary or troupe (see undead followers, above).

Challenge Rating: Same as character +4 +1/2 CR per salient ability (+1 CR for dark pilgrim, occultist, and psychonaut).

Treasure: Double standard.

Alignment: Same as character (always evil).

Advancement: Death knights continue to advance in level as per their original class.

Epic Death Knights: Death Knights that reach epic levels (21 HD) continue to acquire salient abilities normally, with the following differences. Upon reaching 21 HD the death knight gains a bonus salient ability. Additionally, any epic bonus feat that a death knight gains through leveling may be used to instead to acquire a salient ability, if desired. When being an epic death knight alters a salient ability, it is noted in the entry for that ability.

Salient Abilities

A death knight starts with one bonus salient ability, and gains one salient ability for every 4 HD that it possesses.

Peerless Champion

The death knight's physical and/or mental characteristics improve.

Prerequisite: None.

Benefit: This ability may be taken multiple times. The death knight receives +2 to the ability score of its choice, and +1 to its lowest ability score. Additionally, the death knight's natural armor bonus improves by +1.

Combat Mastery

Prerequisite: None.

Benefit: The death knight may select a fighter bonus feat for which it qualifies. In addition, the death knight's damage reduction improves by 2 points and the magical enhancement bonus of the weapon required to overcome damage reduction is increased by +1. This ability may be taken multiple times. Note: An epic death knight that selects this ability receives two non-epic fighter bonus feats instead of one. Alternatively, the death knight may select one epic bonus fighter feat. Damage reduction improves as normal.

Dark Pilgrim

This death knight is favoured by the dark gods. The death knight is granted a measure of divine spellcasting ability.

Prerequisites: Cha 14+, no levels in divine spellcasting classes. No occultist salient ability. No psychonaut salient ability. Must be favoured by a dark god or other puissant god-like entity.

Benefit: You can cast divine spells as a kind of divine sorcerer. Using the sorcerer tables for spells per day and spell known, at levels 2, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 17, 20 (and so on, ad infinitum) the death knight gains spellcasting as if it had gained a level of sorcerer, having known spells and spells per day according to its hit dice as indicated,

except the spells are drawn from the cleric spell list instead of the wizard/sorcerer list. Ignore spells per day and spells known 5th level and above as the dark pilgrim's spellcasting ability caps at 4th level spells and spells known. For example, a 10 HD death knight with this salient ability would have the spells known and spells per day of a 4th level sorcerer. Like a sorcerer the death knight need not prepare his spells in advance. Caster level is equal to HD and the key ability for spellcasting, bonus spells per day, and difficulty class for spells cast by the dark pilgrim is Charisma. The dark pilgrim does not need material components to cast spells granted by this salient ability. Note: The death knight cannot use any of the spellcasting gained from the dark pilgrim salient ability to qualify for a feat, prestige class, or other option, nor is dark pilgrim spellcasting ever advanced by any method other than that detailed above. Additionally, Spellcraft and Knowledge (religion) become class skills for the dark pilgrim.

Fast Healing (Ex)

The death knight's undead body heals damage rapidly.

Prerequisite: None.

Benefit: The death knight gains fast healing equal to its Charisma score ability modifier (minimum 1). Only permanent changes to the death knight's Charisma score is calculated for this purpose.

Occultist

This death knight is granted a measure of arcane spellcasting ability through its connection with occultic forces.

Prerequisites: Cha 14+, no levels in arcane spellcasting classes. No dark pilgrim salient ability. No psychonaut salient ability. Must have contacted an occult creature



such as a demon, devil, servants of elder evils, and the like.

Benefit: You can cast arcane spells as a kind of sorcerer. Using the sorcerer tables for spells per day and spell known, at levels 2, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 17, 20 (and so on, ad infinitum) the death knight gains spellcasting as if it had gained a level of sorcerer, having known spells and spells per day according to its hit dice as indicated, the spells being drawn from wizard/sorcerer list. Ignore spells per day and spells known 5th level and above as the occultist's spellcasting ability caps at 4th level spells and spells known. For example, a 10 HD death knight with this salient ability would have the spells known and spells per day of a 4th level sorcerer. Like a sorcerer the death knight need not prepare his spells in advance. Caster level is equal to HD and the key ability for spellcasting, bonus spells per day, and difficulty class for spells cast by the occultist is Charisma. The occultist is not affected by arcane spell failure when casting spells acquired by the occultist salient ability and the occultist does not need material components to cast spells granted by this salient ability. Note: The death knight cannot use any of the spellcasting gained from the occultist salient ability to qualify for a feat, prestige class, or other option, nor is occultist spellcasting ever advanced by any method other than that detailed above. Additionally, Spellcraft and Knowledge (arcana) become class skills for the occultist.

Psychonaut

This death knight has a measure of focused psionic power, having psionic powers in a single psionic discipline. The change into an undead state has unleashed latent psionic ability.

Prerequisites: Cha 14+, no levels in psionic manifesting classes. No occultist salient ability. No dark pilgrim salient ability.

Benefit: You can manifest psionic powers in a manner like a psion. Using the psion tables for power points per day and powers known, at levels 2, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 17, 20 (and so on, ad infinitum) the death knight gains psionic manifesting as if it had gained a level of psion, having known powers and power points per day according to its hit dice as indicated. Psionic powers are drawn from a single psionic discipline on the psion/wilder and psychic warrior list, and once chosen the psionic discipline may not be changed. For example, the psychonaut that chooses telepathy may only select telepathic powers for its known powers, including psion discipline powers. If there is a power of differing levels existing on both the psion/wilder and psychic warrior lists, the higher level must be chosen. Ignore maximum power level known 5th level and above as the psychonaut's manifesting ability caps at 4th level powers. Manifester level is equal to HD and the key ability for manifesting, bonus power points per day, and difficulty class for powers manifested by the psychonaut is Charisma. Note: The death knight cannot use any of the manifesting gained from the psychonaut salient ability to qualify for a feat, prestige class, or other option, nor is psychonaut manifesting ever advanced by any method other than that detailed above. Additionally, Psicraft and Knowledge (psionics) become class skills for the psychonaut.

Rebuke Undead (Su)

The death knight may exert its influence over other types of undead.

Prerequisites: Cha 14+.



Benefit: The death knight may rebuke or command undead as an evil cleric of a level equal to its Hit Dice.

Shadow Walk (Su)

Prerequisite: None.

The death knight can travel through shadows.

Benefit: As a swift action, the death knight in an area of shadows may move to another shadowed area, as if it had cast dimension door. If there is no shadowed area to emerge from, the ability fails harmlessly. The death knight may bring one additional creature, per dimension door.

Undead Mastery

The death knight can command a greater number of undead than normal.

Prerequisites: Cha 21+, ability to rebuke or command undead.

Benefit: The death knight may command up to ten times its level in HD of undead, as if it possessed the undead mastery feat.

Enhanced Spell-Like Abilities Suite (Sp)

The death knight gains some new spell-like abilities or may improve existing abilities. These spell-like abilities are used at a caster level equal to the death knight's HD.

Prerequisite: None or stated in text.

Benefit: Acquisition of several spell-like abilities. Each ability has two ranks.

Battlefield tactician

First rank: the death knight may use wall of fire 3/day and stinking cloud at will. Additionally, wall of ice is used as if subject to the extend spell feat, doubling its duration. **Second rank:** the death knight may also use transmute rock to mud 3/day,

gust of wind at will, along with forcecage and wall of force 1/day.

Death knight's awareness

First rank: see invisibility and detect magic are a constant effect for the death knight and the death knight's darkvision increases out to 120 feet. Additionally, Search, Spot, and Listen become class skills for the death knight. **Second rank:** true seeing is a constant effect for the death knight. Additionally, the death knight is never considered flat-footed.

Gravedigger

First rank: the death knight uses animate dead as if cast in a desecrated area, as per the effects detailed in the desecrate spell, creating as many as double the normal amount of undead (that is, 4 HD per caster level rather than 2 HD per caster level) and giving each creature created by animate dead +1 hit points per HD. Note that this does not actually desecrate an area, nor may the benefits of this ability be had in a consecrated area. In addition, the death knight gains the ability to use create undead 1/day. Undead created by a death knight gravedigger have an initial attitude of friendly towards the death knight, even if uncontrolled. **Second rank:** the death knight's ability may use create undead 3/day and gains the ability to use create greater undead 1/day, and both create undead and create greater undead are affected by a desecrate effect, giving +1 hit points per HD to the undead created.

As a special use of create greater undead, the gravedigger can create a unique type of swordwraith (Fiend Folio) to serve the gravedigger in unlife from a corpse meeting the requirements for that template, with the following differences; the swordwraith has levels in the fighter class always equal to half the gravedigger's hit



dice round down and does not gain experience points; the swordwraith has the Former Valor (Ex) ability and uses the gravedigger's Charisma modifier instead of its own for the purpose of calculating bonus hitpoints gained through this ability. A swordwraith killed or destroyed reforms fully restored and healed 1d6 miles from its gravedigger creator 1d20 days after its apparent destruction. If the gravedigger is destroyed, then its swordwraiths are destroyed immediately as a result. A gravedigger may create a number of swordwraiths up to his Charisma modifier (minimum 1). These swordwraiths do not count towards the maximum hit dice of controllable undead, and the swordwraiths are always controlled by the gravedigger whether it can rebuke undead or not (treat as spawn). Only permanent changes to Charisma are calculated for the purpose of creating swordwraiths.

Mage breaker

First rank: the death knight may use greater dispel magic 3/day, and antimagic field 1/day. **Second rank (16 HD prerequisite):** the death knight may use mage's disjunction 1/day. Additionally, uses of antimagic field increase to 3/day.

Symbol scribe

First rank: the death knight may use symbol of sleep and symbol of weakness 1/day. Additionally, uses of symbol of fear and symbol of pain increase to 3/day. **Second rank:** the death knight may also use symbol of persuasion, symbol of insanity and symbol of death 1/day and uses of symbol of sleep and symbol of weakness increase to 3/day.

Unholy knight

First rank: the death knight may use bull's strength, prayer, and holy sword

3/day. Holy sword is subject to the following modifications; The weapon acts as a +5 unholy weapon (+5 enhancement bonus on attack and damage rolls, extra 2d6 damage against good opponents). It also emits a magic circle against good effect (as the spell). **Second rank:** holy sword is a constant effect on any single held melee weapon. Additionally, the death knight may also use true strike 3/day as if true strike was subject to quicken spell-like ability.

Wordsmith

First rank: the death knight may use power word blind and power word kill 1/day. **Second rank:** the death knight gains use of power word sicken 3/day and uses of power word blind and power word stun increase to 3/day. Additionally, once

Dread Possibility: The Deathknight Generic Warrior

The generic class warrior in the SRD is a slightly improved version of the fighter class, offering more flexibility in terms of feat selection and allowing for some interesting class features like sneak attacks to spice up the death knight.

Feats for the generic warrior can be any feat for which the generic warrior is qualified. This makes very interesting combinations between feats and salient abilities possible, such as corpsecrafting gravediggers, to name one.

If this dread possibility is used, then the death knight uses the generic class warrior to the exclusion of all others and may not take prestige classes. The generic warrior is used to make the ultimate death knight and is my favourite option for creating death knights.



per day a power word may be used as if it was subject to quicken spell-like ability.

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RICHEMULOT

Land of gossip and decadence

by Mistmaster

A land of crowded cities, where the walls have ears, a lot of ears; trust is a rare and precious coin, here. (This is my Dread alternative of Richemulot)

Tropes

Overcrowded cities and villages, the constant sensation of being listened to, subtle oppression through blackmailing and the supernatural wererats who lurk and mingle. The domain explores Agoraphobia and Musophobia but doesn't give any safety in the marshes and in the forests, where worse threats lurk.

Domain Overview

The Musarde River, and its tributary, the River of Sacrifice, create the marshy ground of Piper's Bog.

The City of Pont-a-Museau, where a little Cathedral of Ezra (Notre dame de la Peste designé) is dwarfed by the twin Domes de les Rats Soureignes, bridges the Musarde near the border with Falkovnia.

It is the main access for river-ships to the Krieglake in Falkovnia and it's a very important trading hub. Further South, near the edges of the Piper's Bog, sits the third city of the barony, Ste. Ronges; the mainly human city is also its main industrial center. Furthest South we found Mortigny, the second largest city in population, and the grain basket of the barony, where one can find Granny's Lair, the main temple of Grandmother Rat, the holiest site in the

barony. The central part of the nation is a marsh, dotted with overcrowded villages. The City of Rien, near the Borcan border, is the cultural center of the state, with two prestigious Universities: the Claude Renier Gentlemen's Institute for superior learning and the Isabel Museau Ladies' College; The cathedral de la Dame Oubliée is the main temple of Richemouloise Ezran sect. Going West we find, near the fork of the Musarde, the city of Della Mirandola, a bustling market town. Closing the circle, and linking the capital with Della Mirandola, we find the fortified town of Mäusenburg, created by Falkovnian exiles. It sits just on the edge of the Whiskers Forest.

The People

Richemuloise see themselves as unhappy, developed people, for whom advancement is not tied to birth but only to personal achievement; every peasant could be promoted to aristocracy, if he earns it, somehow. However, there is a price; Every Richemuloise knows that walls have ears, too, and a lot of them. Thus, Richemuloise are always mindful of what they say unless they have taken all precautions.



Culture level: Renaissance

Ecology: Full

Climate & Terrain: Temperate plain and marshes, in the western and northern part, along the Musarde River; the River of Sacrifices, which forms the Piper's bog, is born from the hills in the Eastern/Southern part of the domain and it enters the Musarde near Ste. Ronges, Forests (The Whiskers Forest, The Wormtail Forest, and the Whiterat Woods) dot both the western and the eastern part.

Languages: Dementlieuse, Balok, Falkovnian.

Religions: Church of Ezra, The Hidden Cup (LG), Church of Hala, The Grandmother Rat (NG), Church of Zakhata, The Rat King (LE), Cult of Mouserinks, The Rat Queen (CE), Cult of Erlik, The Withered Rat (NE).

Races: Human (Richemoulois) 77%, Wererats 20%, Other 3%.
Government: De jure elective, de facto hereditary for the head of the Renier Family, monarchy.

Ruler: Baroness Jacqueline Renier

Darklord: Jaqueline Renier

Lightlord: Jacques Renier

Analog: XVII-XVIII century France
Capital City: Pont-a-Museau (Standard, NE, 190,000.)

Important towns: Ste. Ronges (Standard, LN, 70,000), Mortigny (Standard, NG, 97,000), Rien (Non-Standard, LE, 69,000), Della Mirandola (Standard, N, 49,700), Mäusenburg (Standard LE, 45,000)

Borders: North: Dementlieu and Falkovnia, East: Falkovnia, South: Borca and Verbrek. South-West: Valachan, West: Mordentshire.

Mice and Rats have a double role in Richemouloise folklore; they are seen as spies and agents of revenge from the evil deities, but they are also the bringer of gifts, and the sign of plenty and good luck; as the saying goes "there are no mice in empty pantries."

Technically, there is no law against wererats, which, on principle, are citizens as much the others; in some of the more insulated villages in Piper's bog, however, acknowledged wererats risk lynching.

Not all the wererat packs are scheming and treacherous murderers; Some of them live peacefully alongside humans; like in Verbrek, the lack of a silver weapon is a sign of trust.

Richemouloise humans, even the working class, like large, extravagant, frilled vests, but usually the working clothes can be tied up, becoming more practical.

Religion

Other than Ezra, a relic of the Dementlieuse domination, the Richemouloise worship four deities, three of which are aspects of other deities.

The Grandmother Rat cult is a NG branch of the cult of Hala; her favored weapon is the dagger, and her symbol is a wheel of cheese with the head of a mouse in the center. Her domains are Animal, Community, Good, Healing, Knowledge, and Nature. She teaches the importance of family and collaboration, and urges her faithful to improve themselves and their environment, mindful of everyone. She is worshipped by smallfolk, humans, and Wererats alike.

The Church of the Rat King worships a LE aspect of Zhakata, and his symbol consists of five rat heads crowned in iron. His favored weapon is the scourge, and his domains are Animal, Community, Evil, Law, Nobility, and Strength. He teaches his



followers the importance of teamwork and hierarchy; they must strive to dominate their community with their numbers, because the majority wins, thus, become the majority, and stay such.

His followers are bureaucrats, wererats, and aristocrats.

The Cult of the Withered Rat venerates a NE aspect of Erlik; its favored weapon is the scythe, and its priests have access to the Darkness, Death, Destruction, Earth, Evil, and Madness Domains. The Withered Rat teaches that life is suffering, and only death is the end of it; the deserving ones, though, may earn themselves immortality in the form of undeath. He is venerated by necromancers and aristocrats obsessed with death; assassins pay him homage, too; wererats see him as the god of disease and thank him for their resistance to it.

The Cult of the Rat Queen, Mouserinks, is totally native to Richemulot; Mouserinks is CE, she uses a crowned rat head in a pentacle as her symbol, and her domains are: Animal, Arcana, Chaos, Evil, and Trickery. She teaches that only the cunning ones prevail, and that if you wish for something you must be shrewd and ruthless to take it, no matter the cost; the only other things which count are your family and even for them, only so long as they do not hinder you; the women of the Renier family venerate this goddess, alongside evil arcanists, and savage wererats.

The Richemouloise sect of the Ezran faith venerates her as the Hidden Cup, and uses a cup as a Symbol. They believe that Ezra incarnated, lived, and died as a mortal to give the world her holy descendants. Her domains are Community, Good, Healing, Law, Nobility, and Protection. The major tenets of the Church are the centrality of family ties, the duty which comes from birthright, and the escatologic waiting for the return of the scions of Ezra.

History

In the beginning, Grandmother Rat birthed the world, and all the gods with it. That was the Creation Age; in that age Zakhata and Erlik fought to marry Grandmother Rat. Erlik won, but Zakhata killed him, and married the daughter which was born from Erlik and Hala's union. Erlik body withered but returned to life as the Withered Rat; his daughter, the Rat Queen, filled the world with Wererats.

In the Age of Heroes, a great bard, called the Pied Piper, scourged the eastern part of Dementlieu of rats and wererats, which settled in the marshes of Richemulot.

Ezra decided to be born as a mortal, and left descendants in Richemulot.

During the Age of Darkness, Della Mirandola, a Lady coming from a southern land, managed to assassinate the commander of a Terg army, Zanifar Khan, winning the war for Dementlieu.

In the Modern Age, after the Dementliuse Revolution, which abolished the Monarchy in Dementlieu, the already autonomous Counties of Richemulot seceded, and elected Jean-Claude I Renier as the first Baron of Richemulot, more or less three hundred years ago.

Claude I Renier, Jean-Claude's youngest son, succeeded his father after his 40-year reign following a short, bloody feud with his siblings.

Jacques I Renier removed his father but was then removed by his brother

Jean-Claude II. Jean-Claude II's long reign is seen as one of the most prosperous in Richemouloise history; he codified the current meritocratic criteria of access to nobility, and kept the nation free from strife, internal and external. He was one of the few Renier barons to die a natural death. He was succeeded by his grandson Claude II, who had a likewise long but far



less pacific reign; Claude reigned both the country and his family with a strangle-hold; he managed to discourage the nascent Falkovnian Kaiserreich from invading; he also accepted refugees and exiles from Falkovnia, using them to create a fortified city near the border. The current age began with Claude II's death, and Jacqueline I's accession; Jacqueline distinguished herself by ruling with a soft hand, and building strong diplomatic ties with many other countries.

The Famed and the Infamous

Jacques Renier (LG Young Adult Human Natural Wererat Paladin of Grandmother Rat 9)

The son and heir of Baroness Jaqueline is also her complete opposite; trusting and forgiving where his mother is paranoid and vengeful, Jacques follows the teachings of Grandmother Rat with honesty and enthusiasm. His own burden is his unconditional love for his family, which often blinds him to their wickedness. However, Jacques is neither slow-witted nor naive, and his firm resolve has kept him on a narrow and difficult path.

Adventure Hook: When a plague hits some villages in the Piper's Bog, Jacques pays the adventurers to investigate and find a solution.

Louise Renier (NE Adult Human Natural Wererat Sorcerer (Arcane Bloodline) 8)

Baroness Jacqueline's twin sister, and her only close relative, she is bound to her sister by mutual spite and distrust; Louise hopes to undermine and replace her sister, while Jacqueline keeps her close because, as much as she detests her, she doesn't

trigger Jacqueline's curse, and she does not want to be alone.

Adventure Hook: When news of the legendary Pipe of Rats comes to her, Louise sponsors the adventurers, in secret, to manage to get her hands on that powerful item.

Simon Audaire (LN Human Mummy Fighter 9)

Simon, the scion of a minor noble family, was Jacqueline's father; killed on the order of his father-in-law, he was recently resurrected as a mummy by Gerard Renier, in the name of his blasphemous deity, the Withering Rat. Luckily for Simon, something went amiss, and he retained his free-will; he has gained the help of Pierre Renier, Gerard's far more moderate brother, a member of the Rat Catchers, who keeps him well sheltered. He is trying to build a network of opposition against his daughter.

Adventure Hooks: Arriving in Ste. Ronges, the adventurers are contacted by an agent of the Rat Catchers; meeting with Simon, they must decide whether they can trust an undead.

Fabian Perigneux (LG Middle-aged Cavalier Order of the Star 10)

The Count of Rien is a big sponsor of the local Ezran branch, the Cupbearers, who believe that Ezra incarnated and left a descendance in the world. He believes himself to be one of these scions, and that his newborn son Marcel is the Chosen of Ezra, and he dreams of forming a righteous theocracy, with his son as the leader.

Adventure Hook: Marcel gets kidnapped, the Adventurers are among those tasked with recovering him.



Carelia Douzains (LG Adult Human Cleric of Ezra 10)

The head of the Richemouloise sect of the the Ezran faith, Carelia is credited with descendance from Ezra; this is validated by her enhanced protection and healing abilities.

Adventure Hook: When the holy Chalice of Ezra is stolen, the Adventurers are involved, whether they like it or not.

Martine-Gabrielle de la Queurose (NG Old Human Natural Wererat Cleric of Grandmother Rat 10)

This wrinkled old woman, able to turn into a big white mouse, is wise and witty; she is the head of the cult of Grandmother Rat, and she resides in Granny's Lair in Mortigny. She is the matriarch of a large warren of good aligned wererats, Granny's Paws, and she is the great-grandmother and advisor to Countess Emilie Traidou.

She spends most of her days taking care of the sick and the poor; she is most beloved by the local populace.

Adventure Hook: One of the adventurers' loved ones falls prey to a terrible disease and they seek Martine-Gabrielle's help to treat that person; however, the ancient wererat has disappeared; thus begins a race against time to find her.

Pierre Renier (N Human Hunter 8)

A human member of the Renier family, Pierre was mistreated and discriminated against by his wererat kin; he joined the Rat Catchers society for revenge, but Simon Audaire, the Mummy he freed from his brother's blasphemous control, has managed to change his focus from revenge to protection.

Adventure Hook: Pierre pays the adventurers for escorting a transport of cheese, hiding secret weapons against wererats.

Gerard Renier (CE Human Cleric of the Withered Rat 8)

His hate for his wererat kin turned Gerard in a merciless mad priest; the head of the cult of the Withered Rat delights in surrounding himself with undead rats and wererats, under his control.

Adventure Hook: To advance his agenda, Gerard sets a swarm of undead rats against the village the adventurers are residing in.

Jules Audrix (LN Young Adult Human Fighter 8)

Loyal but, somewhat naive, Jules is a cadet member of a noble family, and he wishes to build fame and glory for himself. As the watch commander of Pont-a-Museau, he feels himself shackled, and wishes to shake things up.

Adventure Hook: Jules enlists the adventurers to root out a band of smugglers; he does not know that those smugglers take orders directly from House Renier.

Narcis de Veyrines (CG Human Hunter 12)

An high ranking member of the Rat Snatchers, Narcis is more a solo operative than a decision maker; after her parents were killed by a savage warren, she dedicated herself to root out the evil wererats. She does not trust any wererat, though, and that puts her in opposition to the Grandmother Rat Priesthood.

Adventure Hook: The adventurers are paid quite well to help in capturing the most notorious outlaw of the Barony, Narcis de



Verynes; are they informed rightly about the woman they are hunting down?

Tecin "the Pebble" Quickfoot (CN Halfling Wererat Rogue 6)

A rare example of non-human Wererat, Pebble is neither malicious nor aggressive; he is, instead, quite eager to help for an honest fee. Obviously, his honesty does not stop him from managing to satisfy his customers in finding any kind of item, more cheaply than in a shop.

Adventure Hook: After their quite pleasant first meeting with the jolly halfling with the long mustaches, the adventurers find one of their items missing.

Emilie Traidou (NG Human Adult Wererat Oracle 7 of Grandmother Rat)

The plump countess of Ste. Ronges, Dame Emilie is lame, but she still arrives wherever she wants to go. With a good heart and a keen mind, she rules with a light hand, and with generosity, financing several charity funds, and she is cherished for that.

Adventure Hook: after discovering that one of her charity funds was robbed, Dame Emilie tasks the adventurers with an investigation.

Bethilie Bresson (N Adult Human Magus 7)

The most famous swordsmith in the Barony, Mademoiselle Bethilie is also an expert fencer, and, secretly, a practitioner of arcane arts. She sponsors a school of fencing which secretly also teaches the way of the Magus to the worthy.

Adventure Hook: A noble from Mordentshire wishes to purchase a blade from Bethilie; the adventurers are offered a reward to escort the delivery of the item.

Quinault Sumene (LN Middle-aged Alchemist 7)

Quinault is the most famous Botanist ever to teach in the Claude Renier Superior Learning School in Rien. He is famous for discovering many properties of the Piper's Bog Moss;

Adventure Hook: When his hired escort deserts, unwilling to help him to reach the deepest, most dangerous part of the Piper's Bog, Quinault offers a generous sum to the adventurers.

Valeray "The Meek" Colverne (CG Youth Human Rogue 3)

A boy of sixteen, wise beyond his years, and seen as the leader of all the urchins of Ste. Ronges, Valeray is cunning and patient. He never lets rage get the better of him, preferring to bide his time before acting; his cunning has allowed him to get ahead of bigger and older people.)

Adventure Hook: When the son of an adventurer's friend get lost in Ste. Ronges, they must seek Valeray's help to find him.

Bahlinda Malvoisine (CE rank VI Annis Hag Oracle of the Rat Queen 4/Barbarian 4)

This evil Hag was once a human follower of Grandmother Rat, and she lived in Mortigny. The death of her only daughter made her mad with grief, and she started to kidnap, maul, and eat children as part of a monstrous sacrifice to the Rat Queen; she turned in an Annis Hag, and started to hide herself in the Piper's Bog, Recently, she decided to occupy the Sanctuary of the Forgotten Lady, under the guise of a blind priestess of Grandmother Rat; her short-sightedness does not makes her less formidable.



Adventure Hook: When children from Mortigny start to disappear near full moon nights, the adventurers must investigate, and Bahlinda offers to help...

Evrard Lavigny (LN Adult Human Fighter 5)

The Count of Mortigny is a very rich man, and the head of the second most powerful family in Richemulot. A cautious man, he has seen what tends to happen to families that defy house Renier, so he keeps a low profile, and focusses on increasing his assets. He is also a sponsor of the Maison des 100 Papillon, the main astrological (and arcane) learning center in Richemulot.

Adventure Hook: When the Estimé Capitale, Mortigny's city hall, is ruined in a fire, Seigneur Evrard must discover the perpetrator and the motive; so he enlists the adventurers to investigate with discretion.

Isodard Yvoire (LN Adult Human, Wizard (Diviner) 5)

The head of the Maison des 100 Papillon, Monsieur Yvoire is a practical academic who knows that finding funds is fundamental for the institution he chairs. He has started to sell the privilege to name stars to the highest bidders.

Adventure Hook: Someone is selling false star-naming papers, signing it with Isodard's personal seal; the diviner can't find exactly who that person is, but he knows that person is still in Mortigny, and he pays the adventurers to stop the fraud.

Mabile "The Crimson" Uznatovich (CN Half-Vistani Bard 9)

This bard is the celebrity of the moment, filling the theaters in Richemulot to the brim, at every exhibition. In his spare time he researches about the Vistani vardo that

used to belong to his father; it disappeared in Piper's Bog when he was still a little boy.

Adventure Hook: someone wearing a Vistana's clothes has been sighted in the Ste. Ronge countryside, near where the Piper's Bog starts; Mabile enlists the adventurers to find out the truth about it.

Delia Mirandola (LG Adult Human Ninja 9)

Dame Delia, the Countess of Della Mirandola, is the direct descendant of the eponymous heroine who stopped the Terg Invasion. The House of Mirandola, since then, has trained its scions with the secrets Dame Della learned in Rokushima Taiyoo.

Delia is married to, and has four sons and two daughters with, Jean-Paul Renier, a distant cousin of the Baroness.

Adventure Hook: Marco Mirandola, Delia's eldest son, is a natural wererat; he keeps this a secret, but, when he starts his training as a ninja, he must infiltrate a warren which controls the black market in the county. When the constable of Della Mirandola hires hunters to kill the wererats, Delia enlists the adventurer to help her son, without exposing him.

Fritz Grunnenberg (LE Old Human Wererat Rogue 7)

The Count of Mäusenburg is not a pleasant person; he opposed Drakov's militarism, preferring a more bureaucratic approach, and he was forced to leave with his warren after his takeover of Silbervas was discovered. He managed to secure an alliance with Claude Renier, and he has served the Renier Family faithfully since then. He rules with a heavy, yet fair, hand. He is paranoid, and tasks his security forces with rooting out any possible Falkovnian spies. He is also a firm believer in the Rat King and promotes that religion.



Adventure Hook: When a Falkovnian spy is found in possession of sensitive data, Fritz needs to find the spy's accomplice before he escapes, without setting the city in a frenzy. He tasks the adventurers to investigate discreetly.

Arguis Groissiat (LG Adult Brute Caliban Alchemist 6/Fighter 4)

The leader of the Lock and Key believes in equal opportunities, especially for those, like him, who suffer the scorn of the world because of their looks. Unlike others in authority, he gives anyone an opportunity.

Adventure Hook: When someone starts a riot in Mortigny, the adventurers are involved, and must try to convince the Lock and Kay, and Arguis especially, that they are innocent.

Organizations

La Serrure et la Clé (The Lock and Key)

This Lawful Good association is made up completely of masked Caliban, and they form the most disciplined and stalwart force of order in the Barony.

Dread Possibility: Corruption of the worst kind has made his way in the ranks of the Lock and Key, by means of a demonic cult, the cult of Baphomet. The members of this secret group, call themselves The Opened Lock, and believe Baphomet will heal their deformities, if they pay his price.

Les Chasseurs de Rats

This Neutral organization was formed primarily to fight off the savage warrens of Wererats living in the marshes and sewers. The Ratcatchers, nowadays, fight every menace in Richemulot, rat-shaped or not, but they are a loose bunch, which only shares a few goals.

Dread Possibility: A bunch of extremists inside the Ratcatchers wants to destroy every wererat in Richemulot; to do so, they are working on a poison they want to mix in the water supply. It won't kill only wererats, though, but also the weaker humans, the non-were kin of any wererats, and a lot of the wild lifeforms in Richemulot; cooler heads have prevailed, but the Solution, as the poison is called, exists, and is protected in a vault in Mortigny.

Les Éleveurs de Saleté

A CE wererat sect devoted to the spreading of diseases and pollution, the Filth-breeders want to wipe out non-wererats from Richemulot. They are on the payroll of Jacqueline Renier.

Dread Possibility: The Filth-breeders, on Jacqueline's order, are working on a disease which will transmit wererat lycanthropy through the bite of common rats. This is called the Becoming Plague, which would give Jacqueline absolute power over the domain, and on the wider world on which she would release it, as well.

The Darklord : Jacqueline Renier

CE Middle-Aged Medium Humanoid (Shapechanger) Rogue (Charlatan)

Hit Dice: 11 (77/99 HP)

Speed: 30, Climb 20.

Initiative: +8/+11 (+4 in Chateau Delanuit)

Senses: Lowlight vision, scent, Perception +12

Armor Class: 19/21 (+4/+5 Dex, +8 Armor, -/+2 Natural Armor) (+4 Deflection in the Chateau Delanuit)

Space/Reach: 1 square /1 square



Combat Maneuver Defense/Combat

Maneuver Bonus: 28(32 vs Trip)/+17(+21 Trip)/32 (36 vs Trip)/+19 (+23 Trip) (+4 in Chateau Delanuit)

Str: 11/13; **Dex:** 16 (18)/18(20); **Con:** 15/17; **Int:** 15; **Wis:** 10/13; **Cha:** 17 (19)

Saving Throws: Fort: +5/+6, Ref: +11/+12, Will: +3/+4 (+2 in Chateau Delanuit)

Special Qualities: Shapeshifter Traits, DR 10/Silver, Evasion, Alternate Form (Dire Rat or Hybrid), Summon Swarms (Rat), Scent, Lowlight Vison, Natural born liar, Evasion, Uncanny dodge, Change shape (human, hybrid, dire rat; polymorph), Lycanthropic empathy (rats and dire rats), Bloodlust, Disease (non-human form; filth fever DC 18), Curse of lycanthropy (non-human form; DC 20/24 in Chateau Delanuit), Spider climb, Gnaw (ignore hardness), Gaseous form, Chemical Bane (Dove's feathers), Rogue Talents [Convincing Lie, Charmer, Coax information, Canny observer, Terse threats, Good name, Flee, Unwitting ally, Rumourmonger, Natural born liar, Skill Mastery (Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Perception, Sense Motive, Climb)]; Curse of the Darklord, Regeneration 10 (in Chateau Delanuit), Mastery 4, Sinkhole of Evil.

Special Attacks: Sneak Attack (+4d6), Disease (Lycanthropy, only with Bite Attack) (DC 20 Fort Negates).

Attack: Melee: +1 Rapier Human bane rapier +12 (1d6+1; crit 18+, +2/+2d6+2 vs humans and human wererats; invisible until drawn) (+2 To Hit Rolls in Hybrid and Rat Form, +1DR, +4 in the Chateau Delanuit),

Ranged: +3 Double Barrel Pistol +12/7 (1d8+1, crit x 4, range 20', touch)(+2 Hit rolls in Hybrid form, +4 on HR and DR in the Chateau Delanuit). In Hybrid form she also has a natural attack, Bite +17 (1d6+3+Disease Fort Negates DC 22).

Skills: Acrobatics +13, Appraise +11, Bluff +16, Climb +17, Diplomacy +15, Disable Device +13, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +13, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +11, Knowledge (local) +13, Knowledge (nobility) +9, Perception +12, Sense Motive +9, Sleight of Hand +15, Stealth +20. (+4 in the Chateau Delanuit)

Feats: Ancestral Legacy (Renier), Exotic Weapons Prof (firearms), Improved Initiative, Persuasive, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse.

Challenge Rating: 14

Property: (62,000 gp/82,000 gp) Rat's Tooth (Human bane rapier +1), double barreled pistol +1, bracers of armour +3, brooch of shielding, cloak of resistance +2/cloak of elvenkind, ring of mind shielding, ring of protection +2, elixir of love, headband of charisma +2, belt of dexterity +2, sheath of bladestealth, amulet of mighty fists +1

Background

Jacqueline was born, along with her twin sister, the daughter of Marie Renier (third Daughter of Baron Claude Renier) and Ser Simon Audaire (with the Audaires being of lesser nobility, they took their mother's more influential surname). While intelligent and perceptive enough to swiftly learn the rulers that governed her treacherous family,



she was a bright, innocent and romantic child, if only a bit ambitious, never accepting defeat graciously. Her Grandfather, the Baron, took a liking in her, and she soon became the only member of the family whom Claude trusted; when her mother initiated her into the mysteries of the Rat Queen, she refused to partake, in horror. But then, after her beloved father left the family, she felt betrayed; her mother thus coaxed her to betray her father's location and then sacrificed him to her dark goddess. Enraged and embittered by her sense of guilt, Jacqueline turned on her mother, and manipulated her sister into killing her; this transformed the previously childish rivalry between the twins into a mortal enmity.

However, a part of her sought redemption and freedom, and she thought to have found it in the form of the man she married, Henry du Bois, the father of her children. But she was naive in thinking that she could simply step out the arena and leave it; her sister tried to seduce her husband, failing, but managing to apparently kill the man. Claude Renier, in this circumstance, declined to help his favorite grandchild, thinking that it was time she resolved her issues with her sister in the long honored way of the Renier family. But Jacqueline was tired of the rules and games of her Grandfather; she decided to turn to her mother's cult, the same Louise followed, and which she soon controlled, once again gaining the upper hand on her sister, without killing her. But to ensure that Louise could never make herself pass for Jacqueline again, she cut off her ear; finally, she decided that she wanted to change the rules, and so, she brutally killed her ever cautious Grandfather, exploiting his only weakness, Jacqueline herself; thus she inherited both the Barony of Richemulot and the mantle of Darklord.

Current Sketches

Jacqueline wants one thing, and only one, to abolish the rules and have her way, without having to dance around it; she wants to do away with subtility and honeyed words, but to do that she must take control of them all. In doing so, she has managed only to add more rules; her ambition, and her desire to prevail makes her continue to play the game, waiting, biding her time, striking in the right moment. She is still forced to obey them, no matter how much she has learned to bend them, as without the rules she can't win, and she wants to win. She also wants to be loved, but sometimes, you need to concede to win in love; that is a lesson she still has not learned.

Combat

Jacqueline detests losing, so she attacks only when she is sure to win, and she employs any available resource to win: minions, poison, hostages, playing on every known weakness her foes possess; if on the verge of losing, she takes gaseous form and flees. She knows the value of patience and can wait years before she attacks. She likes to humiliate her enemies and prefers to torture them rather than killing them.

Special Abilities

Curse of the Dark Lord: Jacqueline automatically changes into her rat form every time she is close to a person she loves; She feels at a disadvantage for that, and prefers to keep her foes closer.

Lair

Chateau Delanuit is the large palace in the center of Pont-a-Museau, the heart of the city, and the ancestral home of House Renier. Decorated with the pack of white and black rats which is the blazon of the



house, the palace has been the theater of hundreds of horrible acts of kinslaying, bloody coups, and murders and is, for that reason, a Rank Four Sinkhole of Evil, which can bestow the Rage, Despair, Fear, and Greed conditions.

Its walls are home to thousands of rats, and its dungeons connect to the vast sewage system of the city.

Closing the Border

When Jacqueline wishes to close the borders, millions of rats surround them; the

rats are so many that they can form a wall and attack even flying enemies. People can pass by killing off the rats and shielding themselves from their attacks; it takes 100 minutes to traverse the area covered by the rats; those immune to swarm damage can also pass unscathed. Jacqueline can keep the borders closed for up to one year at a time.



A HUNDRED SHADES OF DARK

100 new darklords and domains ideas

By Jack the Reaper

Darklords are the central pillars of Ravenloft. We know of several dozens of them, but many, many more lurk out there in the mists, each with his own domain, powers, and curse. The following are 100 seeds for all-new darklords, who may be found at pocket domains, islands of terror, clusters, new cores, or expansions of the original core. The details are left for any DM as he or she sees fit. Adding these darklords and domains to the campaign can make Ravenloft a larger, much more varied setting.

1. **Gorthaur, The Gargoyle Lord**

is the darklord of a great gothic city full of gargoyles and statues of all types, many of which come to life at night. Evil and cruel as those gargoyles are, their presence is the only thing keeping away the evil spirits threatening to annihilate the city.

2. **Gulgolatha, The Skull Lord**, was a supremacist elven king (eladrin) who led a genocidal campaign against all other races, seeing them as inferior and impure. His plans backfired, resulting at the destruction of his kind. Now he is a skeleton warrior with long white hair and ornate armor, sitting on his throne among the ruins of his once magnificent city, his sword, which turns flesh into dust, clutched in his hands.

Surrounded only by ghosts and skeletons, he is fully aware that the other races thrive while he belongs to history - but still dreams that his time will come...

3. **Archimenes, The Nihilist**, was a philosopher who preached so convincingly his philosophy of nihilism and meaninglessness, that the people in his kingdom were all persuaded to end their lives, and he was left alone, unable to die himself. He has the power to convince anyone of his pessimistic philosophical views (nihilism, immoralism, determinism, materialism, etc.) with logical and scholastic arguments; those visitors he doesn't persuade to kill themselves, he sends to other domains to spread his destructive ideas.

4. **Jezebel, The Harpy Queen**. She wanted so much children of her own, that when she found out she couldn't conceive, she stole others' babies and children, taking them to her castle and never letting them out. Cursed to become a harpy, she and her harpy clan now terrorize the people of her domain, many of whom bind their children to heavy, weighted chains or lock them in cages in an attempt to keep them from being taken away.



5. **The Man in the Yellow Hat.**

Mastermind of crime, the white-skinned, ever-grinning Man in the Yellow Hat is a truly bizarre, creepy character, able to grotesquely twist and change his body, control his surroundings, pull strange objects and creatures out of thin air, and perform other cartoonish feats, ignoring physics and logic. He has a sick sense of humor and absolutely no morals, and always plans insane crimes to shock and terrorize the city. Nobody knows his identity and background, and nobody suspects that the real lord is not the man but the yellow hat possessing him - a hat containing the soul of a mad artist, a failure in life but all-powerful in his death (Inspiration: imagine a combination of Judge Doom from **Roger Rabbit**, Jim Carrey's **The Mask**, and **Batman's Joker**).

6. **Lilith, the Mistress of Souls.** It is uncommon to see a whole domain holding a 10-year-old old girl in such awe and fear, but it is understandable when this girl is the current reincarnation of Lilith Lathenus, the matriarch of the noble Lathenus family, who has been reincarnating through her granddaughters for hundreds of years. Ever calm, controlled and unemotional, Lilith has the power to manipulate souls; she has a collection of thousands of souls stored in bottles, dolls, and other vessels, which she may instill into living,

dead, or inanimate bodies, or instead torture, sell, consume, or anything else. Some whisper that the ravens bring her the souls of the deceased. Though everyone fears Lilith, many yet come to her, asking to have their beloved ones' souls instilled into new bodies, or with other requests, which she might grant - for a price.

7. **Anita, the Lady Wasp.** This insect-themed domain is swarming with all kinds of insects, normal, giant, and monstrous. The darklord Anita is a werewasp, and sadistic priestess of Calistria, who tries to keep the balance of power between her, the assassin weremantises, and the conspiratorial werespiders (see "entothorpes" in **Pathfinder Bestiary 6**).

8. **Graf, The Unseen Troll.** The forests, mountains, and under-bridges of this Nordic domain are inhabited by ravenous trolls. However, the human denizens don't believe in trolls, considering them nothing more

than a children's legend. When cattle or people are missing or found devoured, it will always be attributed to bears, bandits, or natural causes. Even if someone actually sees a troll or is attacked by one, he will forget it a moment later, believing the experience to be something else. When troll dies it becomes a stone, so no evidence is left to his existence. It is all part of the curse of the dread troll lord, who wants humans to fear and respect trolls, but





can't make them even acknowledge their existence. (Inspiration: the movie **Troll Hunter**)

9. **Kazan Khan, the Great Conqueror**, was once the great Khan of the vicious Neureni Horde on the prime material world of Barovia. He was a ruthless conqueror who razed cities and slaughtered whole populations, piling up huge pyramids of severed heads and offering their souls to the demon lord Irlek-Khan. He believed his people were destined to rule the world, but his great empire came to an end by when he was assassinated by the Baal Verzi. Now he exists as a giant ghostly head, hovering inside an oriental palace full of maddening illusions of exotic grandeur and horrors, issuing commands in a thundering voice. The tribes of the Neureni live in the vast plains of the domain, still proud and ruthless, but now just a shadow of their former glory, to the great dismay of the Khan.

10. **The Grand Possessor**. People of this domain are often possessed by mysterious entities. Each possession lasts from several minutes to a couple of hours, during which the possessed behaves like a completely different personality. There are about 20 documented recurring possessors

(though many more might exist), each with a unique character and behavior; some are just weird or embarrassing and others are extremely malevolent and dangerous. When a possession is recognized, the people around will usually try to contain the possessed or simply avoid him until the event is over. The darklord is a greater possessor who knows to disguise himself well, and may inhabit anyone at any time, forwarding his malicious plots gently or brutally at his will. His (or her, or its) nature, background and goals are mystery. (Inspiration: the book **Pandemonium** by Daryl Gregory)

11. **Tor-O-Gon, The Caveman**. On a world of advanced technology, Doctor Egon was a scientist who abandoned all morality in name of scientific progress. The Dark Powers made him a chief of a cavemen tribe (who mispronounce his name as Tor-O-Gon). Now he is forced to lead his tribe in a dark, Paleolithic domain, teeming with prehistoric beasts and primal spirits, forever devoid of progress.

12. **The Empty Woman**. Somewhere in the mists stands The Empty City, a large, abandoned, decaying city, inhabited only by the souls of the lost and the damned. Visitors tend to get lost in the city, wandering for days without finding the way out. Somewhere in the city is the dreadful Empty Woman. The black holes of her eyes and mouth, and the cold emanating from her, reveal that she has done things that would make other darklords go pale - culminating in deicide. She is looking for several hundred items scattered and hidden about the city, the gathering of which will enable her to complete her unfathomable goal. She might send visitors to search for them for her, offering them freedom if they agree, and devouring their souls if they don't. The search for the items requires terrible tests and prices though, almost



surely damning the seekers (see **The Holders** series on the net for inspiration for such tests, and **The Lost Room** TV series)

13. **Emil, The Scarecrow**. This small town is populated by grotesque, crudely-made animated scarecrows, mannequins, patchwork folk (see **Book of Shadows**), and other animated objects. The scarecrow darklord rebelled against his human creators and killed them, leading his "people" into this land of their own, where they "live" in a mockery of human lives. He can animate and command any artificial object, and hates true humans more than anything else.

14. **Vashti, the Naga**. Beginning her life as a human slave, Vashti worked her way up into a concubine, and then the king's mistress, using seduction, manipulation, and lies. She poisoned the queen and strangled her children to ensure her own position as the new queen and mother of the heir. The Dark Powers transformed her into a giant naga, making her the lord of a small jungle

domain. She dwells in a hideous temple in the heart of the swamp, surrounded by smaller nagas, snakes, and serpentine monsters she despises. More than all she hates all other women, whom she has grown to see as competitors, and for whom she saves the worst tortures.

15. **Zarizinia, The Gremlin Princess** was an elven princess who always loved making harmful pranks and embarrassing-to-deadly mischiefs on anyone around her. When her mischievous behavior became too evil, the Dark Powers gave her the hideous face (which she often hides behind a veil) and scaly skin of a gremlin. Now she rules the humans, elves, and gnomes in her domain from her heavily booby-trapped palace, served by her hosts of gremlins and gremishkas, and no one is safe from her mischiefs.

16. **Kasar, the Centaur** was once a human warlord, the champion of the Bright City, who led his troops against the savage human and demihuman tribes of the wilderness. He slaughtered them mercilessly, seeing them as nothing more



than animals. An ambush drove him into a quagmire, where he sank with his horse; he emerged as a giant, black-horned centaur. Kasar is now cursed to roam the ever-darkened wilderness of his domain, surrounded by monsters and wild creatures that he loathes. In a role reversal, he tries in vain to lead them against the Bright City, in the center of domain, the only place where the sun still shines, but he is unable to enter it.

17. **Hagatha, the Spectral Hag.** The people of this small domain burn every woman at the stake on her 40th birthday. Most women go willingly, though tearfully, to the stake, knowing that every day past this age the chances grow for them to transform into monstrous hags and devour their beloved ones. The source of this curse is the spectral hag lord of the domain, who was burned at the stake herself, and only by destroying her can the curse be lifted.

18. **Louis, The Rat King.** The rightful heir to the throne, he was thrown away to the sewers as a child due to his deformities, while his good-looking brother inherited the kingdom. Growing in the company of rats, the Rat King - now a truly twisted, three-headed giant rat-thing - returned with a revenge and an army of disease-infected rats. Now he rules his plague ridden, debris filled kingdom from his crumbling castle, never seen in public. His domain reflects Europe during the Black Death, when fear and superstition ruled, and vile magic and twisted creatures abounded.

19. **The Great Fog.** This once thriving metropolis is locked now in a perpetual heavy fog, obscuring sight and making breathing difficult. There is no escaping from this foul, dark miasma. The population has greatly dwindled, and the remaining denizens are struggling to survive in this hellish atmosphere, find supplies, and fight against madmen, bandits, wild dogs, and obscure monsters. The fog itself is the darklord, feeding on the fear and despair of its prisoners, though who or what is it and how it came to be is unknown. (Inspiration:

the short story **The Fog**, by Morley Roberts, in **Strange Tales from the Strand**, and the movie **The Mist**)

20. **Uzhos, The Ogre.** He was a brutal bandit, taking by force anything he wanted: money, objects, women. Now he is an unstoppable, horrid-looking giant ogre, who can easily take everything... but all those things are simply too small to be of any use for him. He terrorizes the villagers in his domain,

bending his frustration on them in cruel methods.

21. **Daniel De Silva, The Lord of Sin.** The horns on the head of this vile tiefling force people to tell him their darkest secrets and desires, which, at his bidding, they act upon. Whenever someone in this domain gives in to his or her desires, he or she becomes more fiendish-looking, sprouting horns, tails, scales, forked tongues, etc. Many denizens revel in their fiendish looks, while others struggle to resist temptation and keep their purity. The darklord believes



all humans are perverted inside like himself, and coming upon pure souls, he will do everything to corrupt them and prove his point. (Inspiration: the book and movie **Horns**)

22. **Gustave Tooms, The One-Eyed King.** In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. This darklord, who lost his eye as a child, infected all of his kingdom with mystical plague, making everyone but him permanently blind. He now rules the community of survivors, using and abusing them at will, since they know they utterly depend on him to find food, medicines, and supplies. His eye is playing tricks on him, though, showing him things that aren't there, and his greatest fear is to lose his sight or connection with reality. (Inspiration: the books **The Day of the Triffids**, by John Wyndham, and **Blindness**, by José Saramago)



23. **The Fly.** The smallest darklord in Ravenloft, this priest of Baalzebub has committed such horrible atrocities that he was cursed to become a fly. He is still very dangerous, though, and may inflict illness and whisper madness, possess people temporarily by crawling into their brain through the orifices, and control swarms of flies. His most horrifying power is a curse that transforms people into man-fly abominations. His domain is a city surrounded by marshes, heavily infested by flies, mosquitos, and other insects.

24. **Lazaralin, The Wish Giver.** When anyone makes a wish in this enchanting, Arabian-Nights- style city of delights, the beautiful female genie darklord makes it come true - in a dark and twisted way, of course. The city is in a state of constant chaos due to all the wishes and counter-wishes made by all its dwellers and visitors all the time. No matter how harmful the results, people never give up and always try to remedy the situation by more wishes (everyone can use up to 3 wishes a day). The only wish the genie can't grant is her own - to be free from her enslavement to those pesky humans.

25. **The Faceless.** This mysterious woman has white gown, long black hair, and no face, only two wild eyes. She's got powerful psionic talents and is completely insane. Visitors in the abandoned, rusty town of her domain will be subjected to vivid hallucinations drawn from the darkest recesses of her and their subconscious and deepest fears. The closer they come to the Faceless, the more powerful and horrifying their hallucinations become, manifesting as phantasmal killers. But there are hidden messages in those mad hallucinations as well, and figuring them out might supply the key to escape. (Inspiration: **Silent Hill** and the movie **Re-Cycle**)

26. **The Wendigo.** An shaman has channeled into his own body the evil spirit of the deer-skulled Wendigo in order to drive away the invaders threatening his people. He has succeeded, but now his evil is tainting his vast Native-American-styled domain, and the lands of the tribes are plagued by evil spirits, demons, and the undead. (Inspiration: **Totems of the Dead** and **Deadlands** RPGs)

27. **Heidrich von Aizenshtat, Governor of the Living and the Dead.**

In this large city, the upper class and nobility are vampires, the hard-working lower class are slow-minded (though sentient) zombies, and the middle class are mortal humans and demihumans of several races. The mortals and the undead live in coexistence, and most of the mortals dream of the rarely given promotion to vampire status (so there is no lack of volunteer blood donors) and dread the punishment of demotion to a zombie. There is a constant tension however, between the different factions, derived from envy, fear, hatred, suspicion, and prejudices, which often erupts in violent ways. The lord governor, a cynical business-like necromancer, and his council of necromancers have hard time keeping the peace and balance in the domain.

28. **The Alhoon.** Everything looks peaceful in this lovely, sunny town. People live their lives happily, facing no unusual problems other than occasional case of

sudden death, attributed to illness. The horrible truth, however, is that this pleasant reality is a façade, a constant mass hallucination broadcast into the denizens' minds by an artifact from the alhoon darklord's tower, superimposed over the actual reality. In reality, the city is crumbling ruins, the air is filthy, and everything is dirty and decaying. Some individuals might get glimpses of the truth,

and even notice the illithids monitoring the people, but they'll be treated as insane if they speak of it. (Inspiration: the movie **Virtual Nightmare**. Note that unlike the Matrix, the people here live bodily in the physical reality, only their perceptions of it are twisted).

29. **Sasha Orlov, The Transmogrifist,** wanted to be free of all categories, and gradually changed his body surgically and magically into a truly grotesque and alien shape. Now he/she/it wants to share with others his "freedom". He flies in his floating domain, the Cathedral of Flesh (which looks like an abominable

organic spacecraft, made from the twisted flesh and sinews of thousands of creatures), abducting people and using his power of fleshwarping to help them "ascend beyond humanity", causing lots of misery and madness.

30. **Sharana, the szarkai.** This female szarkai (albino drow), the ruler of a powerful drow city, is cursed by a trait most uncommon among her kind: a conscience.



She tries everything to rid herself of it, indulging in great depravities in her attempts to silence its voice, but it only makes her feel more merciless pangs of guilt and shame.

31. **The Amalgam.** For many years, a crazy mage collected the vilest, most powerful ghosts and spirits from all over the world, trapping them in his Well of Souls, where they fought, devoured, consumed, mixed, and merged with each other. When the final result finally burst out of the Well - an amalgam of dozens of murderous, insane ghosts - it was such a powerful and horrid being, that the Dark Powers immediately made it the lord of the surrounding city. Having since killed all the living citizens (making many of them lesser ghosts and undead), the Amalgam still haunts the empty city, waiting for more souls to torture, kill and add to itself. It has just about all the salient powers from *Van Richten's guide to Ghosts*, and more.

32. **Melchizedek, the Eternal King.**

This unbelievably ancient, withered-looking vampire ruled his kingdom for 10,000 years, leading it from the bronze age to the space age, from a savage tribe to a galactic empire. The Dark Powers returned him to his starting point; now he again rules a bronze-aged, biblical-styled domain, populated by tribes of idolators and demon-worshippers. He rules like a god-king from his city Ur-Shalem, commanding



monstrous vampiric slaves (see **Buffy's** Turok-Han), but is endlessly frustrated by having to do everything all over again.

33. **Griffith, The Invisible Man,** wanted to be famous and popular, but now no one can ever see him, and his frustration drives him to extreme violence. He rules a small clan of invisible men and women, formed when someone goes ignored and unnoticed for too long.

34. **Alex, The Nerd.** This large city is frequently terrorized by horrifying monsters and bizarre villains. Nobody suspects that the real darklord is an outcast, reclusive lad, with vivid imagination and the ability to make his imaginary creations come to life temporarily (as in the Shadow Conjunction spell, but more powerful), which he uses to avenge himself on the society he doesn't fit into.

35. **Luciano, Lord of the Masquerade.** In this large, colorful Venetian-styled city, everyone wears masks of all types at all times; being seen

publically without a mask is outlawed and considered utterly immodest. There are several noble houses in the city, guilds, cults and other groups, each with their own style of masks; intricate conspiracies, schemes and plots abound everywhere, and one can never be sure who (or what) is behind the masks. Many inhuman beings are drawn to the city as well, easily camouflaging

themselves among the masked population. The prince darklord is a Master of Masks (see D&D **Complete Scoundrel**) with a huge collection of magical masks, each granting him some powers and traits of the role he is currently playing - but he is tormented by his inability to figure out his own true identity.

36. **Nekhet, the Sphinx.** The villagers in this small, arid domain practice all year long to sharpen their minds and wits - talking in riddles, playing intelligence games, and learning philosophy and logics. It is all a preparation for the annual riddles contest, in which every denizen who has come to age must walk into the Maze of Riddles inside the sphinx's temple and survive it. The sphinx lord plans the maze and riddles during the year, hoping to find some humans with brains... and hungry to devour the others.

37. **The Mothman.** Shadowy figures with wings and burning eyes, strange lights in the skies, haunting whispers inside heads, weird sounds coming from nowhere, crop circles, memory loss, time behaving strangely, a second moon appearing, unnerving dreams of disaster, odd patterns of weather and animal behavior, mementos from the past reappearing, madness, bizarre behavior, laws of nature lapsing - all of these eerie phenomena and more haunt the rural, Twilight-Zoned domain in the shadow of the mothman. The domain is actually locked in a time loop of 3 months and then destroyed by some calamity and restarted again. Nothing is known on the enigmatic mothman, and whether he is trying to stop the disasters or initiate them. (Inspiration: the movie **The Mothman Prophecies**, and Pathfinder's **Mystery Monsters Revisited**)

38. **The Hunter of Demons' Island.** This stormy little island near Dementlieu was used in the past as a penal colony, but

is abandoned now. Visitors will experience many unnerving signs of demonic haunting - shadows, sounds, hooved footprints, etc. The phenomena are scary, and intensify with time, but the real danger is mirrors. The moment anyone on the island looks into a mirror, he or she will see the demonic lord's face peering behind his shoulder, and its horrific sight will drive them immediately, completely insane.

39. **Rothbart, the owl-headed wizard,** terrorizes this forested domain, helped by his daughter Odil, owls, owlbears, and giant ravens. He has affinity for birds and polymorph magics, and among other crimes has turned the local princess and her maidens into swans, who can assume their true shape only at night. Many princes have tried to save her but failed. He also cursed a beautiful woman to change into a hawk every sunrise, and her lover to change into a wolf every sunset, so that they'll never meet as humans. Rothbart hates humanity and takes pleasure from causing misery and suffering.

40. **Griselda, The Wicked Witch** is the classical evil crone: wrinkled face, black dress, tall hat, flies on broomstick, cackles maniacally, etc. She only wanted to do good and be helpful, but people always treated her like an evil witch and accused her of everything bad that happened, so she actually became one in return. The villagers of her forested, mountainous little domain fear her and still accuse her of every blight that falls upon them - and now they are often right.

41. **Jolly Roger** (the original one), also known as the Pirate King, is a skeletal pirate ghost. He rules a large tropical skull-shaped archipelago, used by countless pirates' captains as their home and operations base. He draws the cruelest pirates from many worlds to his domain, offering them the opportunity to use the mists to raid many



worlds and escape back - in return to their souls. When such ships drown, their crew become undead under his control. His curse is never to sail again himself.

42. **Brutus, the Pig.** Huge, obese and filthy, this crude and boorish man nicknamed "the Pig" takes a particular delight in giving offense, violating taboos, and defiling anything sacred in the most degrading, repulsing ways imaginable. He works ruthlessly to corrupt and debase his surrounding, scorning any kind of faith, morality, and decency. His domain, a stinking, lawless countryside of swamps, farms, and criminal dens, is populated by inbred crazy farmers, vicious bandits, cruel slavers, and the worst human scum from all over the domains (and beyond). Even the local animals and livestock are twisted and corrupted.

43. **The Shogul.** The mysterious Shogul are seven powerful entities (or one entity with seven bodies). They are the rulers of a dark Lovecraftian-Chinese domain of ancient cities, pagoda temples, bizarre stone monuments, odd people, and eldritch cults, where everything is done according to ancient traditions. The Shogul look like hooded figures in black or yellow robes, the only parts seen of their bodies are six glowing eyes for each and withered hands. They have the powers of wu-jen, but their true nature is unknown. Any wizard anywhere who knows the secret key of the Shogul, may access their collective minds' network and learn their dark secrets and spells. The more he learns, though, the more the Shogul's influence takes over him.

44. **Anthony, The God Child.** It is not clear how this little pampered boy became nearly omnipotent, but now all the denizens of his small, secluded village domain live in constant fear of him, doing their best to keep him happy and pretending to be happy as well. Those who even think unpleasantly

about him... well, better not think of them. (Inspiration: the short Story **It's a Good Life**, by Jerome Bixby)

45. **Dumas, The Angel of Death.** The domain known as the Valley of the Shadow of Death has been the scene of a great battle, followed by the brutal massacre of all the local population. Now it's a misty, shadowy wasteland littered in bones, haunted by the ghosts and shades of dead troops and civilians, whose keening of lament and dreadful spectral visions fill the hearts with despair. Only the foolhardiest enter willingly to the valley, tempted by the forsaken treasures allegedly found there. The lord is a memitim psychopomp (see **Pathfinder Bestiary 6**), who betrayed the souls he was supposed to deliver to the afterlife and left them behind, and now is cursed to dwell forever among them.

46. **Borash, The Demon Bear** was an ancient Celtic-like king given to fits of rage, in the course of which he slaughtered his wife, son and brothers. He was cursed to become a terrible dire bear, and has been roaming his country for centuries by now, feared by all and unable to return to his throne. Many warriors and hunters died attempting to slay him, and he seems to be invincible. (Inspiration: Mor'du from the movies **Brave** and **The Legend of Mor'du**).

47. **The Phantom of the Manor** was a rich frontier settler who strongly objected his daughter's wedding to a simple man. An earthquake collapsed his gold mine and killed him before the marriage, but he returned on the wedding day as a phantom, lured the groom to the attic, and hanged him. The bride remained alone within the decaying house, never removing her wedding dress and clutching her bouquet, waiting forever for her beloved's return, singing softly while ghosts and spirits revel around her in an eternal party. The laughing



phantom haunts the manor, summoning more undead spirits to the house and the nearby ruined town. (Source: Disneyland Paris' **Phantom Manor**'s background story. Dread Possibility: the groom somehow became the Phantom Lover, cursed to lure countless women to their doom but never return to his true love.)

48. **Andrew, Lord of the Castle of Horrors.** The Castle of Horrors is a huge dark castle the size of a small mountain, with countless rooms, halls, towers, dungeons etc. Virtually any monster, creature, trap, or puzzle might be encountered within its walls. Many adventuring parties are drawn to the castle and might spend weeks inside exploring it without seeing everything (assuming they survive that long). The darklord was a Dungeon Master from earth, who believed Ravenloft to be real, and used to murder his players when their characters died, as a sacrifice to the Dark Powers. Now he is a demilich skull in the top of the highest tower, waiting for worthy heroes to reach him so that he can consume their souls, and is fully aware of his strange situation.

49. **Honorio, The Pallid Lady** is a mute zombie lord, brought to unlife by her desperate alchemist husband after many failed experiments. Her domain is known as the Mansion of the Dead, a vast and dilapidated mansion set in the middle of a sprawling, crumbling cemetery, shrouded by green-tinged mists and eternal gloom. The Mansion and the dungeons underneath are home for many walking dead, mutants, and necromantic experiments. It is a floating pocket domain which may appear temporarily everywhere, and the Pallid Lady is constantly looking for new consorts and servants, while spreading the undead infection. She fully controls the house and can move the walls and chambers at will. (Inspiration: Bottled Imp Games' **The**

Lords of the Night: Zombies, pgs. 53-56, and **Resident Evil** game)

50. **Heartless.** Evergloom is a darker version of Everglow (from **Ponyfinder** RPG), a mystical, colorful domain full with magical races, talking and humanoid animals, satyrs, fairies etc. The good races must fight for their freedom and lives against the forces of shadow and darkness. The darklord, a dark veiled sorcerer/fiend, is known as Heartless, and his wish is to wipe all emotion, happiness and love from the world. (Inspiration: a combination of No-Heart from **Care Bears** and Quellor from **Teddy Ruxpin**, in a more mature version, of course)

51. **Gebbeleth, The Eye Tyrant.** The darklord of this Sword & Sorcery domain (think Steve Jackson's **Fighting Fantasy** style) is a cruel genius giant beholder. It rules the ancient, magnificent cities with its nobility of beholder underlings and monstrous minions, though in the wilderness some barbarian tribes still hold to their freedom. The domain has a large share of aberrations, demons, and terrifying monsters of all types. It embodies the horror of being oppressed by truly inhuman monsters (See Neil Gaiman's **A Study in Emerald** for inspiration on such society).

52. **Khamil, the Shadow King.** In the cities and the forests of this perpetually shadowed domain, every shadow is a threat. In addition to the large number of shadow-creatures and shadow-monsters, the Shadow King controls all the natural shadows and may spy through them and animate them at will. He was once a great emperor, but now he is the power beyond the scenes, pulling the strings of mortal society and conspiring to bring it and the physical world under his absolute control.

53. **Shadrakh, The Black Dragon,** rules its coastal city and its business harshly but efficiently, ever increasing its wealth



and power. It is stuck in human form, to its great dismay, but can send its draconic soul into other people, haunting and killing its victims inside their minds (they alone see the dragon as if it was real, while others around them only see the victims staring and struggling with thin air, though wounds do appear physically on their bodies). Every victim "sees" the dragon somewhat differently, its shape reflecting their inner fears. The people of the domain have no idea that this frightening phenomena has something to do with their charismatic ruler.

54. **Ludwig Hecht, The Skeptic.** This ex-priest who lost his faith wants magic, miracles, and the supernatural to be real, to have a hope for the afterlife; but he is so skeptical that his very presence dispels every magic and nullifies any unnatural phenomena, making him angry toward his "foolish, superstitious" denizens. He and his men persecute any religious believers and people claiming to have supernatural powers, punishing them severely if they can't prove their claims under scientific examination (which obviously they can't in Hecht's presence).

55. **The Gamemaster.** All around Ravenloft there are legends about the dreaded gamemaster, about men and women awakening to find themselves in his dungeons, forced to participate in a cruel game of puzzles, choices and traps, putting to the test their wits, morality, views, and willpower. The stoic Gamemaster sees his work as educational, and maybe he is right,

for those who survive his games come out changed, scarred in body and mind but with better understanding of themselves.

(Inspiration: movies like the **Saw** series, **Cube**, and **Would You Rather**)

56. **Lodin, the Siren** (mermaid), has had her heart broken by a human prince, and now lures sailors with her singing to her little iceberg domain, sinking their ships and killing them.

57. **Ordelia, the Perfectionist.** This glorious, golden-haired aasimar, in her forties (think Nicole Kidman in **The Golden Compass**) demands perfect order from

everyone, in everything, all the time. Everything must be clean, polished, and well-trimmed. She has no tolerance whatsoever for poor manners, bad grooming, offensive language, or anything she defines as immorality - including impiety, irreverence, disrespect for elders, use of alcohol, and sexual promiscuity.

Any flaw or breaching of the rules results in punishment and "correction", which may include turning the offender into a statue, painting, or other piece of art. Ordelia's domain and manor are truly beautiful and radiant places, but everyone lives in constant fear of her frequent surveys, trying in vain to match her impossible standards of perfection.

58. **Honeytongue, the Liar Fairy.** This mischievous pixie is a masterful liar. She looks like a diminutive and beautiful elven girl, 1 foot tall, with an impish smile. Her lies have incited wars, ruined families and



lives, and caused endless strife, which only makes her laugh. She has the power to make anyone believe anything she says as long as it's a (sensible) lie; when she says the truth, however, no one will believe her. She flies around her domain, spying on people invisibly and looking for the best ways to lie them to their doom. The denizens are all suspicious of each other, and accusations of lies and cheating are common, but still they all fall for Honeytongue's every word.

59. **Sabag, the Ghoul Lord.** This is truly a domain of dread, with shadowy cities, forests of gnarled, twisted trees, vast creepy graveyards, and frequent thunderstorms. The people live in constant dread of the ghouls, ghosts, and other undead who reach everywhere through the tunnels crisscrossing the land, and whose attacks seem to be orchestrated to create maximal terror. The demonic-faced Sabag, a serial killer and artist of the grotesque, for whom the whole domain is his playground, can assume the shapes of his former victims, and haunts his victims both in their dreams and in reality; many poor souls have awakened from a nightmare in which their bedmate turned out to be the ghoul lord, only to see it coming true.

60. **Rabbi Mendel, the Kabbalist.** An aging Jewish rabbi and master kabbalist from Gothic Earth's Poland of 17th century, Rabbi Mendel came to despair at the hopelessly corrupted world. After years of studies and preparations, he tried to perform a ritual to retrieve all creation into nothingness, but found himself instead surrounded by the Mists along with his Jewish shtetl (little town). Convinced he was trapped by the Oliphoth (forces of evil), he delves deeper into the secrets of the kabbalah, searching the mystic formula to end all existence. He almost never comes out of his room, nor lets anyone in, except

his golem and other unearthly servants. The Jews in the shtetl try to cope with the hardship of their lives and the occasional dybbuks (devils) and bad spirits. Rabbi Mendel is a most powerful kabbalist, who can control reality on the basic levels of time and space. With his wild, grey hair and beard and burning eyes, he has an atmosphere of awe around him, and few dare approach his room.

61. **Zelig, the Shrinker.** This twisted gnome hated to be the smallest of all, so he devised a ray that shrank all the people in town to 2-inch size, making him a giant in comparison. Now they try to survive in the domain composed of his messy house and surrounding garden, searching for resources, fighting mice and insects, and trying not to fall prey for Zelig's experiments and abuses. Visitors to the domain will quickly be shrank as well by the crazed gnome, but perhaps they'll be able to find a cure in his dangerous lab...

62. **Ozymandias, the King of Kings.** Compared to this egomaniac, even the other darklords look meek. The dark-skinned giant of a man known as Ozymandias feels nothing but contempt toward all other beings, utterly convinced that all must obey him. He ruled a huge African-like empire, forcing his subjects to worship him and construct colossal statues in his image, starting a process of apotheosis. But eventually a rebellion ruined his kingdom. He found himself in a copy of his capital, where he is all-powerful indeed, but he knew at once that none of this was real. The people in his domain are just dream stuff, without real consciousness and feelings. Though he tries to pretend otherwise, he knows there is nobody here to truly acknowledge his superiority... unless some outsiders arrive.

A ruined, colossal statue of Ozymandias might be found in the Amber Wastes.



Reading the writing on it and touching it draws those who do so into his domain, from which one may escape only by realizing that it is just Ozymandias' dream.

63. **Tash, the Rooster from Hell.** Once there was a good hearted farm boy, who wanted to stop the killing and eating of animals by men. He found and performed a druidic ritual intended to give the ability of speech to all the animals in the area, believing humans wouldn't kill talking animals. The ritual worked, but some of the animals changed more than he intended, becoming twisted, demonic, and evil. The vilest and most dangerous was a fierce rooster named Tash, who became a giant, human-sized pyrolisk (a variation of cockatrice whose gaze can burn victims to ash). He led the other animals against the humans, killing them all. Now Tash and his lieutenants (Grogar the ram and Taurus the bull) rule tyrannically over the other talking animals in the farm and surrounding lands and woods - some of which wish for humans to return and rescue them, while other develop strange religions and rituals. (Inspiration: books like **The Book of the Dun Cow, Watership Down, The Wind in the Willows** etc.)

64. **The Dreadknight Lord.** This vast domain is ruled by the cold, emotionless Dreadknights, an order of heavily armored knights, mercilessly devoted to their unflinching vision of absolute law and order. The Infernal affects all aspects of life in the domain, and all denizens are forced to take part in diabolical rituals, knowing from an early age that their souls are bound to hell. Little is known about the leader of the Dreadknights, an awe-inspiring figure in blood-red full plate armor, only that he formerly belonged to the Hellknights in Golarion; some whisper he is no other than Daidian Ruel, the legendary founder of the Hellknights himself, who descended into

diabolism in his obsession to rescue his suicide son's soul from hell. Others say he was the leader of the lost Order of the Blood sect (see Parfinder's **Path of the Hellknight** for details).

65. **Blind Paul, the Monk.** What greater curse can befall a scholar who lied and murdered in order to gain possession of a grand, ancient library, than being struck with blindness, forever unable to read the countless books surrounding him? Blind Paul is now the lord of the floating pocket domain known as the Library of the Mists, rumored to contain all kinds of arcane knowledge. He eagerly waits for visitors so that he might capture them and force them read for him, hoping to find a cure to his blindness in some book. Though blind, he is very dangerous, and may darken the library at will and use his sharp hearing and other senses and his monk's fighting skills to overcome his foes.

66. **Horacio, The Silent Bard,** is a bard and assassin who loves music and singing as much as he enjoys killing, but now rules a domain engulfed in perpetual magical silence, where no one can hear you sing... or scream. Unable to sing, at least the silence makes his assassinations in the service of the three noble houses so much easier. The population has adapted to life in the silence, communicating through sign language and writings.

67. **Vor-Tola, The Worm that Walks,** was a mad sorcerer who believed worms to be the ultimate life form and the destiny of the world. Now his body is made of thousands of worms, and he is the darklord of a post-apocalyptic domain drawn from a reality where the fabled Age of Worms has come to pass. The remnants of humanity struggle to survive in a ruined wasteland crawling with wormspawn - giant worms, avolakia, ulgurstasta, wormdrakes, sons of Kyuss, other worm-like aberrations, and the

undead. This domain is part of the Weeping Ruins cluster, composed of several post-apocalyptic domains.

68. Varus, Herald of the Apocalypse.

Cold, indifferent, and utterly analytical (think Agent Smith or Albert Wesker), Varus leads a society of scientists, necromancers, and arcanists devoted to the Xammux - a group of six alien entities representing forbidden knowledge (see **Book of Vile Darkness 3.5**). In their quest for knowledge and world dominance they opened a gate to another dimension, summoning an eldritch electrical storm that animated the dead all around the world, resulting in a zombie apocalypse slaying most of humanity. Varus and his followers reside now in their secret bunker while the storm still rages outside, and the remaining survivors fight against the undead hordes and other eldritch horrors. This is one of the domains in the Weeping Ruins post-apocalyptic cluster.

69. Ricardo, the Zombie Master.

Another post-apocalyptic domain from the Weeping Ruins cluster. Survivors from the zombies' holocaust are concentrated in this fortified city under the cruel governor Ricardo, a half-Vistani with an innate ability to control the zombies, who feeds them with anyone who fails to obey his whims. The survivors must bend to his rule, knowing his will is the only thing keeping the undead hordes at bay. Recently however, some zombies have started developing sentience and breaking his control, banding into groups and organizing attacks on the city, causing Ricardo much concern. Other local governors might rule similar city-domains in the wastelands of the Weeping Ruins.

70. Jess, the Left Hand of God.

Corrupted sheriff in a wild-west styled frontier land, Jess can psionically change people's perceptions of reality and even of

themselves: make them see, hear and feel things that aren't there, believe they are somebody else, perceive him differently or not at all, etc. He can make a woman believe she's his wife, or make a father see his children as demons. But Jess is delusional himself, frequently having revelations of angels and demons giving him orders or threatening him. He sees himself as an agent of higher powers, "the Left Hand of God", and uses his powers to twistedly punish those who "deserve it". The domain has a large share of madmen, religious fanatics, criminals, and self-proclaimed prophets and messiahs, so trying to figure out the truth may cause one lose his mind.

71. The Pumpkin King, a pumpkin-headed being ruling a big city where humans masked as monsters and monsters masked as humans mingle under the orange moon in an eternal Halloween night; joy and horror overlap, and everything is possible. (Inspiration: the RPG **Worlds Numberless and Strange**, pgs. 64-71)

72. The Animal Lord. Grown among the apes and taught to despise humankind, the white man known as the Animal Lord is now the terror of the jungle tribes, using his skills and control over animals to make sure they know who really rules the jungle. He is cursed to lose his ability to speak, becoming mute like the animals he loves.

73. The Fear Itself. The sewers of Timor might have been relocated to Paridon, but the city remains, and now it has a new darklord: a 5th rank fihyr (see **Quoth the Raven 11**, "Report on Fihyrs"), manifested from the collective, continual fears of the Timorians. This abomination uses its vast powers and intelligence to further increase the fear level in the city, thus creating even more of its kind.

74. The Big Boss is a crime lord who reached the top of the criminal hierarchy



thanks to his genius and psionic powers and ruled his metropolis with iron fist. Now his city is secluded from the rest of the world, shrouded in perpetual night, and almost all color has drained from it, leaving the domain in hues of black, gray, and white, with only some flashes of bright color here and there. This is a noir/Sin City styled domain of existentialistic despair, where countless criminals, antiheroes, gangs, guilds, mafia families, and other factions fight to achieve dominion, money, and meaning. The supernatural is also present in the forms of vampires, succubi, and other inhuman beings. The Big Boss, a large, bald man with a wrinkled face, is still the most powerful and feared man in the city, but he must struggle to keep his position, and he suffers greatly from the lack of lively colors in his world.

75. **Prince John** doesn't look the stuff of a darklord. Sure, this thin, straw-haired, freckled young man is far from being a pleasant person; he is sour, rude, pampered, short-tempered and capricious, but not more so than average princes of his teen age. He is never known to have killed or tortured anyone, and is not even overly debauched. What he embodies is just that - evil that comes not out of acting, but rather out of neglect and lack of caring. Prince John doesn't care about anyone or anything; the people in his kingdom often suffer from raids, floods, failures of crops, and other problems, but even though John could solve them with his magical power to create matter and objects out of nothing, he just doesn't bother to do so, keeping this power to himself and complaining about how other people are such a nuisance.

76. **Theona Bell, the Monster Huntress.** The dreaded baron of this domain seems to be a grotesque nosferatu, brooding in his dark castle and hardly seen in public. The people spread all sorts of

horrible rumors about him. Actually, he is just a non-evil man suffering from deforming disease and sensitive to sunlight. So are the other "monsters" haunting the domain - the "vampires", "werebeasts", "hags", and "ghosts", though scary-looking, are all pathetic and harmless creatures, or just diseased humans. That doesn't stop the real darklord, the venerated monster huntress Theona Bell, of the glorified Bell dynasty, from hunting and killing them mercilessly; though she knows the truth, her hatred for monsters goes beyond reason. She fancies the baron to be her arch-nemesis, but her plans to destroy him always fail.

77. **The Tall Man.** Few understand death better than this silent, thoughtful tomb giant (**Pathfinder Bestiary 6**) death delver (**Heroes of Horror**), but now he wants to understand human life as well. The people of his gloomy, sparsely populated domain speak fearfully of "The Tall Man", whose shadowy cloaked and hooded figure roams the land, looking for victims to abduct or just watching from afar. Those he abducts he takes to his underground caverns, where he subjects them to incomprehensible psychological and physiological experiments, trying to figure out how the human mind and emotions work. He doesn't look malicious, only curious, but his tests are often horrible experiences. The Tall Man's height is 4 meters (12 feet), but he has the power to assume a semi-corporeal shadowy form and become much, much taller.

78. **Hanako, the Yurei.** The people in this small Japanese-style domain rightly fear the night, for their land is haunted by yurei (Japanese ghosts), noppera-bo (faceless, corporeal ghosts often masquerading as humans), kuchisake-onna (slit-mouth women who cut your face if you fail to answer their questions properly), and other



horrors from Japanese folklore and movies. The darklord is a powerful yurei of a murdered girl, seeking revenge.

(Inspiration: J-horror movies like **The Ring**, **The Grudge**, **The Eye**, **Dark Water**, **Shutter**, **One Missed Call** etc.)

79. **King of the Underworld**. Very little is known about this grim dwarf (if a dwarf he truly is). Presumably he is a Theiwar or Zhakar dwarf from Krynn, who rules an underground kingdom of darkness and strange purple light, and possesses a magical crown with the power to command almost every creature in the Underdark. His servants and soldiers are a mishmash of duergars, derro, troglodytes, fomorians, cave giants, kuo-toa, and many other underground races and monsters, which he sometimes sends to raid the surface world for his nefarious purposes. He is overly paranoid about his crown, always fearing someone will take it from him.

80. **Papa Santos, the Dealer**, is a flamboyant, jovial, and heartless dealer and pimp, who keeps the people in his domain on his leash by addicting them to various types of "stuff" that only he can supply. Even the most virtuous men and women can be reduced by him to slaving beasts who will do anything to get their next ration of bliss and ecstasy. His domain is a city filled with shining casinos, fun houses, and drug dens, bright façades hiding dark alleys and terrible corruption. Papa Santos himself has his own inner demons tormenting him, but no amount of his own wares can free him from their grasp.

81. **Leo and Rose, The Ghosts of Love**, were in life two passionate lovers whose love became dark, possessive and obsessive, leading to their mutual poisoning of each other. Their domain is a truly beautiful landscape of stunning sunsets, shining stars, and intoxicating flowers. The people are a beautiful, deeply emotional

folk, sensitive and romantically inclined, easily falling deeply in love with each other or with nymphs, dryads, and other fairies and spirits of the forests. But romance and tragedy walk hand in hand here, and those love affairs lead too often to suicide, death, or other disasters, thanks to the influence of the jealous darklords.

82. **Lovina, The Ugly Queen**. This girl maimed and disfigured other girls in order to be the most beautiful. The Dark Powers made her stunningly beautiful indeed, but the people in her domain are all ugly and horrid to look at, and they have reversed aesthetical standards - they see ugliness as beauty and beauty as ugliness, making her as utterly disgusting in their eyes as they are in hers. Visitors to the domain will quickly become ugly like the locals until they leave it.

83. **Chomolungma, Spirit of the Mountain**. This princess was cold and aloof, seeing herself far superior to all other humans. Now her undying, skeletal spirit lives far indeed above anyone else - on the top of the highest mountain in the world (Everest style), swept by fierce winds of ice and snow, where very few adventurers dare to climb. Legends warn everyone of the wrath of the mad spirit, combined with the natural hazards of the ascent, but also tell of some rare treasure hidden at the top - a most powerful relic, or a gate out of Ravenloft.

84. **Taitachak, the Last Winter**. Thought that Vorostokov is cold? Apparently, you haven't visited this Lovecraftian-arctic domain of black ice, polar bears, wild barbarian tribes (some of them cannibals), ancient temples buried under the ice, yetis, orcas, winter wolves, and ancient horrors. In the heart of the domain, Taitachak is trapped in the ice, an ancient xixecal (see **Epic Level Handbook**) who brought an ice age to his



world and wishes to expand it further. His evil thoughts and dreams affect the domain and its denizens.

85. Archbishop Lacosta, the Hypocrite. Lacosta is a lecherous, disgusting, spidery old man. He holds the reigns of both religious and political power, preaching publicly about piety and virtue while hardly trying to conceal his lustful and greedy behavior. By doing so he makes people lose their faith in the church, gods, and human virtue, pushing them to corruption as well. His ability to cast priestly spells and create miracles for his benefit only helps to convince the populace that the gods themselves must be hypocrites as he is. Shortly put, he embodies the worst of organized religion, using faith and the gods as a thin plaster to further his basic urges. He suffers from an ugly skin disease which no prayer can cure, though.

86. The Minotaur. Many years ago, the people of this city used to sacrifice young men and women to the terrible minotaur who dwelled in the labyrinth beneath them. The minotaur was slain, but his spirit lives on, looking for a proper vessel. When someone in the city gives in to strong anger or acts violently, sometimes the darklord might possess him, transforming him into a monstrous, demonic-looking minotaur with a half-skeletal head. The sound of alarm horns will be heard then in the city, and the labyrinth itself will manifest all over it, superimposing itself on the houses and streets. Then the minotaur will go on a hunting spree.

87. Shimdon, the Imp. Every man, woman, and child in this domain have an imp as familiar. The imp appears soon after birth, telepathically bonding with his patron and becoming his or her closest friend, assistant and advisor. The imps assume any small shape desirable by their patrons (cherubs, fairies, small animals, etc.), give

them information and perform errands and a little magic for them. Thanks to the imps' help and advice, the domain has advanced significantly... but so has corruption. The imps coordinately manipulate their individuals and society into depravity, slowly but surely. The darklord Shimdon is the ruler of all the imps and the personal imp of the governor, pulling deviously all the strings from his position.

88. Anabubali, Mother of Dinosaurs. A powerful witch-doctor, Anabubali created dinosaurs on her prehistoric homeworld by using foul magic to defile reptilian eggs, making herself an army of monsters. She ruled her world tyrannically until a meteor strike directed by her rivals destroyed her kingdom and creations. Her domain is known now as the Isle of Monsters, full of dinosaurs, giant insects, and other monstrous abominations. Anabubali is a blackened lich, covering her skeletal frame with black robes and a heavy ritualistic mask and headdress, her voice a chilling, raspy whisper. She rules a city of tailed humanoids, worshipped as a bloodthirsty goddess, and rarely leaves her temple. Though cunning and powerful, she has a primitive mindset, superstitious, and pagan. Visitors from more advanced lands make her jealous, suspicious, and envious of the sophistication beyond her reach.

89. Kiran Darkstorm, the Storm Bringer. Kiran was born on a particularly stormy night and abandoned as a baby for unknown reasons. He was found and raised by an order of mystic monks, and his soul was stormy as well, always in turmoil, trying to figure his place in the world. He found he can actually call down winds and lightning when in an emotional state, sometimes unintentionally. Kiran became a wandering hero, but tragedy seemed to follow him; unknowingly he killed his father and married his sister, becoming the Lord of the





exotically beautiful Dusk Islands. Upon discovering the truth, he killed her and their children in a burst of emotions manifesting as lightning bolts - followed by a raging hurricane that laid waste to the city. Kiran is a strikingly handsome man, with an athletic body, shoulder-length blond-white hair and grey eyes; many women seek his company, but his tortured soul and turbulent passions make him a very dangerous man to get emotional with.

90. **The Mimic.** This super-dangerous domain looks like an abandoned town, but actually is full of mimics of all sizes and shapes, including house hunters (giant mimics disguised as whole buildings), and animators of every rank. Every object or structure might turn out to be a deadly killer. The darklord is a mimic who tried to ascend into human shape and failed, becoming a huge shifting mass of tendrils and melting human visages (see Pathfinder's **Dungeons Denizens Revisited**).

91. **The Storyteller.** The Black Forest in this domain is the home of the dark and twisted Grimm's fairy tales (and others), where one may encounter a vampire Little-Red-Riding-hood, seven evil dwarves, undead Rapunzel, a children-eating witch in a house of candy, petty kings and queens,

giants, and so on. The denizens all know and respect the Storyteller, a kind old hermit who lives with his talking dog and seems to know the stories of all the denizens of the domain. Little do they suspect that he is the one who brought all these horrors to life with his stories, and whatever he tells becomes true.

(Inspiration: **Grimm** RPG and **The Storyteller** TV show)

92. **Sir Hugo, The One-Woman Man.** This black-hearted, bass-voiced nobleman led a life of debauchery, until a meeting with a beautiful

vampiress changed him into a vorlog. Now he is constantly looking for a surrogate to his dead vampire lover. Unfortunately for him, all the denizens in his domain are perfect doubles of this maiden; even newcomers (regardless of their sex, age, and race) are transformed overnight to look exactly like her. The sight of his lover's face everywhere drives the vorlog mad, and he tries hopelessly to find out which one is his "real" lover. He replaces his surrogates often, convinced every time that this time it's the real one, but eventually gets frustrated and murders them viciously.

93. **The Illusionist.** One can never know what is real and what is not in this domain. Any person, animal, object, or structure might be an illusion, temporary or permanent, harmless or dangerous, and either not exist at all or be different from how it seems. It is all the handiwork of the mysterious Illusionist, but very little is known about this enigmatic figure: is it a man? A woman? Is it human at all? What are his goals? How can the truth be found under so many layers of illusions?

94. **Dom, the Jailor.** The muscular body of this bald, hulking half-ogre is covered in scars and tattoos all over his grey skin. Born and raised in one of the worst prisons



imaginable, Dom has never set foot in the outside world for single a day in his life. Thanks to his exceptional strength and cunning, he became the head of the prisoners, eventually leading them in a bloody riot against the jailors. But when he finished exacting his terrible revenge and was about to finally step out of the prison, he found the Mists surrounding it. Now the prison is his domain. He is both curious about the outside world and tortured by dreams about it. The Mists keep bringing him new prisoners, some are vile criminals and others truly innocent. Dom doesn't care; he does his best to make their imprisonment a living hell, with the help of

his sadistic underlings. If he can't be free, nobody will.

95. **Nikolai the Terrible, the Tsar.**

With his mane of gray hair, long drooping moustache and feral looks, Tsar Nikolai Ivanovich is an impressive and frightening figure to behold. He rules over a large Russian-styled domain, where humans and fairy folk from Slavic lore once lived together in happiness. But when Nikolai came to power, not only did he become a cruel tyrant for mankind, he started persecuting and destroying all the magical and mystical creatures as well. As a result, his kingdom became a cold and dark land, devoid of joy. Many magical beings are still hiding in the woods, and Nikolai's campaign against them is ongoing. He is not above recruiting the darkest of those beings to his side as an assistance against their brethren. Nobody knows for sure what motivates his hatred, but it seems it has something to do with an encounter he had at an early age with Baba Yaga. Some speculate he is some unnatural being himself.

96. **Maia, the Amazon**, is a beautiful, red-haired warrior woman who hates men with all her heart, the result of all she has suffered from their hands. Her domain is a women-only island, and women from all over the domains are drawn to it, where they are trained to be powerful warriors, able to defend and avenge themselves. They are also indoctrinated to see all men as inherently evil and despise them. Every man setting foot on the island is killed, tortured, or transformed by Maia's powers into a predatory animal under her control (reflecting how she sees them). But for all her efforts to make her domain a safe haven for women, Maia is cursed to see it falling time after time before male invaders - pirates, bandits, troops, agents of other darklords etc. - who always manage to defeat the amazons in spite of all their

training, and kill or enslave them. In the wake of each such invasion Maia is left alone, determined to make her disciples stronger next time - and her hatred burns even hotter.

97. **Doriath the Dark** is a stunningly handsome half-elf, with midnight-black hair, golden hypnotic eyes, and white skin covered with many runes and strange symbols. Doriath has always believed a great destiny awaits him, and was willing to go to any length to find it. During the hundreds of years of his life, he has studied and worshipped countless evil gods and deities, archdevils and demon lords, reaching quickly to the highest ranks and then moving on when he wasn't satisfied by the results. He learned the darkest secrets, performed the darkest rituals, and achieved countless boons and banes. He seems to be able to look into the darkest pits of the abyss or hell without losing his calm. Now



he leads a huge university devoted to the practical studies of everything dark, and the population around supplies everything the students need. Doriath is convinced now that the Dark Powers hold the key to his destiny, but no matter how much he learns and tries, it still seems to be beyond his reach.

98. **Sebastian, the False God.** These islands look like a tropic paradise populated by happy, friendly tribes - until one finds out that the greatest desire of the local people is to be eaten by the White Gods, who live in the Jungle! They strive to keep their bodies in perfect health and shape, to be as tasty as possible for the gods.

The "gods" are actually Sebastian and his friends - normal sailors who came to the newly discovered islands, pretended to be gods, made a show of power and convinced the awestruck locals to care for all their needs while they live debauchedly in the luxurious villa they built. But when the Mists came, the "gods" found that they have indeed become godlike - invulnerable, powerful, and beautiful - but now they must eat human flesh to survive. The locals became all too eager to donate their own flesh, but it pushed Sebastian and his fellows to the edge of madness. Some of them believe now they are actually gods.

99. **Yorak, the Barbarian.** Several savage barbarian tribes are constantly fighting and raiding each other in this chaotic evil domain, each trying to exceed the others in atrocities and cruelty. The domain embodies the horror of pre-civilization society without any semblance of morality or order, where compassion is seen as weakness and brutality is equated with strength. Yorak is the leader of the strongest tribe. He relishes destruction and death, eating the hearts of his foes and making drinking cups from their skulls. Every day he passes without a killing he

loses some of his mental attributes and becomes stronger in physical attributes, gradually transforming into an ogre-like monstrosity (like the curse of the Sword of Arak from **Realm of Terror**). Sometimes he does so intentionally before great battles.

100. **Sheila, the Wight Queen**. The queen of this truly dreadful domain and her court are true were-wights, able to shapeshift at will from living humans to hideous wights, gaining the advantages of both mortals and the undead (some are were-ghouls, were-vampires, etc.). Many people in the domain are infected were-wights, living most of the time as regular humans but transforming into evil dead when triggered (their undead aspect has all their memories and intelligence, and might resume illusory mortal shape for short time, adding to the confusion. Think **Evil Dead**). Queen Sheila is a decadent hedonist, making the most of both of her shapes and savoring the shock and horror of her victims while she devours their souls (take some inspiration from Pathfinder's Urgathoa, **Inner Sea Gods**). In this domain, normalcy is an illusion which might be ripped away at any moment, revealing a horrific undead reality.

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LILLIEND

by Mark Bartels aka Rock

FoS warning: mature themes!

Prologue

*"I only smile in the dark
My only comfort is the night gone black
I didn't accidentally tell you that
I'm only happy when it rains
You'll get the message by the time I'm
through
When I complain about me and you
I'm only happy when it rains."
'Only happy when it rains', Garbage*

I walked in the Mists.

There had been a reason for me to come here, I knew. I thought. I seemed to recall. Dimly. It had been so long ago, my entry into these billowing gulfs, it was hard to remember. At least it felt as though it had been long ago.

My awareness of time had been one of the first things to leave me. My ability to judge the distances I had travelled, a close second.

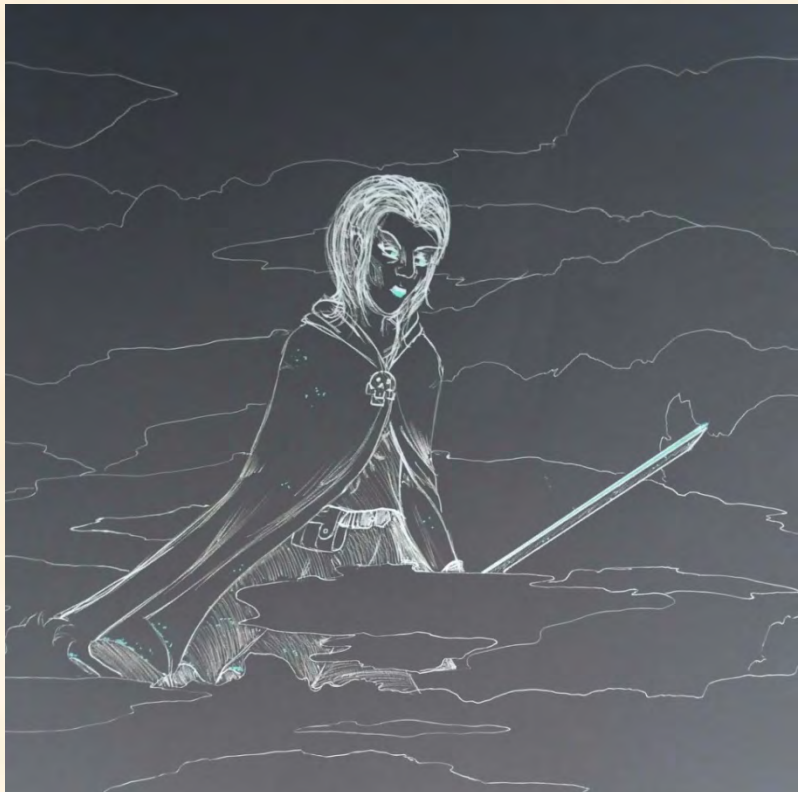
I walked in the Mists, based on that dim inkling that there was some purpose to my doing so, that I should not simply stop and let myself fade away.

I was not always alone. Sometimes things stalked alongside of me, whispering vileness or seeking comfort.

Sometimes they lurched out of the Mists and challenged me, obliging me to run... or to walk along, after, gore-stained footprints fading into pointlessness behind me.

None of it mattered. None of it seemed to matter, anyway. I could not be certain. Of anything.

Despair had come to me, only to be left behind like a bawling child, sitting on the featureless ground in this chasm of mobile white and grey. For a time, I had raged blindly at everything, but anger had exhausted itself to a tattered memory. Madness had come then, and perhaps it still



lingered, did I but have the awareness to notice its presence. Or absence. But there seemed to be no point. If your whole universe is insane, how can you recognize madness in yourself, and why would you even bother to find out?

At a certain point, I found myself flanked by two great animals. On my right hand, a hyena with eyes that glowed like fire. On my left hand, a lion whose breath stank of fresh blood and honey. The lion spoke to me in a language I could not understand. The hyena told me things I intimately understood because it was perfectly soundless. They, too, faded into the distance eventually.

But after they went, the whispering started.

I dully ignored it at first. The Mists were sometimes full of whispers, and they were either meaningless or hideously disturbing. They always went away – except these did not. Meaningless they certainly were, but constant. Constant and growing stronger. Stronger... and familiar.

My mind was like an old clockwork, gears grinding against disuse and caked dust and grime, in desperate need of some oil.

Familiar. A sound I had heard many times. If only I could make that essential connection of input to meaning! The sound of... sound of...

A glint of colour in the Mists, startlingly bright after the greyness that had devoured and saturated me down to the bone.

Green. A flash of green... That whispering – the sound of wind in trees!

The clockwork started to spin smoothly for the first time in what felt like an eternity, just as the Mists parted like rotting cloth before the edge of a surgical scalpel.

Out of the featureless void, I stumbled into a living, breathing forest. All the impressions overwhelmed me for precious minutes, and I was forced to lean against a

tree until I had acclimatized. The thousand-and-one scents of a forest; moist earth, leaves live and dead, bark, flowers, animal dung. All the sounds of the wind in the leaves, of tiny creatures scampering along the undergrowth, of birds squawking in the heights. And oh, the sights... greens, browns, blacks, greys – but all of them alive and potent, not like the bleak horror I had been plodding through.

Slowly, so painfully slowly, I adapted. Processed. Found myself capable of standing tall and interacting with this gloriously live world again. Found myself in myself again.

And I found you when I got to the core of me, my *Master*, rather, your instructions to me when you sent me into the Mists. It was you who subjected me to who knows how long a span of time, walking through that void. You, who subjected me to despair and madness, followed by that utter numbness...!

You, who had given me my orders, which I must obey.

I must still obey.

The first of your commands, I have obeyed and now completed, I trust to your satisfaction.

In accordance with the mad ramblings you found in that dusty old grimoire from Kalidnay, I awaited the correct astronomical and astrological convergences, performed the blood sacrifice by the dark of the moon on Midwinter Night, and walked into the Mists from the southernmost point of Sithicus, seeking to locate and interact with the Mistway there described.

Mad, the author may have been – mad, I am sure he or she was! – but their description of the Threefold Path was painfully correct. I walked through despair. I walked through madness. I walked through emptiness. All to arrive here, in new lands on the far side of the Misty gulf.



Huzzah.

The second of your commands, I shall now commence to obey.

I shall scout. I shall catalogue. I shall question. I shall compose reports of all that I find. You shall have knowledge of landscapes, histories, peoples, politics, cities, magic, monsters and science, my *Master*.

All that I discover through base guile, through peerless application of magic and alchemy, through diplomacy and barter and strength of arms, shall be yours to know.

Yes, you shall have your very own Gazetteers, alike unto the ones you copied from the notes sent to King Azalin, by which you incurred his... But I digress.

I shall finish these reports with my personal recommendations for your grand project, your towering ambition: conquest.

Here, on the far side of the Mists, where there is no King Azalin to persecute you for theft of his belongings, no Fraternity of Shadows to hunt you for betraying the order's vows, you may finally unleash your twisted genius in bending peoples' wills to your whim, in shattering nations and reforging them to your own design, in violating the cycles of nature to raise armies, in molesting the sanctity of life and sanity in your quest for...

Ah, but I digress, and you take offence, my *Master*. Remarkable that I can still feel such, when we are so far apart.

To the third of your commands: I shall commence the planting of the first seeds of your conquest. May I once again remind you...? No? Very well. The planting shall proceed as you have commanded, just as soon as I find the necessary base materials and locations.

Onward I go – to compose the first of your Gazetteers on the Wartorn Cluster.

May it please you well.

In other words, may you choke on it.

Regards,
Ciska

Report One: Lilliend

"Love will destroy the world."

'Wolves of the Calla', Stephen King

As I mentioned in the Prologue, when I arrived in the first land I was to encounter of the Wartorn Cluster, I found myself in a forest.

Oh, you may scoff, my *Master*. You are yourself a child of Dementlieu, that culture capitol of the Core. Moreover, whenever the time came to have someone go far abroad and actually perform the dull grind of field work to further your studies, you always sent me or one of your other servants. I doubt you ever so much as camped out in a field, let alone slogged your way through a wilderness equipped to resist you.

Therefore, I hypothesize that you have no basis to understand what a *proper* old growth forest is, my *Master*. This was no dainty little park, all the trees growing neatly in rows lest they be trimmed down to size, replanted, or simply cut and removed for fear of displeasing the wrong art critic.

No, this was a wilderness that had grown proud and mighty in its age. I saw trees big enough that if felled, one could have provided all the lumber needed to build a villa. The undergrowth was so thick and tangled that I had to draw my sword cane and hack a path to proceed by. I was



constantly aware of the way little sounds would fall quiet at my approach or – and this more worrying – continue unabated, as if my nature were an unknown to the usually timid creatures of the green, or as if they considered my presence of no importance.

Already, I anticipated the need for a fire come the night. My eyes were casting about for dead branches, and so I missed a warning sign – to my deep regret at the time, but ultimately to my benefit. One moment I was ambling along, chopping at plants, and the next my foot was sticking out in empty air, and I found myself taking a fall before I realized what had happened.

While painful – as I recall, I landed on a bramble bush – my fall was not fatal. And it was highly instructive.

Finding myself on a small patch of horizontal ground, just big enough for the aforementioned bramble, I realized that the land was not as flat as I had believed. Rather, I had the good fortune of arriving

on the highest of a series of irregularly descending plateaus. Also, I had the good fortune of falling where there was another plateau of a size to support me reasonably close by. From where I sat, I could see the edge I had fallen from, obscured as it had been to me by plant life when I was on the higher plateau... and safe places to fall down or climb down to were in short supply.

I climbed back up to the first plateau, my Master, cut myself a clearing and lit a fire. Finding myself bereft of spells, even though I could not recall casting any while in the Mists, I spent a restless night keeping watch against predators and other dangers. Only when dawn had come and I had the time to study my book and spend some quality time with my portable alchemy lab, did I set about finding a way down to lower levels, and hopefully civilization.

Already, I could see that this land was treacherous, with hidden edges promising death to the unwary.

Lilliend at a glance

Cultural level: Medieval (7)

Ecology: Full

Climate/Terrain: Temperate forests and mountains

Year of Formation: 613 BC

Year of Joining the Cluster: 740 BC

Population: 30,041

Races: Human 80%, Elves 10%, Half-Elves 4%, Fey 3%, Ogier 1%, Undead 2%

Human ethnic groups: Lilliender 80%, other 20%

Languages: Lelender*, Elven, Ogier, Sylvan

Religion: Artemis*, Athena, Thunderfather, Ashar, il Demonio, Coralin, Carilon, Brightwell

Government: Monarchy

Ruler: Queen Alexandra Lenkherr

Darklord: Camille Churnstone

Landscape

As mentioned above, Lilliend is a land of descending mountain plateaus, which can be roughly divided into two areas.

The western half of the land, that which abuts the Mists, is called *L'Haut* by the natives. Here, vertical spaces vastly outnumber the horizontal. The plateaus end sharply and without warning, their edges obscured by the plant-life that crowds every available inch – and does everything in its power not to give up that inch.

Construction of anything larger than a shack is either impossible, given limited space, or inadvisable, given that the larger plateaus would need to be cleared of trees before anything could be built – and the trees are the only barrier against the gale-force winds that pick up most nights.



Without a grapnel, a stout rope, and preferably access to *feather fall*, *levitate* and even spells of *flight*, I would dare say that the place is highly hazardous, even impossible to get around in. And even if one has all of these things, there is danger in ample supply. Apart from the aforementioned winds, *L'Haut* is subject to nocturnal rainstorms and snowstorms, which can cause small but vigorous floods and avalanches. Some of the smaller plateaus are fragile, crumbling underfoot. Predators frequently lunge out of the cover provided to them by the dense undergrowth – and though these are mostly snakes and wolverines, they are fearless and vicious – and I discovered to my discomfort that there is a kind of mountain goat which traverses *L'Haut* with insolent ease, and takes apparent offence to intruders into its turf. Worse, the whole area appears to be the hunting range of giant eagles and a type of gryphon, both of whom are likely to pounce on any creature they judge to be too occupied safely descending the plateaus to defend itself.

Of special note are the gryphons, who are a serious threat for all that they are smaller here than my studies had suggested they should be. Quite apart from being exotic creatures, I feel they are more intelligent than one would expect.

When accosted by my first gryphon, I drew my pistol and fired at its wings – and the thing *curse*d at me as it fled! Do not be mistaken in this, my *Master*; while I was not familiar with the creature's language, I cannot be mistaken about the difference between words and an animal's cries of pain.

Worse, the gryphons I saw after that were clearly testing my capacities in an intelligent manner, working in groups to determine the range of my pistol and attacking me when I was at my most

vulnerable. At the end, my conflict with the gryphons turned into a running battle, and I grew concerned that the predators would run me to exhaustion while they simply changed shifts.

I was deeply relieved to leave them behind me when I did *L'Haut* ...

L'Haut is also the place where the domain's two great rivers – the *Wittwentraen* and the *Bitterflut* – are born.

The '*Traen*' is the result of run-off from the regular snow- and rainstorms which lash the mountains every night, the waters gathering in great basins on plateaus that have been worn concave by centuries of erosion. Streams spill forth to gather into a mighty white-water flow, which cascades down the mountainsides.

In contrast, the '*Flut*' wells up from underground, as subterranean wells send forth rivers which burst out through great cracks in the mountainsides, gathering together into a single stream which seems tranquil on the surface. I must stress 'seems'; I took soundings along my way, and discovered that the *Bitterflut's* placid surface hides strong currents underneath.

As the two rivers snake their way down the mountains, countless little streams split off from the main flows. These are collectively known as the 'Widow's Daughters' and the 'Bitter Daughters', depending on which mother river they descend from. You might wonder how the locals tell one river's 'parentage' apart from another when encountering it, my *Master*, and the answer is very simple: by taste and smell. The *Bitterflut*, with its plutonian origins, carries along a wealth of minerals and minute flecks of ore, which give its waters a distinctive, bitter taste and scent. Indeed, I was warned by locals that drinking too much of the '*Flut's* water was bad for the health, although they swore that bathing in it was highly recommendable.



The fallacies of the vain never cease to astound me.

You might have at least tried to enjoy a spa day.

Who knows, it might have sweetened your disposition.

Descending further, one comes into the eastern half of the domain, known as *Le*

Bas. While still a land of mountain plateaus, at least *Le Bas* features increasingly larger plateaus, until one comes to the *Letztafl* – the greatest plateau of all, which sits at the eastern edge of Lilliend.

The *Letztafl* commands a magnificent view of the lands to the east, as it sits at the final edge of the domain. To its eastern end, there is only a steep incline as one slithers and slides past bracken, brambles and saw-edged ridges to the land's immediate eastern neighbour, **Conquista**, and its neighbour to the southeast, **Masogan**.

In addition, the *Letztafl* may take pride in having the largest concentration of civilized life in the entire domain. *Le Bas* as

Dread Possibility: The Many-Wings Clan

Exiles from the domain of Umbrash, far to the east, the Many-Wings Clan of Gryphons is indeed intelligent – and belligerent in the extreme towards any humanoid creature they spot in *L'Haut*.

The Many-Wings nurse a deep ancestral grudge; they are the descendants of Gryphons who fled Umbrash in the face of one of King Stefan Szerán's attacks on the Gryphon Aeries. For their cowardice, they were forbidden to return by the Gryphons who had stayed to fight and defend their ancestral lands. Their own pride stopped them from seeking a new existence in the human or Qin lands of Umbrash, and so they left in search of a new home.

Migrating from one domain to another in search of a place to lair, the Many-Wings banded together, clan lines blurring and eventually fading away. For a time, they dwelled in the high peaks of the Wrathwall in the domain of Conquista, but here they found themselves prey, and to humans and humanoid abominations at that! They attempted to conquer the great Father-Peak of Masogan, but the domain's curse obliged them to move on lest they die out.

Having finally settled in *L'Haut*, finding its harsh landscape to their liking and being too fearful of the Mists to go further, the Many-Wings are determined never to be uprooted again, and so react with immediate violence against incursions into their territory.

Moreover, they have an ambition to make Lilliend their own. Once their numbers have sufficiently grown to form an army, the Many-Wings plan to descend from *L'Haut* into *Le Bas* and tear 'the two-legs' to shreds.

Camille is aware of the Gryphons' burgeoning forces and their ambitions, but has not taken direct action against them. Rather, she allows her progeny to harry the arrogant creatures, murdering the young, the infirm and lone Gryphons they come across, and destroying any stockpiles or aeries they find with fire. Should the Gryphons manage to overcome the constant sabotage and assassinations and assault the lower reaches of Lilliend, they will soon discover that the winds they rely upon to fill their wings will turn against them at a Darklord's whim...



a whole is more densely inhabited than *L'Haut*, with the increasingly larger plateaus home to logging camps, farms and small villages, but only on the *Letztafl* have the people of Lilliend built cities.

As in *L'Haut*, so do the great rivers and their daughters run through *Le Bas*, and they are well-appreciated by the natives.

Some families make a living from sifting the waters of the *Bitterflut* and her daughters for minerals, precious ore and even small gemstones. In the cities, enterprising engineers have created spas for the wealthy, where the mineral waters of the '*Flut*' are caught and heated for the customers' delight.

Farmers are far more delighted to guide the life-giving waters of the *Wittwentraer's* daughters to their crops, using a series of dams and trenches to direct and regulate the flow. As you might imagine, my *Master*, the dams are subjected to considerable strain during the spring thaw, when the *Wittwentraer's* waters swell enormously and carry along copious amounts of debris from *L'Haut*. It is not unheard of for people in search of farms that have fallen mysteriously silent to discover those farms to be in ruins, their inhabitants swept away by the flood after a dam burst.

When I asked the locals whether this did not make them feel a different approach to irrigating their crops might be advisable, I was given the fatalistic answer that '*Li Mère gib, li Mère nim*', which translates roughly as "the mothers give, the mothers take", and means that nature sometimes demands a price for its bounty. Apparently, only a fool balks at paying when the bill is presented, for the bounty is 'always' worth it.

Flora

As I mentioned in the section on **Landscape**, *L'Haut* is covered in dense plant-life. Great trees, all of them deciduous, have risen on every scrap of land that will support them, their roots cracking the rock underneath to improve their grip. Various types of underbrush struggle to survive in the shadow between their trunks, sacrificing light for shelter; unlike the hardier brushes that dominate smaller plateaus, they are at least shielded from the harsh winds and snows by the trees.

While I did not stay in *L'Haut* long enough to witness this phenomenon myself, a particularly daring mountaineer told me that in autumn, the flanks and plateaus of *L'Haut* appear to be dipped in blood as the leaves turn. She assured me that this is a sign that even the bravest explorer should leave well enough alone; once the leaves start to fall, the footing in *L'Haut* becomes ten times as treacherous, and cover against the weather and predators is far scarcer.

Edible plant-life is freely available in *L'Haut*, in spite of its treacherous nature. Much of the undergrowth produces safely edible berries, the better to entice the native fauna to assist in spreading their seeds. Travellers should however make *very* sure of what they are eating; there is also a wide variety of berry-bearing bushes whose fruit looks and tastes virtually identical to the safe ones, but whose effects range from abrupt attacks of diarrhea to death. Various mosses can be scraped off of the trees to be boiled into nourishing soups and teas, which can sustain a traveler when all else fails. One should be careful to stay away from Autumn Moss, however, a growth which displays a festive orange coloration, but conjures disturbing hallucinations. I regret to report that I had noticed the



growth in question, but neglected to collect a sample at the time, due to my escalating conflict with the gryphons.

In *Le Bas*, the plant-life is much the same as in *L'Haut*, with the possible

Dread Possibility: Autumn Moss toxin

Type: Contact, ingested

Fort. Save DC 15

Onset: 1 minute

Frequency: 2/day for 2 days

Effect: *Lesser Confusion*-effect

Price: 2,000 gp

difference that it does not have such a grimly determined atmosphere to it, and there is actual space between the bushes and trees for grass to grow.

Oh, I can see you rolling yo ur eyes at my description now, my *Master!* But rest assured that it is accurate; in *L'Haut*, every plant that does not cower in the shadow of a greater plant for its survival is a rugged, deep-rooted thing that spends every living moment fighting for survival. In *Le Bas*, where the weather is far more clement, nature seems more relaxed. Certainly, the soil goes deeper here than it does on the high plateaus.

Local farmers take advantage of this to plant crops of various types of wheat and vegetables, which they sow in autumn and harvest in summer. Crop rotation is very important in Lilliend, where arable soil is literally prized higher than gold, and both wild and domestic edible plants are cherished and nurtured where possible to thrive.

Fauna

As I mentioned above, the sheer flanks of *L'Haut* are home to various types of snakes, martens, raptors, wild goats and small vermin. During my stay I spotted

eagles – some of which reached truly prodigious size! – falcons, hawks, sparrowhawks, and buzzards in flight. I had to struggle for scraps of food against mice, voles, shrews, wild hamsters, and lemmings. More vipers than I care to throw a stick at obliged me to do just that. Weasels, ferrets, ermines, and the highly aggressive wolverines all defend their little patches of territory with zeal. Curly-horned wild sheep and long-bearded goats leap up and down the mountain flanks with an offensive ease and are forever eager to headbutt intruders over edges and into oblivion.

While many of the same creatures appear in *Le Bas* – especially during winter, when many of them are forced to travel down the slopes to find unfrozen water and food – they are markedly less aggressive here, where the living is easier. Wild sheep and goats are wholly absent, but I noticed that the domestic varieties show a distinct kinship to their up-slope kin.

Horses, donkeys and mules are not unknown on the *Letztafl*, but they are rare and considered to be expensive. First, an aspiring horse-owner needs to make the purchase of breeding stock. Second, said stock needs to be shipped up the steep incline and past all of the border stations. Third and finally, the animals need to be watched at all times, lest they come to grief ascending or descending a plateau. Truly, the people of Lilliend consider anyone who rides a horse to be showing off the fact that they have too much money on their hands. In contrast, donkeys and mules, which can be more easily trained to navigate the vertical landscape, are highly prized both as mounts and beasts of burden – where I should like to add that they receive superior treatment to what they might expect in many other places I have visited. A stout donkey is considered not just useful in



Lilliend, but potentially a lifesaver, as there are many harrowing tales of travelers caught in a snowstorm who only made it back home because their donkey stolidly trudged through the snowdrifts and unfailingly found the way home to its stable.

While large aerial predators are a common nuisance in Lilliend, the domain does not have a large amount of large land predators. The lower slopes of *L'Haut* are the domain of cougars, but they are not numerous, and only descend to the *Letztafl* during the worst winters. If at all possible, they prefer to hang onto what to them must be a narrow strip of safe ground, caught between raptors on one hand and humans on the other.

Unnatural hazards

By your command, my Master, I have compiled a catalogue of monsters both mentioned and observed during my stay in Lilliend. I trust you will be pleased with the thoroughness of my work, though possibly not its results. In truth, I doubt you will find this information very useful for your goal of conquering the land.

Fey

For all its faults, Lilliend seems like prime Fey territory. As far as I was able to determine, over half the domain is free of settlements, and possesses a lush, savage beauty. I duly enquired of the locals whether there were any legends of creatures which shared the most common known traits of the Fey – and nine times out of ten, I came up empty.

Finally, during my investigation of the domain's capitol city, Luzander, I met a toothless old grandmother who recalled a tale about a certain tree in the Queen's Gardens. In spite of the name, this proved to be a public park, which was open at all

hours of the day and night. I located the tree in question by checking for ethereal resonance, but waited to approach it until after sundown, when I could be more certain of uninterrupted and unobserved discussion.

While I anticipated some difficulty in coaxing the tree's occupant forth, she proved to be alert and presented herself the instant I set foot on the carefully-tended lawn which covered the earth around her tree: A Dryad.

We had a brief discussion, which I did not find altogether satisfying, after which she dismissed me from her presence. The fact that I did not even question this command gave me pause only once I had left Lilliend. The entries in my personal journal suggest that I considered returning for another attempt several times, but always found reasons not to – many of them highly dubious. I would conclude that this particular Dryad is a force to be reckoned with.

Q: "Greetings. My name is Ciska. What is yours?"

A: "I have no name. Once, I had a name, but no more."

Q: "You are a Dryad, correct?"

A: "In your language, I am a Dryad. You are human?"

Q: "That is correct. Your tree is magnificent. It is old?"

A: "Old. Yes. Yet not. The land is older. You are not so old."

Q: "Of course. You are of Fey. Are your people many in the land?"

A (agitated): "No. My little sisters sleep in L'Haut. But not many. There are more of them than there are of you, though."

Q: "But of course. Are there others of Fey in the land?"

A (agitated): "Some. But most fled towards the sun, once the other lands appeared."



Q: "Are you lonely?"

A: "Lonely. ... No. No. I am waiting."

Q: "What are you waiting for?"

A: "Death. Why are you asking questions?"

Q: "I am a seeker of knowledge. Why do –"

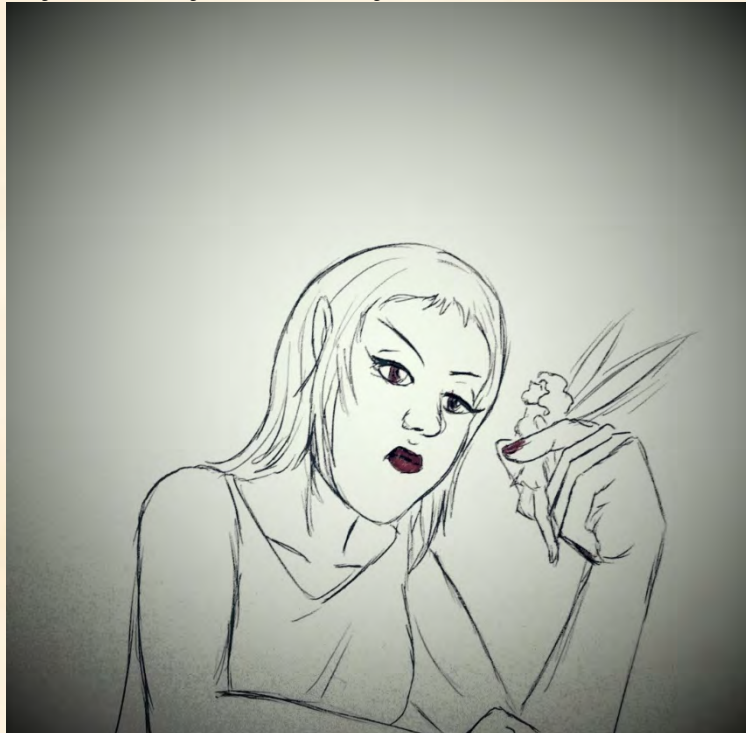
A: "Why are you seeking knowledge?"

Q: "So that I might know the truth. Why do you –"

A (agitated): "Forget the truth. Embrace lies. They are softer, your roots will dig deeper. The truth is bedrock. The truth is the land. The land will hold you fast so you can never escape, and you will be trapped with the abomination."

Q: "What is the abomination?"

A (agitated): "I cannot say. I must not say. I will not say. Its roots dig deeper into the land than mine. Its ears hear more in the winds than my leaves. I await death, but to anger the abomination would deny me even that sweet release. Go. Leave here. I await death. My little sisters in L'Haut await death or lie to themselves that they are safe there, dreaming. Most others fled. You should flee. Run, while you still may. Go. Go away! GO NOW!"



I obeyed her command without question, my *Master*. As unsatisfying as this encounter was, I dare say you may eliminate the Fey as a serious factor in your plans to conquer Lilliend. A handful of Dryads, unable to travel very far from their trees – and apparently too timid to reveal themselves to me while I was in *L'Haut* – will hardly make an army. I never encountered other Fey during my survey, suggesting 'the others' are even more retiring in nature. Of course, magically dominating any Fey found could make them useful stewards of territory you wish to hold, but *L'Haut* is hardly worth the effort of taking, and that one Dryad I found in Luzander seems to be insane, or something close thereto.

And yet. In spite of her... confusion, I do not believe that she was lying to me.

Gryphons:

I know I already mentioned the domain's suspiciously intelligent – and surprisingly small – Gryphons in my section on Landscape, but wish to add a few tidbits more, which I only discovered after I had made my way to *Le Bas*, established my first laboratory in the domain and found time for a little light scrying and crafting.

To augment my further research, I created my first homunculus. I do not doubt that you would find many faults with Firstborn, but it has repaid the costs of its creation tenfold just in this first stage of my research. A combination of direct scrying and stealthy reconnaissance by Firstborn brought to light that, far from living like the beasts they appear to be, the Gryphons have at least one proper settlement in *L'Haut!* Through my magical sensor and Firstborn's eyes, I saw the

creatures go in and out of a crudely assembled, but nevertheless stout, fortress of rough-hewn wood and stone, built on one of the larger plateaus of *L'Haut*, carrying in freshly-killed food and bowls of water.

What is more, there was *smoke* rising from the fortress' chimneys, and I swear to you on the grim patrons of the Eternal Order that there were gryphons *wearing armour* who stood guard at the entrance! In hindsight, my escape from the high reaches was far luckier than I had realized. Any attempt you make at conquering Lilliend, my *Master*, should take these creatures into account. A predator capable of hunting both in the air and on land, intelligent enough to construct shelters and handle tools, and quite likely gifted with problem-solving intelligence can only be considered to be deadly competition – at least, until you find some way to bring them to heel.

Dead Zones & Ogier

The seasons turned to autumn during my stay on the *Letztafl*, making the notion of ascending the higher plateaus a hazardous one. Even if the mountaineer I questioned had not warned me outright, I daresay I would have deduced it from the way people started trickling into the city; loggers, trappers and others who spent much of the year on the higher plateaus were seeking shelter within the embrace of city walls.

Regrettably, my knowledge of the wilderness on the higher plateaus still seemed lacking, and so I devised an alternate method of reconnaissance. I rented a small cottage on the outskirts of town to have some privacy, furnished a laboratory which allowed me to start a couple of alchemical processes, and acquainted myself with the section of my spellbook that deals with scrying. For hours on end, I sat cross-legged in the middle of

my cottage's floor, sending my mind out to scout and map and spy – and I made a discovery.

On several occasions, my magical sensors just winked out, leaving me back in my own body, startled and confused. I experimented, determined my grasp of the magic was solid and confirmed the duration of the spells, leading to the conclusion that either someone was interfering with me, or there was some kind of passive ward I had chanced upon. As none of my other magical or alchemical experiments suffered any interference, I decided to consider the second explanation the more likely.

Through tireless effort, while the autumn winds rattled the roof-tiles above me, I plotted out the locations where my magic had failed me. In the end, I determined there were a round dozen of them within my range, four of them located on plateaus close to the *Letztafl* which had not been cultivated and had an unsavoury reputation – although, tellingly, no one I questioned could tell me exactly why this was so.

I overcame my reluctance to travel in the steadily worsening weather, my *Master*, thanks to the compulsions you have so thoughtfully placed in my mind, and trekked out physically to investigate these 'dead zones'. I do hope you appreciate my efforts; I had a miserable time ascending to the higher plateau, half-blinded by driving rains and in constant danger of losing my footing or being swept away by a surprise mudslide. Even when I was under the cover of the forest canopy, cold water continued to leak and drizzle its way down to me, smothering any fires I tried to set.

I found the 'dead zones' easily enough, thanks to my flawless attention to detail and superior documentation, but found myself unable to enter.

My first attempt to do so sent wracking pains through every part of my body until I



retreated a stone's throw from the 'zone's' edge. My second attempt, augmented by every abjuration I could conjure at short notice, 'merely' made me feel so violently ill that I could not think and found myself stumbling away, my spells gone as surely as though they had never been cast. All my attempts to identify the nature of the effect through the finest efforts magical and alchemical failed miserably, as everything I tried to send into or touch upon the effect winked out or went inert on the instant it touched the 'zone'.

I pitched my tent a fair distance from the 'zone', camouflaged it to the best of my ability, and retired to rest and recover. Of course, I was not completely idle; I used my spyglass to look as deep into the 'zone' as I could, taking copious notes well into the night. I was just comparing the flora I could see inside the 'zone' to that outside it – and I hasten to add I found no noteworthy differences – when I spotted the creatures striding towards me through the trees.

Fortunately, they had apparently not noticed me. I blew out the sole candle I had used to write by and put away my spyglass, allowing my eyes to get used to the dark while I observed the strange beings.

Both stood head and shoulders above a human and, at first, I thought them unusually well-groomed Ogres. As they passed by my shelter, however, I noted the differences in anatomy. This was no pair of gnarled Giant-bloods in search of carnage and brutality; these were tall, straight-limbed creatures with dignity and purpose. They wore proper clothing, fit for their size. While their features were not human, they were not wholly hideous. The tufted, pointed ears which swiveled in response to noises might suggest animalistic tendencies, my *Master*, but I found them merely appropriate to the creatures' features. One was noticeably male, sporting a long

mustache, the other female and graced with long, braided hair. Both were deep in discussion in a low, rumbling language I did not recognize. To be precise, they appeared to be arguing about something, but in a genteel, civilized sort of way.

Fortunately for me, they were so engrossed in their discussion that I was able to trail them with relative ease. I made copious running notes on their discussion while they walked and talked – and, as it turned out, harvested late nuts and fruits from the forest, which the female collected in her apron. To my regret, my focus on transcribing was a little too absolute, and I did not notice the creatures' path had gently looped around.

Quite unexpectedly, I found myself wracked by hideous pain and I cried out, stumbling blindly away from the edge of that accursed dead zone. By the time my sight had cleared up, the creatures were long gone, but I had a terrible sense of foreboding. I grabbed as many of my notes as I could reach without subjecting myself to the dead zone's dread touch and packed up my tent, then ran for the edge of the plateau. I was halfway down the incline when instinct made me look up, and I saw them outlined against the cloud-filled sky by a lightning bolt: five of the hulking creatures, each one armed with an axe with an unusually long handle. We stared at each other in the dark, and I fancy we were all frozen by indecision. In the end, I shimmied further down. As soon as my boots hit the ground, one of the creatures very deliberately brought his axe down on my grapnel, causing my rope to fall limply down at my feet.

Message received, I retreated to the security of my cottage to rest and recover, and refrained from making any further *personal* forays into the dead zones. I did, however, translate the notes I had taken



and performed follow-up scrying on the area around the zones, using the opportunity to spy on the creatures as opportunity allowed.

Please find enclosed my notes on these tall, axe-wielding creatures, who name themselves *Ogier*. If they can be tamed, they would likely make a useful fighting

Dread Possibility: Ogier and *stedding* in Ravenloft

Although Ciska is unfamiliar with Ogier and *stedding* at this point and classifies both under Unnatural Hazards, anyone who has read Robert Jordan's epic *Wheel of Time*-series is likely to be familiar with them.

An AD&D 3.0-compatible ruleset for roleplaying in this setting has been published by Wizards of the Coast, although this is no longer in print. Several fan-made online resources exist, however, allowing for people to engage in the setting in accordance with the D&D 3.5- and Pathfinder-rules.

Personal recommendations include, respectively, [Under the Dragon's Banner](#) and [Wheel of Time Pathfinder RPG](#). The second of these provides character creation rules for Ogier.

While the Ogier of Lilliend are generally loathe to interact with any other species within the domain, sometimes daring youths feel the urge to explore the wider world, and might join an adventuring party headed for the border.

Ogier have come to Ravenloft with the appearance of the domain known as the Broken Wheel, to the southeast of Lilliend. They suffered several nasty surprises upon their arrival. They are a gentle, erudite people in tune with the world around them and deeply respectful of nature, who suddenly found themselves in a place where malice and corruption lurk in every shadow and the land is bound to evil through its connection to the Darklords and the Dark Powers.

The Ogier once hoped they could escape the malice they sensed all around them by migrating to other domains. Unfortunately, they only found different types of evil. At one time they hoped they might ride the danger they sensed all around them out by opening their prized artefact, the *Book of Translation*, but discovered the priceless item would no longer carry them forward in time.

All it would do, was create new *stedding*, the magic dead areas where Ogier must retreat to at certain intervals to stave off death.

An Ogier who holds the Book of Translation in Ravenloft can create a *stedding* by performing a week-long ritual. The size of the *stedding* is dependant on the Ogier's personal power, typically creating an area with a radius of 50 ft. per level. The Ogier must be at least of fifth level before the *Book* will activate for them.

The *stedding* were – and continue to be – welcome havens from the evil that the Ogier sensed all around them, although their nature has changed in the Demiplane of Dread.

Inside the *stedding*, no spell can be cast and no spell can be cast into it. Active spells that enter *stedding* are automatically dispelled without save. The effect of permanent magical items is suppressed until they leave the *stedding*, rendering magic weapons merely masterwork, wondrous items powerless *objets d'art*, and potions and alchemical extracts bottles of coloured water. Constructs fall dormant as soon as they try to pass the boundary and remain so until they are carried out. Animated dead like zombies likewise fall dormant until removed – but greater undead like ghouls, vampires and wights can weather the effect, even though they can not use any magical, spell-like or supernatural abilities they have while within the *stedding*. Summoned creatures retreat as soon as they touch a *stedding's* border and refuse to enter, regardless their summoner's orders.



Spellcasters themselves become nauseated and blinded with pain as long as they are inside, even if they are normally immune to these conditions. In addition, a *stedding* functions under a constant, permanent Magic Circle against Evil-effect.

And the touch of the domain's Darklord is much reduced inside a *stedding*, toning down from a strong pulse to a distant, muted buzz.

Unknown to Ogier, a Darklord can sense the presence of a *stedding* in their domain. The rise of a new *stedding* gives them an annoying feeling comparable to suddenly losing sensitivity in a part of one's body. Although this sensation soon passes, the Darklord can thereafter pinpoint the 'spot' without any great effort, meaning that any Darklord with the means and desire to do so could clamp down on the Ogier settlements in their territory with little trouble.

In addition, any Darklord who manages to get their hands on the *Book of Translation* can use it to reverse the process that created a *stedding*, returning a *stedding* of any size to normal land by means of a 24-hour ritual.

Well-intentioned as they are, the Ogier thought they might save the land from itself by creating more *stedding* in key places, and perhaps one day expanding the *stedding*-effect to cover whole lands. One thing about the Demiplane of Dread that came as a pleasant surprise to the Ogier was the way their birthrate suddenly spiked, allowing them to not only travel to new lands as they appeared adjacent to the Broken Wheel, but also to create new colonies there. As their colonists carried the *Book of Translation* with them, they created new *stedding* to house their burgeoning villages.

The Ogier's grand dream of one day smothering the influence of the Darklords throughout the Wartorn Cluster came crashing to a bitter halt once they reached Lilliend, however.

Like other Darklords, Camille Churnstone sensed the rise of *stedding* in her land; unlike the other Darklords the Ogier had encountered to that point, she was neither too weak to respond, nor dismissive of the effect a few magic-dead and 'numb' spots could have on her mastery of the land. She arranged for a few lone Ogier to be captured when they ventured out of their safe haven, and personally tortured them for information until she knew enough to set her plan.

Although Camille could not enter the *stedding* herself, she could and did drive an unprecedented number of vampiric spawn into each of the *stedding*. The Ogier, forced to fend off wave after wave of vampires, struggled to protect their people. As a result, they were less alert when it came to protecting their precious *Book of Translation*, which was stolen from its place of keeping by Camille's agents.

The Darklady used the *Book* to destroy two *stedding* and personally lead the vampires who descended on the terrified Ogier attempting to flee to other safe havens. Otherwise, she has refrained from using the artefact because, like so many of her other treasures, she has forgotten where she hid it. The Darklady is content that at least the Ogier cannot use the *Book of Translation* anymore, and takes a dark glee in the knowledge that the gentle giants exist in a state of muted desperation to retrieve their prized artefact, while they know even less of where it might currently be found than she does.

If a brave adventurer were to discover the location of the fabled artefact and returned it to the Ogier, their name would surely go down in the long-lived giants' legends and history as the greatest hero of all time. On the other hand, anyone who so aids the Ogier would also incur Camille Churnstone's undying enmity...

Until such time as the Book is returned to them, the Ogier in Lilliend live in self-imposed isolation. They have not dared report their failure to protect the priceless talisman to their people in other domains, they avoid contact with the other creatures inhabiting Lilliend, and much of the joy has gone out of their lives.



from the dead zones is currently impossible to calculate, however; my best efforts did not even tell me what causes them, let alone how they could be deactivated or circumvented.

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History - Creation Myth

According to a body of mythology shared in one form or another by all the current purveyors of organized religion in Lilliend, there was once a time 'when all the lands were one', and the land was a goddess named Haurau, who hung suspended in the blue orb of the sky. Haurau was the earth, she was the water, she was the forests, she was fire, she was the mother of every living thing that walked upon her surface, and she loved all her children.

Haurau's mate, the father of all her children, was Thunder-Father, who held together the blue orb of the sky that surrounded Haurau and kept the Mists at bay. Thunder-Father was the sky, and the clouds, and the wind, and the rain, and the lightning, and the thunder. Thunder-Father did not care about the living things that grew and moved on Haurau. Whenever he lusted for his mate, he would hurl himself upon her without caring how many 'little things' he crushed.



Every time Thunder-Father came to her, Haurau would weep, for she felt keenly the death of each of her children. Also, her mate was not a gentle lover and would leave her crying when he was done. She tolerated it all, though, for she loved Thunder-Father in spite of his flaws and knew that he loved her above all others (of whom there were many), and knew she needed him so she might bear more children and also to keep at bay the dreadful Mists.

One day, as he was looking about for a new lover to wile away a stray moment (as he often did), Thunder-Father happened to cast his roving eye beyond his blue orb of sky.

There, suspended in the endless waves of the Mists, he saw the sleeping Brightwell, who had once been as a sister to his mate.

Now Haurau was dark as the earth, old and, to be blunt, fat, sagging and wrinkled after her many pregnancies; but Brightwell was pale as cream, fresh with youth, and her hair was a halo of fire about her dreaming face. No sooner had Thunder-Father spotted Brightwell, than his desire flared and he flew forth from the blue orb of sky, cracking it in his urgency.

And while Brightwell slept, Thunder-Father threw himself upon her just as he always hurled himself upon Haurau, and the pain of his assault woke her from her dreams, crying out so all the Mists rang with it. This did not dissuade Thunder-Father, who visited his lusts upon her and then got up to return to his blue orb of sky. But he noticed that Brightwell's belly was swelling with the child he had made with her, and he paused, fully proud of his virility.

A second time, Brightwell cried out; and the evil one who would come to be named *il Demonio* burst forth from her womb, dark and full-grown, a terrible reflection of his father's worst aspects and his mother's

power. Before Thunder-Father's disbelieving eyes, his son hurled himself upon his mother just as he had done, causing her to cry out in pain a third time – and he did nothing, so confused was he by what was happening.

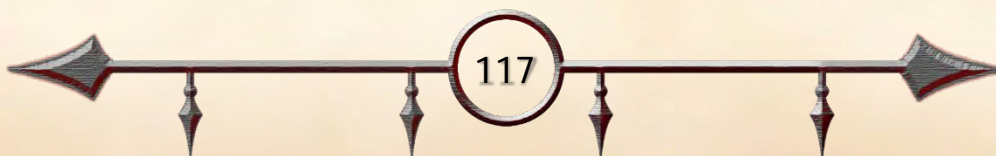
And as Brightwell's belly swelled with the child of her own son, her green eyes locked on Thunder-Father's blue eyes and she spoke terrible words: "***Beware. For the next man to touch your mate, my sister Haurau, will break her, worse than you and your son have broken me, and you shall be alone!***"

Then she drew up her legs and kicked out, driving *il Demonio* off of her so her second child could be born, and she cried out a fourth and last time at her pain. Bright Ashar exited her mother and immediately engaged her father-brother in brutal battle, and the screams of pain and the roar of combat were such that Thunder-Father fled back to his blue orb of sky, terrified by the consequences of his actions.

Deceptively sophisticated; as Evil disrupts a balanced, Neutral state, Good rises. Good as a reactive, rather than an active force.

Re.: the Wretched Mourns Waithe Woman's notes on religious myth reflecting real-life events.

See notes on Populace, cross-ref. Waves of Immigration ?



But the Mists were vast, and the journey was longer going back than it had been going forth, and while he fled, Thunder-Father noticed *il Demonio* fleeing at his side.

"Have mercy on me, oh father mine," the evil one pleaded. **"Let me take refuge in your blue orb of sky, for my sister-daughter seeks my life, and my mother hates me. Please, oh please save me, oh father mine, whom I love."** which was a damnable lie, for *il Demonio* loves no one save himself. But Thunder-Father was a fool, and he was feeling sentimental, and so he swallowed the lie whole.

Through the crack in the blue orb of sky they passed, and Thunder-Father reached up to close it. But *il Demonio* stayed his hand, whispering: **"Oh father mine, what if my sister-daughter or my mother follows after? Should we not leave a little door by which we might escape their wrath? "**

At *il Demonio's* words, Thunder-Father remembered how Brightwell had been there with Haurau and him before the beginning, and how she ruled the Mists just as he ruled the blue orb of sky and how small the orb was compared to the Mists. He grew very afraid of the wrath of Brightwell and Ashar then, and agreed, turning his back on the crack in his blue orb of sky. And so he did not notice the evil things of the Mists, Brightwell's nightmares, creeping in through that crack, blaspheming in honour of *il Demonio* as they went to hide in the shadows of the world. But he *did* notice the way Haurau squirmed with discomfort as evil seeped into the cracks in her skin, making itself at home and leering at her children with murderer's eyes.

Again, *il Demonio* whispered to Thunder-Father, saying: **"Your mate Haurau is**

looking about for the man who shall break her, oh father mine, just as my mother her sister prophesied. Do you not see her fear and discomfort? Do you not love her, oh father mine? Do you not wish to save her, oh father mine? You should go to her and lie atop her, oh father mine. Choke out all the little wriggling things that might otherwise do her harm, and she will be safe in your arms forever!"

To Thunder-Father, this sounded like a very good idea; and so he hurled himself atop Haurau, crushing animals and plants and people by the millions. And in his fear, he hurt Haurau until she cried out for the very first time for him to stop, but he would not listen.

So it came to pass that Thunder-Father, wishing never to lose the one he loved above all others, shattered her in his grip. And Haurau was no more, and the land was no longer one.

From the Mists, Thunder-Father heard the powerful voice of Brightwell, saying simply: **"I had warned you!"**

All the new lands slipped through Thunder-Father's fingers while he tried desperately to fit them back together, and the face of his one true love shattered into a multitude of younger goddesses, who sprinted away from him to govern the many lands, rather than endure his touch or his presence for even one moment longer.

Thunder-Father looked about him, hoping to see his son, that he might comfort him, but *il Demonio* was gone to bedevil the new world. All that lingered was his mocking laughter, and so Thunder-Father knew himself to have been betrayed by his own blood ... and alone.

Alone and wounded to his core, Thunder-Father sat upon the highest mountain peak he could find, the highest peak of what is now Lilliend, and there he stayed; thus the



sky remains always above the land now, instead of crashing down upon it, and the animals and the plants and the people may live – but Thunder-Father cares for them not, even now. All he cares about is the terrible loss he feels for the lover he murdered. He does nothing to close the crack in the blue orb of sky, that lets in Brightwell's nightmares. He does not try to find a new mate from among the throng of goddesses that govern the many lands. From time to time he raises his tired and sorrowful face to look for his son, or his granddaughter, or even faerie Brightwell and her halo of flame.

But all he hears is his son's mocking laughter, or his granddaughter's clarion call to righteous battle or Brightwell's silence as she sleeps away eternity in the cradle of the Mists.

And so Thunder-Father sits alone and weeps, and his tears are the rain and the snow, and his broken voice is the wind that lashes Lilliend every night.

Recorded History

Just as Lilliend's creation myth is shared by all the land's organized religions – although they each give an individual interpretation of the events therein – the land has a unified history, accepted by all the local humans. In fact, the noble families take pains to ensure every citizen knows the 'true course of events' which lead up to Lilliend being as it is.

I was happily surprised when investigating my first Lilliender city to discover that history books were available for a negligible price. While my copy's penmanship was less than optimal, the shopkeeper who sold it to me explained this was so because the cheaper history books are the fruits of writing lessons given at the domain's boarding schools. Young women learning calligraphy are ordered to copy the

nation's history, and the fruits of their labour are then sold, with the profits channeled into their school's coffers. (After a reasonable deduction for the benefit of the shopkeepers, who must after all find a way to shift the stock.)

My delight at such easily-accessible history turned to disappointment soon enough, and not just because the so-called author had the disagreeable habit of leaving inkblots in the margin of every other page, rather than regularly clean the nib of her pen.

Lilliend's history flows forth organically from its creation myth.

The Lilliender believe that after Thunder-Father retreated to the highest mountain peak – probably the plateau where I first entered the domain – some of the goddesses born from Haurau took the domain in hand. Proud Artemis ruled the wilderness and the spirit of woman; wise Athena governed the urges to create and learn; and faerie Carolin was the nursemaid of the Elven people, who set themselves apart from the humans favoured by her two sisters.

Artemis first taught humans to hunt, gather and fight to protect what was theirs.

Athena taught humans to build homes and villages, then cities. She also taught them to weave, smith, write, and all the other skills needed to rise from the wild into civilization.

Carolin crept up the mountains and forced herself on Thunder-Father while he slept, later giving birth to a son she named Coralin and took for her consort.

While the humans, under the guidance of Artemis and Athena, strove to make a place for themselves in the world, Carolin and Coralin taught the Elves to envy and covet while they lurked in the wilderness. Just as the humans of Lilliend completed building their first city, the Elves erupted from the



deep forest, carrying bows and arrows made for them by their incestuous patrons in their hands, and carrying hatred and greed in their hearts. The first battle between mortals erupted there, at the site where the first city stood, which would later become the nation's capital: Luzander.

Blood soaked the earth and the dead were stacked like cordwood on both sides, but in the end, humanity prevailed and the Elves fled back into the wilderness to lick their wounds and plan their next attack.

Four great, human heroes had distinguished themselves above all others during the battle, and their names were **Churnstone, Lenkherr, Lockstone** and **Weisücher**. Hailed by their fellow humans as natural leaders, they would go on to found the four great noble families of Lilliend. They agreed among themselves that in future, the nation's kings would be elected from among their leaders, and that every time a king died – for whatever reason – the four families would elect a new one, based on wisdom, strength, skill and power.

A brief breakdown of the four families, as they came to be known:

Churnstone

Heraldry: A raven, spreading its wings over a rampant lion upon an obelisk.

Motto: *'Kraft, gegründet auf Dauer'*

Family seat: Karnbrunnen

Traditionally, the Churnstone family governs the city of Karnbrunnen and the surrounding territory, closest to *L'Haut*. The family made its fortune by managing the domain's quarries and the guilds of masonry and engineering. Although no Churnstone recorded in history has been an architect or

engineer of note, their territory has produced them, and thus they claim the glory such men and later women earned as their own.

Regrettably, the two things the Churnstones are known for which might be called their true achievements are the tendency for poetic genius which crops up from time to time, and the fact that the main family has gone extinct through an unidentified malady or weakness.

Family traits

Heart of Poetry. *Prerequisite:* Churnstone family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Churnstone family with this trait receives a +1 to Perform (oratory) or Perform (sing) and Perform is always a class skill for them.

Voice of the Land. *Prerequisite:* Churnstone family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Churnstone family with this trait receives a -1 to all Powers checks made when levelling a curse against someone, cumulative with other modifiers that affect the laying of curses.

Lenkherr

Heraldry: A hunting hound, running next to a lion, both their tongues lolling.

Motto: *'Exceller en toutes choses'*

Family seat: Malkort

Traditionally overseeing Lilliend's wine country, the Lenkherr made their fortune by establishing the nation's first vineyards and breweries. Unto this day, Lenkherr wine, beer and spirits are considered the finest of all Lilliend, and the produce of their lands is one of few things exported – to a very select clientèle. Sadly, more than their wine, the Lenkherr are known for being sycophants to whoever is in power, and debauched lechers when at home. The



Lenkherr are born politicians and courtiers, keen on spinning webs of intrigue and deceit to get ahead and consider their serfs to be at their disposal in every sense of the word. As a result, even today their name is considered to be a byword for untrustworthiness and shameless exploitation.

While the Lenkherr may claim their motto is 'to excel in all things', even their own serfs are more likely to mutter 'trust a Lenkherr to betray you'.

Family traits

Dark Charm. *Prerequisite:* Lenkherr family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Lenkherr family with this trait receives a +1 to Bluff when interacting with any creature sexually attracted to them, and Bluff is always a class skill for them.

Embrace of the Land. *Prerequisite:* Lenkherr family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Lenkherr family with this trait receives a +1 to all grapple checks against medium-sized or smaller opponents regardless of their own size, cumulative with other modifiers.

Lockstone

Heraldry: A hyena, glancing over its shoulder and baring its teeth.

Previously: A lion, rampant, roaring at the moon.

Motto: *'Sed nunc liber'*

Previously: *'Ehre durch Pflichtsamkeit'*

Family seat: Schlotstein

Overseeing the lands closest to the final edge of *Le Bas* and responsible for patrolling the final descent to other lands, the Lockstones were traditionally concerned most of all with the nation's defence against invasion by 'heathen foreigners'. The Lockstones excelled in military training and the forging of metal, having crafted the

finest weapons and armour, but also the finest tools in all of Lilliend.

Recognizing the need for soldiers and knights to be able to trust the people who supplied them with food and labour, the Lockstones made the revolutionary move of ending the serf system in their lands, declaring all commoners within their holdings to be free folk. As a direct result, the Lockstones were among the most beloved nobles in all the land, as well as the second wealthiest; the commoners under their protection offered their best efforts to make the Lockstone lands thrive and paid their taxes freely. In return, the Lockstones held strong to their notion of *'noblesse oblige'*, with nobles unhesitatingly offering aid and comfort to commoners in time of need, just as they received aid and comfort in times of plenty.

Family traits

Undaunted Hyena. *Prerequisite:* Lockstone family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Lockstone family with this trait receives a +1 to all Will saves and Concentration checks.

Wrath of the Land. *Prerequisite:* Lockstone family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Lockstone family with this trait can go into a rage, similar to a Barbarian, for one round each day, whenever they see an ally or an innocent victim threatened by an enemy, and gain all the benefits associated therewith. They suffer the same consequences as a Barbarian afterward.

Weisücher

Heraldry: A rampant lion, crowned, roaring at the sun.

Motto: *'Sois entendu, et c'est tout'*

Family seat: Luzander

The historical wardens of the nation's capital of Luzander and consequently of the



nation's richest farming lands, the Weisücher boasted that they were the most far-sighted of the noble houses. Others, particularly the Lenkherr and Lockstones, tended to mutter that it is easy to look to the future if you can effortlessly fill your plate and your cup on any day of the year.

Despite the criticism levelled against them by other noble houses that they tended to ignore the struggles of their neighbours so long as they could fill their own plate, the Weisücher are indeed known to have produced some of the greatest philosophers and scholars of Lilliend's history. Certainly it was a Weisücher queen who founded the nation's educational system, which is a great boon to young people who manage to meet the entry requirements.

Family traits

Child of the Land. *Prerequisite:*

Weisücher family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Weisücher family with this trait receives a +1 to Stealth, cumulative with other modifiers, and Stealth is always a class skill for them.

Memory of the Land. *Prerequisite:*

Weisücher family member, human ancestry.

A member of the Weisücher family with this trait has been initiated in the family's secret lore, and may select the Dark Ones as a patron, either individually or as a collective.

The four great families did as they had decided, dividing the nation of Lilliend into four provinces and governing them in accordance with laws passed down by the kings they elected from among their own number. While the history does not say so outright, there are ample hints that some of the kings were but puppets, their edicts given to them by coalitions of two or more of the great families and temples. All that

stood in the way of permanent alliances governing the whole nation was the endless bickering between the Lenkherr and Lockstone families.

In Lilliend's early history, the Lockstones were a byword for honour and dutiful behaviour, whereas the Lenkherr were known to be shameless debauchers who abused their own serfs. As both families jockeyed for power over the other and alternately swayed the Churnstones and Weisücher to join their side, power shifted in Lilliend and politics remained ... dynamic.

As you might imagine, my *Master*, the common people suffered most whenever the constant conflict flared up, with young nobles gathering bands of brigands to burn, pillage and murder in enemy lands, and knights staking pieces of land and the people living on it on the outcome of duels of honour. And when the common people suffer, so does the land; the constant internal strife meant that farms could not produce food, workers dared not travel, payments were not made in time, and all of Lilliend's economy suffered.

King Arthus Weisücher III, last king of Lilliend, concocted a ruinous plan to save his nation from poverty; he called the four great houses together and bound them together by declaring war on a neighbouring nation for its 'ungodliness'. As the king had the authority to suspend all conflicts of honour during wartime, the rival Lenkherr and Lockstone elders reluctantly swore peace among themselves for as long as Lilliend was at war.

The history does not name this neighbouring land, but the author had added a footnote that suggested the massed armies of Lilliend were sent directly east, and so the 'ungodly' folk must be the people of Conquista. She further speculated the Conquistan refusal to acknowledge Thunder-Father may have been what set off



King Arthus Weisücher III, as the worship of Thunder-Father was apparently still widespread and vital in his time. On the other hand, it seems more likely that king Arthus III coveted his neighbours' wealth and hoped to revitalize his economy with a judicious infusion of plunder.

The flower of Lilliend's nobility rode out to attack the unsuspecting heathen, driving commoners recruited at sword-point to serve as soldiers before them and Lilliend was left without its farmers and craftsfolk. While Arthus Weisücher III was gallivanting about the world, playing the paladin and butchering 'enemy' commoners by the cartload, the industry and economy of Lilliend sank to all-new lows. The only ones left to tend the home fires were the old men, the infirm, young boys and all the women.

Some five years before the 'war' – actually the largest raid ever committed in Lilliend's history – ended, queen-consort Helena Weisücher convened a council of the ranking women from all four great families. Her speech is considered to be very moving and inspirational by the locals, but really boils down to a series of forthright observations of how king Arthus III had botched his one job: the protection and careful management of Lilliend. Helena went on to brutally point out the flaws of every other male ranking member of the four families and warned her sisters in nobility that if the men were allowed to continue on their path, they would ruin Lilliend.

Surprisingly, the various consorts and wives agreed wholeheartedly, and voted Helena in as the first ruling queen of Lilliend on the spot. By the time the war ended and the survivors of king Arthus III's army came limping home, their mounts laden down with loot, their wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, cousins, aunts, and grandmothers

had been digging in and preparing for five years. Troops that marched into cities and fortresses expecting a hero's welcome were quickly disarmed and locked up. The officer corps and the ranking male heads of the four families were imprisoned separately in the dungeons under the royal palace at Luzander.

On a sombre, misty morning, these prisoners were dragged out of their cells one by one and brought to the square before the royal palace. Despite their pleading for mercy, their tantrums about how the natural order was being defiled, and in many cases their absolute disbelief that this could happen, each of the army leaders was executed by means of beheading. Queen Helena Weisücher I sat in state and watched the whole process from start to finish without flinching once and without shedding a single tear.

It is said that when king Arthus Weisücher III's head tumbled into the basket, the whole land shook and Mists rose on the horizon.

While the people fell to their knees and begged for Thunder-Father to seal the blue orb of sky and protect them, queen Helena I rose to her feet and publicly denounced Thunder-Father for failing to do his duty of protecting the world, even in the absence of Haurau.

"Are we not women?" she shouted at the massed civilians and her own troops. "Do we not know

All very civilized.

greater courage than any man, every time we dare to make new life? Bow not to Thunder-Father, for he is the worst of them; foolish, cowardly and covetous. No; recall Artemis who gives a woman her fierce and unbreakable spirit; and recall Athena



who gives a woman all the tools she needs to get the job done!"

Her words were met with ever louder cheers, and the women of Lilliend rose to their feet, saluting Helena as the mother of the nation's new era.

Under Helena Weisücher I, Lilliend continued much as it had done before. The four great families still ruled, conniving against one another when the opportunity presented itself. Commoners still needed to live under the control of the four families, providing the food and labour that kept the nation going, and the queen ruled all.

A profound social shift had taken place, however; men were no longer in charge. Rather, men were now treated as necessary for the long-term well-being of Lilliend, but they were a necessity that needed to be managed and guided by women, who were naturally wiser and more capable of governing their emotions.

While one might argue the point whether one gender is innately better suited to rule than another, my *Master*, the threat of civil war was much reduced. This is not because the Lenkherr and Lockstone families hated each other any less, but because women generally have different methods of settling conflicts than men do. Brave knights no longer challenged one another to joust at dawn, nor did petty lordlings round up bands of farmers to burn enemy homesteads to the ground and butcher their retainers. Rather, dowagers spread disturbing rumours about their counterparts, and fine ladies bedecked with lace and jewels paid assassins to pay quiet visits to their enemies in the dark of night.

In any case, the new way of doing things was much easier on the commoners than the old way and allowed them more opportunity to actually do their work. Queen Helena I introduced the notion of formalized

education and funded the building of boarding schools, where the nation's young women could 'improve their minds and skills without the distraction provided by boys and other foolishness'. Educated young women returned to their homes and families after graduation with fresh, new ideas which stimulated new trades. The nation's coffers benefited from all these changes to the point that they started to 'overflow with gold', or so claims the history.

Lilliend became so prosperous that queen Helena I felt she had made good on her promise to save the nation, and she passed away peacefully in her sleep after having ruled for sixty years. She left to the four families a united and prosperous Lilliend.

As in days of old, the heads of the four ruling families came together to elect a new queen, and Magda Churnstone was elected over Elka Lockstone by a narrow margin. The Lockstone delegation was noticeably disappointed, but as they still held duty and honour as their key virtues, they congratulated the new monarch and departed for home with their dignity intact.

Their dignity lasted until they were halfway home; assassins paid by either Lenkherr or Churnstone gold fell upon the delegation and butchered all, leaving house Lockstone with the uncomfortable choice whether to promote to head of house a five year-old girl, Amathe, now the last surviving daughter of their fallen liege-lady as all the other daughters had died at her side during the ambush – or instead promote her twenty year-old *son*, Maximilian Lockstone.

By Lilliend's new laws and standards, Maximilian was a ridiculous choice. As a man, he was not actually entitled to inherit anything, and should be expected to be a dullard who thought with his muscles and was governed by his passions and foolish



whims. The Lockstone family elders acknowledged the young man was anything *but* those things, however. Rather, he was known to be studious and thoughtful, preferring to spend his time in the family library over the practice court and the hunting range. Also, his sister Amathe was a little girl more interested in her dollies than the needs of the Lockstone estate, let alone the rest of the land. Seeing the needs of the Lockstone holdings as more important than following social dogma, the elders installed Maximilian on his mother's seat as head of house.

Most of Lilliend laughed, and the history books mention bets were made in Luzander by lesser nobles as to how long it would take Maximilian to ruin his family, and for the Lockstone cousin branches to take over control of the family seat at Schlotstein.

Instead, the nobility and commoners were surprised to discover Maximilian was a cold-blooded, distant, but highly efficient administrator. The young man turned out to be well-learned, contrary to the trend to teach young men only so much as they needed to know not to bore the noblewomen they would one day be married off to, and to give their sons their first instruction.

Although he was not charming, nor even very diplomatically inclined, the young master of the Lockstone estate could recognize these qualities in others and sent out his more silver-tongued cousins to mend fences with the Churnstones and Lenkherr, offering formal apologies for ancient slights and presenting favourable trade options. He also managed to keep the Lockstone estates running smoothly and improved the efficiency of their famous forges by introducing new technologies he had read about in his beloved books.

Maximilian continued to serve as the soft-spoken and retiring head of the

Lockstone family, rarely leaving his study, let alone the family seat of Schlotstein, during the reign of Magda Churnstone I. Only when Magda died, according to some rumours to poison, although the official story was that she had succumbed to spring fever, did the lord of Lockstone travel to Luzander to attend the election of the new queen. For the first time in recorded history, Lockstone and Lenkherr did not bicker when their chiefs met; Maximilian's diplomatic efforts had borne fruit, and his Lenkherr counterpart, lady Olivia Lenkherr, was willing to bury the hatchet.

Instead, Maximilian's presence was vocally objected to by the head of house Weisücher, Helena, granddaughter of queen Helena Weisücher I (and rumoured to have arranged the untimely death of queen Magda Churnstone I). On behalf of her house, she demanded that Maximilian immediately remove himself from office in favour of his younger sister, Amathe, who was now of age to rule. When Maximilian politely – though somewhat coldly – refused, Helena called upon the other heads of house to join her in declaring a vote of non-acceptance against Maximilian and force him to abdicate.

To her shock and fury, both Olivia Lenkherr and Magteld Churnstone refused to do so. Instead, lady Olivia offered Maximilian her hands in friendship, and the hand of her eldest daughter Canelle in marriage.

"By your example and good faith, let us move beyond the past. Let us forge a new future of peace and prosperity between us," she said, or so claims the official history.

The election continued, despite Helena Weisücher's grumbling, and Magteld Churnstone was elected as Queen Magteld I by a majority vote of Lenkherr, Lockstone and Churnstone versus Weisücher's one vote in favour of Helena. During the



coronation festivities, Maximilian Lockstone and Canelle Lenkherr were introduced and formally engaged to each other, adding to the air of joy and goodwill that had come to dominate the political landscape of Lilliend. 'Blasphemous' tongues whispered in the shadows that perhaps, the way forward lay not in any one gender dominating, but in the installation of a meritocracy.

The Lockstone delegation returned home to Schlotstein, where Maximilian and Canelle continued their courtship and, in the fullness of time, married and conceived their first child. By all accounts, their union was at the very least a companionable and friendly one, even if it was not a grand love affair, with man and wife admiring each other's qualities and forming an efficient team.

Lilliend was at peace, with the noble houses no longer at each other's throats over conflicts best left in the past, and it seemed that the bright goddesses smiled upon the land and its people. Even the Elves of the forest were less prone to attacking lone travelers and labourers they spotted near their sylvan territory, and fewer wild animals came storming out of *L'Haut* to attack children and cattle when the weather turned towards winter.

Predictably, this was the moment where everything went straight to Hell.

The official history claims that Maximilian Lockstone, who had always been 'unusual' for a man in that he preferred to be governed by his mind over his muscles, succumbed to the paradox he embodied; a man who fostered peace instead of conflict, and reason over passion.

As a result of this internal schism, the history books claim he went mad and murdered his pregnant wife. When his retainers came running to investigate the source of his gut-wrenching screams, they found him in his wife's chamber, bathed in

her blood and wielding 'a terrible blade, bright as the moon'. Behind him lay poor Canelle's gutted corpse.

Howling hideous slander which vilified house Weisücher, Maximilian called for his loyal retainers and knights, shrieking that war was upon them. Such was his frightful passion, his madness, that he managed to infect his entire household. House Lockstone, nobles and commoners both, took up arms and stormed forth from their rightful seat at the edge of *Le Bas* into Lilliend's heartland. Instead of their old, admired banner of the Lilliender lion challenging the symbol of darkness, they flew a hideous new flag that showed the hyena, the scavenger who contests the lion its rightful prey, and a dark motto which betrayed their desire to cast off all their old values and the rightful rule of the queen.

When she heard of the approaching army, queen Magteld Churnstone I suffered a fatal schism of the brain and collapsed, dead. The only ranking noble in position to replace her was Helena Weisücher, who was hurriedly crowned queen Helena Weisücher II by the lesser nobles which infested the court even at the best of times. Her first order was to call upon the other noble houses to come to the defence of the nation's capital and strike down what would become known as the Lockstone Rebellion.

After a year of running battles, which ended in a siege of Luzander itself, the coalition of Churnstone, Lenkherr and Weisücher finally managed to defeat the Lockstone horde, ending that house's main family line. Maximilian Lockstone died in single combat with Olivia Lenkherr, who later died of her wounds while being tended by nuns of Athena. Amarthé Lockstone, who had served as her mad brother's squire, was executed in his stead for treason and warmongering.



After the war, Queen Helena II imposed stiff penalties on the Lockstone cousin branches but did allow them to take over the family seat and authority over their family estate for the sake of maintaining the nation's security and economy. Sadly, this proved to be insufficient.

Shaken by recent events, the Churnstone and Lenkherr animosity towards Lockstone had been kindled afresh, and Lilliend's economy suffered accordingly. The forges at Schlotstein lay cold as the land's finest smiths had died fighting for their mad liege-lord, and the other noble houses were loathe to supply them with coal and ore. Savages from beyond the border dared raid the *Letztafl*, now the Lockstones were no longer able to beat them back.

What made everything worse, was the fact that Lilliend was struck by a drought after the Lockstone Rebellion. A drought that lasted for years.

Much to her frustration, queen Helena Weisücher II spent most of her reign reinforcing the Lockstone holdings with her own troops and nurturing the estate's trade, and personally funding a far-reaching irrigation project to keep the nation's farms alive, rather than focusing on her grandmother's policy of stimulating the whole nation by building up the education system. On the occasion of her death, Lilliend was still suffering the repercussions of the Lockstone Rebellion, and her closest confidantes claimed the queen might have taken poison to speed her end, rather than continue the daily grind of rebuilding the lands of an enemy and reaping nothing but contempt from the rest of the nobility for her work.

Helena II's death occasioned the next election, but attendance was low.

The Lockstones were wholly absent, owing to the fact that their main line was

now extinct, and the law forbade cousin branches from placing a vote.

The Churnstones declined to attend, as they were now suffering some odd malady which was gutting the numbers of the main family line. They wished to focus on cleansing their house, rather than risk contaminating the rest of the nobility.

Many of the lesser nobles also failed to make a showing of themselves due to the continuing drought, which was having a terrible impact on the nation's food production and was even causing the *Wittwentraen* and the Widow's Daughters to dry up.

The Lenkherr and Weisücher representatives eventually swore in queen Yarsinde Weisücher I, but the omens were against her from the start; she was simply the eldest representative of her family at the time, not known for any excellence. Her reign limped on, with one mistake following another and lacklustre attempts at fixing the damage to Lilliend's economy and social development.

In time, Yarsinde abdicated, quoting ill health – while her own family's serfs and her own servants muttered her nerve had finally broken in the face of general lack of approval for her reign – and was succeeded by Helena Weisücher III, her daughter.

Helena III tried to restore the nation's agriculture by having dams built and canals dug, but none of her good works managed to save the Churnstones, whose main line died out due to their still unidentified malady.

With two of the four houses now ineligible to vote in the next queen, and the drought failing to let up, tensions started to rise between Lenkherr and Weisücher. Although the Lenkherr remained as sycophantic as ever, Helena III grew increasingly paranoid that the Lenkherr were getting ready to kill off her main



family line, leaving themselves as the only available rulers of Lilliend.

History records that Helena III paid half the royal treasury to foreign assassins, that they would carry out her chilling command: kill off the whole Lenkherr family, main line, cousin branches, consorts, man, woman, and child, *all*.

History also records the Night of Blood, when the assassins descended on Malkort during one of the many depraved Lenkherr celebrations. Although many of the Lenkherr died that night, the assassins ultimately failed; the family of whom it is still said '***Trust a Lenkherr to betray you***' was itself well-prepared against treachery, and the army of assassins was ultimately cut down by a combination of troops moving through the secret passages of the Lenkherr estate and a series of vicious traps.

While the halls of the opulent Lenkherr estate ran with blood, the moon above turned red and stormclouds gathered. According to the people who survived that night, it was 'obvious' that Thunder-Father had finally deigned to notice the actions of the little creatures who still infested the shards of his lover's body, and their actions had filled him with wrath.

A thunderstorm to end all storms erupted over Lilliend, shattering buildings, scattering humans and beasts alike, laying waste to all that was known. When finally the wind subsided and lightning-bolts no longer fell like raindrops, the devastation was beyond belief. Even proud Luzander was in ruins, and queen Helena Weisücher III and her immediate family had died, crushed by the collapsed roof of the royal palace.

With the Weisücher in disarray, their main family line extinct, house Lenkherr moved in to claim the throne. For the past five generations, all queens have been

members of the Lenkherr family, with the current queen Alexandra no exception.

Many of the Lenkherr queens have disgraced themselves and their office by indulging in their hedonistic appetites, becoming addicted to alcohol, narcotics, and the company of young men and women of dubious morals, but it must be admitted that they have gradually restored the nation and worked hard to restore the quality of its boarding schools. Troops once again patrol the edge of *Le Bas*, trade flows from city to city, the schools churn out educated young women, and there is a certain quality of life throughout the land. The common folk even believe that the gods have blessed the Lenkherr dynasty, as the rains once again fall and the *Wittwentraen* flows freely.

Of course, the troops guarding the borders and patrolling the cities are now predominantly Lenkherr troops, with the other noble houses keeping their women-at-arms confined to their estates. The taxes demanded annually from the commoners all flow into Lenkherr coffers. The officials who execute the queen's edicts are all lesser Lenkherr nobles.

There are no longer any Churnstones, nor Weisücher, nor even Lockstones from their families' main line to contest the Lenkherr the crown and throne, the surviving cousin branches are afraid to question Lenkherr edicts, and many voices throughout the domain mutter: "***Trust a Lenkherr to betray you.***" In spite of this, there has been no further rebellion, nor internal strife; Thunder-Father's wrath has shown what might happen the next time someone causes a bloodbath as Maximilian Lockstone and Helena Weisücher III did.

Here ends my summary of Lilliend's *recorded* history. You may note, my *Master*, that nowhere does the history mention when the Mists receded, revealing new lands beyond the borders. From the



author's footnotes, it seems clear the locals are unaware that the neighbouring lands have not always been as they are. Consequently, I have serious doubts that this 'history' is worth the vellum it was written on, but I have nevertheless dutifully recorded it. While ferreting out the truth of this land's history would be a worthy challenge of my skills and powers, I am sure you do not wish to spend the time I would need for such an undertaking, and other lands beckon.

Populace : Appearance

I vividly recall how you scoffed at my interest in the subject of comparative anthropology, my *Master*. Your main interest in people lies, after all, in finding ways to control, rather than understand, them. Be that as it may, I believe you would benefit from reading my notes carefully and giving my theories all due consideration.

After having spent a few months interacting with the humans of Lilliend, what struck me was how ethnically *diverse* they were. Just among the noble class, which (officially, at least) prefers to breed mostly with itself, I discovered four broad strains, which differed as much from one another as possible while remaining true to the human form. The commoners are even more diverse, displaying traits one might expect in the most cosmopolitan cities of the Core and any of the Clusters drifting through the Mists.

Attempting to make a record of the various ethnic strains of commoner in Lilliend is a fool's errand, and so I will move on to the more easily quantifiable nobility.

You may recall from my recounting of the domain's **Recorded History** that there are four great houses, which once passed around the throne and crown among themselves. Having delved a little deeper

into the subject, I can say with some confidence that each great house has traits unique to it, although two are closely related, and that the nobility of Lilliend today tries with quiet desperation to maintain these traits through judicious selection of husbands and wives. Lesser noble houses are especially frantic to do so, as though sporting the traits of greater houses grants a veneer of glory and legitimacy to houses likely founded by women who were born on the wrong side of the sheets.

The Weisücher family and its descendants distinguish themselves through pale skins with a tendency to freckle, red to brown hair which tends toward tangled curls, and pale eyes. The typical Weisücher is not blessed with height, but their build is solid and stable.

Lenkherr descendants display great beauty. I say this from an objectively aesthetic viewpoint, rather than one of subjective interpretation. Wavy hair which ranges from pale to dark blond, eyes either brilliantly blue or a surprising shade of gold, and fair skin which tans are all combined with a tendency to regular features and tall, lithe figures. I did not have the opportunity to perform a dissection and comparative tissue study, but I suspect some measure of Elven heritage in the bloodline. Maybe you will take the opportunity once you arrive, my *Master*?

Churnstones and Lockstones strongly resemble one another; they are neither exceptionally tall nor very short, their hair tends to be dark and straight, their skin tone and eyes are naturally dark. The main difference, as far as I can see, is in small details; Churnstone features tend to be slightly more regular, the eyes larger and more expressive than Lockstones'. In contrast, Lockstone features are stronger,



giving the impression they possess greater willpower.

I discovered fairly quickly that a subsection of the populace consisted of Half-Elves, who are more-or-less integrated into the human population. While they tend toward slighter builds than their human neighbours, they are more likely to display the colourations associated with the noble families who govern the area where they were born and raised. To me, this suggested that the noble families may once have been rather friendlier with the domain's Elven population than the creation myths would indicate.

For the most part, Half-Elves live as their human relatives and neighbours do. All Half-Elves I found were commoners, plying a craft or toiling as serfs on the land of local nobles. So long as they keep their heads down and do their job, they are left in peace. Any Half-Elf who makes trouble, however, is likely to meet their fate at the end of a rope. In fact, any Half-Elf found near the scene of a crime, *any* crime, is likely to be lynched on the spot. Some careful questioning brought no better explanation than simple racism; even today, the humans of Lilliend feel that the Elves are vile monsters bent on exterminating them, and any creature that carries their blood must 'naturally' be inclined to evil acts.

Finding pure-blooded Elves to study was a nuisance and a half, my *Master*. My Firstborn flew far and wide and I cast my scrying spells as often as I could, and yet they remained as elusive as the Ogier. I scanned the area surrounding the dead zones in hopes that the Elves might be making common cause with these axe-wielding Giants, but no such luck.

Only after I had plied a Half-Elf in Karnbrunnen with drink until he was nearly unconscious did I get a lead on the location

of an Elven village. Mindful of Elves' aloof nature and expecting a siege mentality due to the local humans' hatred of them, I kept my distance and spied on the village from afar, using magic and spyglass.

Lelender Elves appear much like their kin in Darkon and Sithicus in build and facial structure. They are perhaps better attuned to the forested areas where they hide from humanity, possessing surprisingly earthy skintones, which they painted to resemble the texture of bark and leaves, and braiding their hair with bits of moss and small plants, allowing them to fit in with their surroundings.

Fashion

Fashion is not a subject of great concern to the commoners and serfs of Lilliend. Men and women both wear tunics of rough-spun cloth, typically wool or hemp depending on the season, and leggings, boots, and bracers of thick, sturdy leather in all seasons. While Lilliend's summer heat might be more pleasant with lighter footwear and clothing, the prevalence of venomous snakes in wild areas – not to mention their tendency to slither into farmland in search of edible vermin – makes the discomfort of sweaty feet an easy price to pay.

Broad-rimmed hats with hemispherical tops, made of dark felt, are a common accessory in all seasons; during summer they keep off the sun, during autumn and winter they keep off the sleet and snow.

Commoner clothing is generally adorned with small markings representing the wearer's family, their home town, in some cases the guild they belong to, and the noble family they answer to. In contrast to the rest of their clothing, these little badges and sigils, typically affixed to the left shoulder, can be delightfully intricate and artful.



Among the nobility, clothing is more elaborate, and divided strongly between what is appropriate for men and women.

Wide-skirted, sweeping gowns with laced bodices were the fashion of choice for women during my stay in Lilliend. Primal colours dominate, and fine fabrics like brocaded silk and velvet are very popular, with the materials used shifting in accordance with the seasons.

I was mildly surprised to note that such dresses are largely free of embroidery; there appears to be a bias that anyone who stitches patterns onto their clothes is announcing to the world they are actually a commoner or serf. One exception which is tolerated in Lilliender noble society, though certainly not applauded, is the tendency to embroider the holy symbol of one's goddess of choice onto the left shoulder. Piety trumps society's bias, it seems – or at least the *show* of piety. A cynic might suggest that the tendency to only embroider holy symbols advertises the nobles' belief that they are second only to the gods...

The *hennin* was women's headwear of choice, and also an easy indicator of relative status; only women with demonstrable links to the four great houses of old are allowed to pin a veil to their *hennin*, typically in house colours. It is highly uncommon for the veil to be used to actually shroud its wearer's face.

For men from noble and/or wealthy families, sleeveless vests of velvet over silk shirts were the fashion. Rather than wear hose 'like a peasant', men of quality are expected to wear kilts over silk stockings. All in all, male clothing is more diverse in its colouring, their vests and kilts displaying tartan-like patterns which indicate family allegiance. In a sense, every well-dressed man is colour-coded so his allegiance and ancestry are immediately apparent – a custom that put me in mind of branding

cattle in this case. Male headwear is typically a more flamboyant version of the peasant's hat; wide-brimmed with a hemispherical top, but the brim is curled up on one side of the hat, and gemstone amulets and feathers are attached to the upcurled side of the brim.

Both men and women of means wear a kind of ridiculous shoe with a curly tip, typically crafted of velvet or some other material inappropriate to rough terrain or providing arch support. I was vividly reminded of the ballerina's shoes I saw during that disgusting incident when you sent me and your other servants to the Grand Opera to fetch that young dancer, who ... but I digress.

From what I saw of the Ogier and Elves, fashion is even less of an issue to them than it is to the human commoners.

Ogier tend to wear dresses and aprons for women, hose and sleeveless vests over shirts for the men. Both genders wear solid boots, and elders held in esteem wear wide robes. Regardless of the rest of their clothing, all wear hose underneath. All Ogier clothing is decorated with leaf patterns, not for camouflage purposes (though they could be used as such) but apparently out of love for the theme; during my magical espionage, I saw Ogier sporting leaf patterns which resembled no foliage I found during my study of the domain's flora, some of them quite fanciful and most likely imaginary.

Elves tend to a unisex dress code; hose and soft, knee-high boots with soles moulded to leave prints which resemble animal tracks; long-sleeved shirts and gloves; and sleeveless vests that trail into divided skirts which fall down to the knee. All these clothes are painted and embroidered to fade into the natural background, enhancing the wearer's ability to hide from hostile eyes.



Lelender Primer

| Base | Dialect III | Dialect IV |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Greetings! | Bondië / Getag | Seigrüss / Venaro |
| Goodbye | Gewohl / Arevoir | Gesegn / Wiedergabe |
| Yes | Ha | Sicert |
| No | Niëe / Oah | Ela |
| Help! | Asemoi! / Zuhil! | Seignede! |
| Love | Amret / Liëe | Mädegabe |
| Magic | Brighfäde | Ortillatrie |
| Men | Gaster/ Om | Rûck / Sevée |
| Women | Freigabe / Hohhabe | Höhgabe |

Language

My analysis of *Lelender*, the main language of the land, supported a theory I had started to develop during my analysis of Lilliend's ethnic diversity.

Lelender can be distinguished in 'Pure' and 'Vulgar'. Both are quite obviously *creole* languages, possessing a rather tortured grammar and an uncomfortably expansive vocabulary, which borrows from no less than *four* distinct parent languages and possesses numerous words to describe the very same thing.

Pure Lelender is not in common usage, even among the nobility; it is the language of important contracts, legal decrees, noble mottos, and religious ritual. Most, if not all, citizens of Lilliend can understand it, but only trained experts like professional scribes are expected to ever use it. The only thing I can say in its favour is that Pure Lelender somehow manages to combine its disparate elements into a more-or-less harmonious whole. It is not exactly easy to master, but it offers the aspiring student certain handholds by its highly rhythmic structure. Assembling a sentence in Pure Lelender is as much like writing a poem in accordance

with antiquated rules as it is communication.

In contrast, Vulgar Lelender is the everyday language of commoner and noble alike. Contrary to what one might expect, it is the more difficult form to learn, despite the fact that it shares much of Pure Lelender's vocabulary. What makes it especially troublesome, is the existence of six distinct dialects in Vulgar, where the Pure has only one.

Vulgar Lelender displays one dialect as spoken by children, amongst each other and to adults (I); one as spoken by adults to children of either gender (II); one as spoken by men or foreigners to men or foreigners (III); one as spoken by men or foreigners to women (IV); one as spoken by women to women (V); and one as spoken by women to men or foreigners (VI).

Note that it is *illegal* for a foreigner to speak any dialect other than III and IV. Therefore, I will only include these in the primer. Any attempt to break this law was punishable by horse-whipping when I was staying in Lilliend; a fate I barely managed to escape after making a *faux pas* in a little hamlet near Malkort.

Some differences between the dialects can be subtle and confusing, as they depend less on vocabulary than they do on pronunciation, tone, inflection and what I can only describe as linguistic flourishes. Some dialects show a strong resemblance to one another, while others almost seem to be completely different languages. Dialects II and VI are almost indistinguishable to the untrained ear in their tone and vocabulary, whereas dialects III and V observe distinct grammatical rules.

Dialect IV is never spoken at great volume and requires the speaker to use a high tone; dialect VI is spoken with exaggerated care and a slightly raised voice. Whispering in dialect IV is encouraged;

whispering in dialect VI is considered to be rude and cruel.

Dialects I and II are, as one might expect, the most simplistic of the six. III, IV and VI are more complex, and V is indisputably the most complex of all. While III and V are very different, they have a tendency to incorporate the same, highly specific, rhyme scheme and cadence in common.

Regional dialects also exist, muddying the linguistic waters even further, but to my slight relief I discovered that these generally boiled down to local preference for certain parts of the vocabulary over others. So long as one manages to master a goodly section of the vocabulary and remembers in which part of the *Letztafl* one is, there need be no trouble. Of course, using pieces of the vocabulary commonly associated with other areas tends to irritate people and can be a reason for poor service and general antagonism in the larger towns, and for public humiliation and beatings in the smaller settlements.

Lifestyle & Education

On the surface, Lilliend's daily life and social structure looks predictable.

No matter the airs the nobility gives itself, or the locals' insistence that theirs is a thriving and civilized nation, I found the land woefully backward even at the best of times. Lilliend's nobility is clearly the degenerate offspring of succeeding waves of military conquerors, who settled in what must have seemed to them a fat and wealthy land, enslaving such locals as they found to become their servants or else coming to arrangements with them.

Lilliender cities and large towns are trapped inside defensive walls, which stifle expansion and oblige the citizens to either keep piling new levels onto old ones, or else let shanty-towns spring up outside their

walls, with vague notions of one day building a new, larger wall to surround those as well as the inner 'city'. One can easily see that this style of 'strategic' thought was instrumental in all the supposedly 'great' cities of Lilliend, with the sole exception of Karnbrunnen; the cities are divided into inner and outer tiers by the remnants of circular walls, which have largely been cannibalized for building materials (with the exception of Schlotstein, which keeps all the walls intact), and once served as the outer wall of original, smaller settlements.

Although the nobles of Lilliend claim sophistication, they observe the same festivals as the commoners and serfs, gathering to dance and share meals to celebrate the harvest; to drink, sing and tell stories on the first eve of winter; to honour the gods of Lilliend with puppet shows and ritual on the first day of spring. The only real difference is in the amount of money squandered on entertainments, the quality of the food and drink provided, and the quality of the feelings displayed. In my personal estimation, visiting a commoner's festival was far more pleasant in spite of the relative meanness of the fare and simplicity of the entertainment offered.

Armed troops may be encountered anywhere, enforcing the law and ensuring everyone knows the queen is in charge (there was no distinction made between the army and a civilian peacekeeping force), but lumber about in heavy armour, carrying broadswords and axes. What ranged weaponry they possess is limited to the longbow, with firearms unknown and even crossbows considered to be expensive novelties, reserved only for officers and master markswomen. Were it not for the advantages offered to them by their terrain, and their admittedly ferocious loyalty to queen and country, I am convinced these



swaggering brutes would be hard-pressed to keep out even a small battalion of well-trained gunners. Just I by myself could probably have made stew of most of the patrols I saw plodding about their duty.

A fair assessment.

Lilliender society is stratified and, by and large, ossified, with attempts at advancement thwarted in all ways save one.

The queen may originally have been as close to an elected official as a backwards country like Lilliend could come, but her office is now an inherited one, and firmly in the grip of the Lenkherr family. Officially, the queen rules all Lilliend absolutely, and her word is law. In truth, her power is absolute only within the reach of her loyal soldiers and nobles, and she often needs to check up on the actions of her more intractable nobles to make sure they are following her orders.

The nobles rule their holdings as absolutely as they dare within the limits set by the queen's law and draw on the savings of their ancestors and the labour of their inferiors to support a lavish lifestyle. While the four great houses once stood at the top, all but one have crumbled, and numerous lesser houses have sprung up to clamour about their own virtue. The nobles give themselves airs based on their impressive pedigrees and bicker among each other, wasting money on appearance and other foolish expenses to show just how rich and noble they are. The only time I could determine that the current crop of nobility does anything close to being useful is when the queen calls upon them to serve her by performing various tasks.

Freeborn commoners toil from dusk till dawn to stay free, feed their families, and maybe advance their station a little.

Generally speaking, the nobility prevents the freeborn commoners from scraping together enough money to buy actual influence, even if they join into guilds, by levelling surprise taxes.

The army is composed equally of the more patriotic and martial daughters of the nobility and of freeborn commoners who feel armed service is their best chance of advancement. Lilliend's armed forces occupy a kind of social no man's land. While the more traditional nobles scoff at the notion that they should show respect for someone who was born the daughter of a greengrocer, they only scoff when that heavily-armoured and well-armed warrior is not within hearing distance. The army, at least, appears to be fanatically loyal to the office of the queen, and it is rewarded by receiving the finest equipment put out by the Schlotstein forges and the cream of the Weisücher's crop of horses. Patrols can be encountered anywhere in the country, either escorting nobles tasked to check up on local luminaries or providing the queen's people with protection against brigands, Elves, foreign invaders, and revolutionaries born of their own ranks.

The clergy of Lilliend's acknowledged gods is likewise composed of both nobles and commoners, but also offers positions to both men and women, depending on the god or goddess. Taking up holy orders is not seen as a solid career move by anyone, given that priests and priestesses are not allowed to marry, reproduce, or wield political or financial power themselves. Even priests who find themselves blessed with advisory or educational positions in the homes of the mighty are unlikely to ever wield any power save from the shadows. Any cleric who is caught at gathering influence is likely to be defrocked and executed on the spot, and the easiest way to rid oneself of a troublesome priest is to



accuse them of maneuvering to occupy a position of power. On the other hand, priests and priestesses are supposed to be inviolate to mundane law, so long as they do not violate them too openly. Many a young man has fled into the priesthood, rather than accept a marriage proposal they found intolerable, and was allowed to live in spite of the insult this presented to their prospective bride's family.

Serfs live their lives tied to the land of their masters, whole generations trapped in the same flyspeck village and toiling every day to keep the very same patch of dirt fertile and profitable. There is supposedly a possibility for an industrious serf to earn enough to buy their freedom, but the nobility collect the majority of the serfs' harvest in taxes and charge the earth for anything their subjects might need to do their job, from tools to medicine. Thus, they keep the people who nominally depend on them for protection impoverished and enslaved in all but name, and everything stays the same.

Or it would, if not for the nation's spectacular educational system.

For generations now, the crown of Lilliend has been striving to provide quality education to every woman, from the queen's daughters down to those of the meanest serf. Every settlement, even ones too small to have their own shrine to the gods, has a school, even if this is but a ramshackle hut with a dirt floor and a single blackboard.

While boys are required to work if serf-born or freeborn commoner, and noble boys are expected to acquaint themselves with the ways of armed combat, hunting, dance, polite conversation, and other methods of appealing to young ladies of quality, all female children up to their twelfth year are taught to read, write, and some simple maths. Any girl who consistently excels at

her lessons, outperforming her fellow students, can qualify for an official scholarship and full education at one of Lilliend's famous boarding schools, paid for by tax money.

Located outside the cities, well away from "boys and other distractions," these lucky girls receive as full an education as Lilliend can provide on the subjects of history, politics, advanced mathematics and language, as well as skills supposedly beneficial to married and professional life. (Frankly, I was not too impressed with the quality of this schooling, but allowing for the nation's obviously provincial and backwards character, it is admittedly thorough.) Upon graduation, these students are released with a fair-sized stipend, which can serve as seed money to start a business of their own, or else as a dowry to start married life off with. I was assured that many a moderately successful freeborn family was taking pains to hide the fact that their founding mother had been born in a serf's miserable hovel.

It should not surprise *you* to learn however, my *Master*, that I discovered there is a price to be paid for this grand opportunity for social and financial betterment. But more on this later.

As a result of this initiative, literacy is common in all layers of society, and Lilliend has a surprisingly robust literary industry. As the country lacks a printing press at this time, all books are written by hand, and consequently more expensive than they would be in the lands of the Core. If any particular book proves popular enough that there is a market for it, dozens and even hundreds of scribes may be employed to make copies.

I noticed during my stay in the city of Malkort that the most successful merchants to specialize in the sale of books lowered the production costs by employing illiterate



serfs, who they need not pay in person and who can be requisitioned from ranking nobles by the dozen. In the case that straining to copy texts under adverse working conditions, especially poor lighting, causes these workers to fall ill or even go blind, they can be turned out into the streets to become beggars or die, and the merchants only need to pay a token sum as apology to the serfs' owner.

I would like to say that the cost of human life is at least validated by an output of valuable books on scholarly subjects, but I must honestly say it is a complete and utter waste. The most popular kind of books for sale in Lilliend are so-called 'romantic novels', which are basically puerile fantasies about courtship and physical contortions. The main themes of these 'romances' has not even caught up to modern events; noble knights still court their ladies with flowers and pubescent poetry before riding off to battle in the name of the King, whereupon the lady fair finds solace in the arms of her closest friends whilst waiting for the return of her knight. Expect more puerile poetry and purple prose, followed by idealized portrayals of the physical act. At the end, there is either an amicable parting upon the knight's return, the defeat of some dastard seeking to spoil 'the sweet milk of beautiful friendship', or else a message of the knight's death in battle leading to intensified 'friendships'.

Frankly, I consider the whole of Lilliender literature to be a pitiful waste of trees, ink and human potential.

One more institution of social life in Lilliend on which I feel obligated to expand further is that of marriage, childbirth, and romance.

As you can probably imagine, my *Master*, the people of Lilliend are keen on maintaining their numbers. Although

no one would say it out loud, I got the distinct impression that Lilliend as a whole feels that it is surrounded by enemies.

The official written history fails to reflect the fact that Lilliend has suffered several attempts at invasion, mostly from Masogan to the south-east, but also by troops from Conquista to the immediate east and by forces from even further out than that. Get old, mutilated soldiers drunk enough, and you soon learn the people of Lilliend are *afraid* of their neighbours. You may recall my assessment that skilled wielders of firearms could make easy work of their troops? One doddering old grandam slurred out a gruesome story of black-uniformed troops who "wielded sticks that roared like thunder and spat small stones that killed" before her friends shut her up and hustled her away. The old dear assured me that this relatively small group of *Demonio*-men had only been stopped because the full border contingent rushed them at once, and the survivors still had to clamber over the corpses of their fallen sisters before they could cut down the invaders.

In spite of the frankly understandable fear Lilliend holds towards its more

Dread Possibility: The Bloodlines

Some of the nobles of Lilliend really are breeding humans to a specific purpose. Especially the Lenkherr and Weisücher families show an unfortunate enthusiasm for this practice.

While the Lenkherr are breeding for beauty and energy, hoping to make their serfs not only capable of working harder and of being aesthetic playthings besides, the Weisücher are breeding their serfs to be hardy and strong. Eventually, the Weisücher hope to offer their serfs up to replace their own daughters when the time comes to send children to the nation's boarding schools and appease Camille's infernal appetites while their precious children are spared.



advanced neighbours, the land is highly dependent on the outside world, for a reason also not reflected in the official written history:

Lilliend does not have enough men to keep it going.

Oh, boys are born of marital unions as well as illegitimate trysts, with a steady number of Half-Elves born even today 'because young women took a walk in the forest', but I discovered that they rarely if ever live to a ripe old age – unless they escape into the clergy, which means they are disqualified from marriage and siring offspring for life. Boys are born, grow up, and if they do not display any defects their brides are arranged for them before they are old enough to shave. Serfs are especially unfortunate in this, as they are in most things, because their owners basically *breed* them, arranging for an exchange of what amounts to breeding stock with their allies and assigning husbands and wives at their own whim. Some nobles, it is whispered, are running long-standing breeding programs, just as lesser men and women might do with horses, pigs and other cattle, hoping to produce the perfect serf.

Once married, a young man is expected to obey his wife, her mother and older sisters (if any are available in the household) absolutely, and to devote himself to the production of children. At no time is he given the idea that he is the master in his new home; neither he nor any sons he sires stand to inherit if his wife passes away; he is to consider himself wholly at the disposal of his wife, her female relatives, and any daughters he sires for as long as he lives. In spite of Lilliender literature's endless yammering about the beauty of romantic love, marriage is a utilitarian thing, aimed solely at the

production of offspring and the forging of alliances.

If a marriage produces a son, the boy is left to his father's care for all occasions which do not strictly require a mother. If the marriage produces a daughter, there is much rejoicing – and the husband/father soon dies.

I investigated the phenomenon most carefully once I became aware of it, my *Master*, I assure you. Once a married Lilliender woman gets pregnant, her husband tends to become progressively more nervous the further her pregnancy proceeds. His friends may visit him and take him out regularly to get drunk or otherwise soothe his nerves, but any relief he finds in the bottle usually evaporates by dawn. I observed grown men reduced to nervous wrecks while they watched their wives' swollen bellies, fear radiating from every pore like an unclean stench.

Married men hover close to the birthing-chamber once their wife's time comes, in some cases because neighbour-women gather for the happy event and ensure the man does not run. One fellow I observed snapped under the strain and tried to fight his way out; the neighbour-women clubbed him over the head and tied him to a chair in his own living-room! Another man took out a knife he had hidden up his sleeve and slit his own throat once he heard the cry of his newborn child, causing the neighbour-women some considerable distress.

If the father fails to make a successful exit, once the baby is born he is brought unto his wife's bed, and required to carry the child outside so his neighbours can see it.

If the newborn is a boy, then everyone – men and women both – cheers. The lucky father is shaken by the hand, treated to drinks and food, and generally dissolves into a great big puddle of happy relief. If the



child is a daughter, the festivities are even wilder and more widespread, but they ring hollow. The firm handshakes are solemn, as befit someone who is freshly bereaved, rather than a young father. Drink still flows, but the father gives every impression of trying to drink himself into oblivion. Women avoid the father as much as possible, and the men are his only company.

And on the morning of the very next day, priests come to the couple's home to gather up the father's dead body.

I tracked over a dozen pregnant couples during my stay in Lilliend, my *Master*, and it was the same for everyone regardless of social standing and wealth. If a man has sired a female child in Lilliend, he dies in the following night. The locals could – or would – offer no explanation for the phenomenon, and in fact refuse to acknowledge it in word or writing. No matter how drunk I got the old soldiers or how skillfully I tried to probe the natives' minds, no one would speak of it and their minds resisted thinking of it.

I regret having to report that I was unable to secure one of the bodies for dissection; they are almost immediately cremated after collection by the clergy, this in contradiction of the local custom to bury the dead as deep in Haurau's earth as is feasible, 'so they may return to the Mother'. Rather than be offended by the custom of burning those who had sired daughters, the men of Lilliend mutter it is 'the final freedom' to be removed from the grasp of the dead goddess.

As you can imagine, remarrying is a common practice in Lilliend so long as the woman is still of child-bearing age, and adultery and unmarried pregnancy are not so much frowned upon as they are carefully

Dread Possibility: Wanted Men

Adventurers – specifically *male* adventurers – who wander into the Wartorn Cluster and first arrive in Lilliend might find themselves surprisingly popular with the locals. Local noblewomen may offer them profitable marriage contracts; the tavern wenches may be more friendly than normal; Lilliend may *seem* like it's a fine place to put down roots and return to. However, if they accept any such contracts or other offers, Lilliend's smile soon turns to the scowl of authority. If an adventurer accepts a marriage contract, they will be expected to stay at home and serve their wife; going off to adventure, especially if that threatens to take them out of the country, will lead to increasingly aggressive efforts to make them stay. Worse, if an adventurer sires a child with a local woman and the news gets out, locals may try to force them to return to the side of their baby's mother.

And if the child is born and is a girl ... death will loom.

An adventurer is more capable than most of thwarting what stalks the men of Lilliend, but should they fend off one attack, the next will not be far behind. And the next. And the next. And the next.

ignored, just so long as the resulting baby is healthy.

But still all married men die as soon as a daughter is born in their home, and so Lilliend is in the unenviable position of having to look outside its borders for replacements. The queendom does send out merchants to sell fine Lenkherr wine – and to spread rumours that in Lilliend, a man of ambition and drive can find a bride to suit his tastes and a plot of land to call his own with no great difficulty.

Every year, fools and thieves come crawling up the final slope that separates the *Letztafl* from the rest of the world, keen to claim a beautiful woman and start a little farm or a store of their own. Those who



cooperate with the authorities are introduced to commoners or lesser nobles as befits their station, education and skills, and may indeed make a choice. Men who try to go around the government's back, having rape and brigandage in mind, are chased like rabid dogs, but captured alive. Upon capture, they are put in a lottery system and given to any woman willing to buy a lot, as little more than a slave.

And they, too, die as soon as their first daughter is born.

As I have mentioned, I was unable to identify the cause of this phenomenon, my *Master*, but I have my suspicions. More than likely, you will share them as soon as you have finished reading my report.

In contrast to marriage, which was, in all the cases I have managed to document, an entirely deliberate and even chilly affair, romance is considered to be an exquisite gift from the gods. As I have mentioned, local literature is infested with the notion of men making grand gestures and serenading women with (bad) song and (worse) poetry, giving her flowers to compare unfavourably to her beauty, and generally making an ass of himself trying to win her hand.

I observed young boys being given strict instructions to be 'gallant' to girls their own age, and I will admit I derived some wry amusement from their clumsy attempts to imitate the books. The girls were told to respond with proper manners, but to be judicious as to who they showed their favour to. Those who enjoy the darker forms of humour would probably enjoy watching little princesses lord it over gaggles of confused and uncomfortable boys while giggling together.

As soon as a boy is old enough to shave and is told about the realities of marriage, reproduction and (so I assume) their death after the birth of their first daughter, all romantic drive seems to be leached out of

them. Any sign of impoliteness towards their female counterparts is disapproved of and strictly punished, but no one with even a lick of sense to their name seems to expect them to behave like the courting knights of old anymore. Should any young women feel the desire to repeat the games of their youth, they are likely soon cured of it by the sullen lack of interest displayed by their former playmates.

Given the grim realities of what may await them if they reproduce, yet given the baleful influence of the biological imperative, one might expect boys to perhaps turn to one another for the sake of experimentation and release. I did not observe any such acts, but I did witness the results of what happens if any men are *caught* at 'wasteful' acts of love. To wit, any man caught at engaging in amorous activity with another man is publicly flogged for the first offense. A second results in being burned at the stake. Both the flogging and burning are overseen by the clergy of Athena, who make use of the opportunity to preach to the spectators that a man has one important duty in this world, and that any who shirk their duty lose their claim to life.

In contrast, girls turning to experimentation with one another, and even adult women who have 'close friends' (as such relationships are called in Lilliend) suffer no noticeable bias, so long as they do not let such affairs interfere with their duty to one day bear children. I did note that this theme exists in the foul romantic literature, barely hidden by strained metaphor.

Attitudes Toward Magic

Magic is not popular among the human population of Lilliend, to put it mildly.

Clerics may be sought out to cure disease, heal wounds, and perform all the other little miracles for which mortals



beseech the gods, but only as a last recourse after mundane medicine has failed. The locals claimed this is because the gods should not be bothered to do things mortals can do for themselves.

Given how the gods are portrayed as mighty, terrible and above all *fallible* in the nation's creation myth, it should surprise no one that the people of Lilliend tend to fear attracting the focused attention of their gods. I heard whispered fireside tales of people who had gone to the clergy of Artemis to have broken bones healed, only to walk away with antlers upon their heads, or how a traveler who prayed for health and strength at a stone circle of Brightwell was transformed into a creature, half-man and half-boar.

I suspect that Clerics retain their privilege of being inviolate to mortal law largely due to a mixture of fear for their power and awe of their willingness to take on the attendant risks of dealing directly with the gods for the sake of the rest of Lilliend's people.

If possible, arcane magic suffers even more distrust than clerical magic, given that it is referred to as 'the dreams of Brightwell', which should not exist in the natural world.

The land has no wizardly tradition, nor schools where magic is taught. Stories exist of mad hermits who pray to Brightwell in the depths of forest and mountain and learn how to cast spells, but these are morality tales which end badly for the spellcaster or the fools who seek them out for magical boons.

The fear of arcane magic's ability to pervert the natural order is so prevalent that I did not even encounter magically-skilled Bards during my stay in Lilliend, and I heard more than one harrowing tale of children who clearly displayed sorcerous potential being dragged out of

their homes to be driven into the wilderness or stoned to death in the village square.

As so often happens, fear breeds ignorance, and I found proof that there are at least some arcane spellcasters in Lilliend who survive because they are able to hide their existence. Such stone circles dedicated to Brightwell as I managed to locate and investigate were radiant with arcane auras, and more than one 'herbalist' shop offered curative tonics that their creators swore were extracts and blendings of natural herbs, but which I sensed were minor magic potions.

Religion

Although the gods of Lilliend are somewhat lacking in the departments of wisdom and dignity, with the possible exception of Artemis and Athena, and some of them are outright dangerous and threatening, their worship is very much alive. Small shrines are built in any town wealthy enough to support one, larger temples are points of pride for the great cities. In spite of the danger the gods

Human Pantheon

Artemis

Titles: Moon Maiden, Wildest Heart

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Portfolio: Hunting, disease, the moon, wilderness, women, women's pride

Symbol: A woman holding a longbow, ready to fire

Worshippers: Druids, hermits, hunters, midwives, Oracles, Rangers, women

Cleric alignments: CE, CG, CN

Domains: Animal, Chaos, Darkness, Healing, Plant

Subdomains: Decay, Fur, Growth, Moon, Night, Restoration

Favoured weapon: Longbow



represent, they are also seen as guardians. The very power which makes them perilous allows them to support the pillars of the world and let creation exist; mortal prayers are food to them, and the gods must remain strong, so that they may perform their assigned tasks.

While Lilliend's Clerics tend to focus on one god to the exclusion of all others, lay worshippers may wander into any shrine as their concern of preference demands. Athena and Artemis are considered to be the reigning queens of Lilliend's spiritual landscape, but they do not rule over all aspects of creation, and the other gods are part of the order they champion – with the sole exception of Brightwell, who comes from Outside, but must nevertheless be honoured for her power.

A description of the gods follows, divided in the human, Elf and Ogier pantheons.

Artemis

Artemis is Lilliend's goddess of women's pride, the patron of the bright and proud flame of self-respect that keeps women going where men fall by the wayside, whimpering about their woes. She is also the scourge that lands upon the back of any man or woman who fails to properly honour her or the other gods, or otherwise sins against the natural order. Both pestilence and healing are firmly within her domain, and so every sickness is seen as her

punishment for some misdeed, and every time someone survives a sickness they are said to have been forgiven by Artemis.

The Moon Maiden is especially popular in rural areas and among those who frequently travel in *L'Haut*. In the more settled areas, her faith and those who practice it receive a carefully measured amount of respect, but little encouragement; Lilliend's urban dwellers are more fond of Athena and her message of civil order, than they are of Artemis and her prideful boasts that a woman's spirit can overcome all opposition

– even the rule of law.

Artemis has few dealings with the rest of Lilliend's pantheon, and what little she has tends toward the negative. She actively and vocally despises Thunder-Father, Brightwell, and both of their get. Whenever possible (so claim her priestesses) she hunts Carolin and Coralin as though they were a pair of stags – or

men who had wandered into her hunting range. Only Athena receives Artemis' love and respect, and according to many folktales even more than that. While Athena's clergy deny such claims, the wild priestesses of Artemis claim that the two goddesses are lovers, finding a joy in each other's arms which no male deity could ever bring them.

Images of Artemis are rare, given that her faithful prefer to dedicate forest clearings and caves to her worship, rather

Dread Possibility: The Hunt of Acthaeon

Although the faithful of Artemis are not responsible for even half the number of disappearances in wild areas every year, they do have a tradition of taking at least one man at the end of every summer, and another at the end of every winter. This chosen one is taken into the deepest wilderness, stripped, has a headband with antlers nailed to his head, and is given the order to run back to civilization. Theoretically, if a chosen man ever makes it back to the safety of town limits, any town limits, the faithful would reward him with a sack of gold and heal all of his injuries. In practice, there has never been anyone who survived being hunted down by the collective priesthood of Artemis.

than temples of stone. What few images exist depict her as an eternally youthful woman with moon-pale skin, dark hair and eyes, and slender antlers. She is forever armed with her longbow, regardless of whether she wears her signature tunic and sandals or not.

The oldest and most famous painting of Artemis is located in the throne room at Luzander; it shows Artemis rising from a forest pool, one arrow nocked on her bow, while the rest jut from the corpses of a hundred men who had come upon her in her bath.

Artemis' clergy are often hunters themselves, proud and strong women who live in the wilderness even during the worst of Lilliend's winter – or else die there. All of Artemis' clergy pride themselves on being trained midwives and healers. While they are welcomed in any rural community, especially when there is a difficult birth taking place, they are usually kept at a careful arm's length; in spite of their reputation for treating even the most difficult ailment, there are persistent rumours that they become as good as they are by abducting lone travelers and wandering children to use as test cases for novice priestesses. In spite of this, they never lack for young women who are eager to join the faith and abandon home and hearth for rigorous training in the domain's wilderness.

Ashar

Hailed in Lilliend as the only goddess who is purely good, Ashar is quite popular with the commoners. Her dominant sect in Lilliend is the Chaotic Good one.

Especially, serfs are fond of the goddess who calls for mortals to be compassionate and kind, and who works tirelessly to burn evil out of the world. Among the nation's more well-educated and affluent, however,

Ashar

Titles: The Bright, Burning Girl, Daughter of her Own Brother, the Ferocious Dawn, the Good Lady, the Honourable, the Kind

Alignment: Neutral Good

Portfolio: Battle against evil, compassion, goodness, kindness

Symbol: The sun, rising out of the Mists

Worshippers: Bards, Cavaliers, doctors, Paladins, people who value kindness and compassion

Cleric alignments: CG, LG, NG

Domains: Charm, Destruction, Good, Protection, Sun

Subdomains: Catastrophe, Day, Defense, Light, Love, Purity, Rage

Favoured weapon: Longsword

she is not held in as much favour. Pedantic philosophers are fond of saying the existence of both *il Demonio* and Ashar is what leads to human suffering, as good cannot exist without evil, and they agitate each other to cause ever more violence. The nobility at large is not fond of Ashar because of her priesthood's call to abolish the serf system and for nobles to acknowledge their obligations as well as their privilege.

Ashar's relationship with the rest of Lilliend's pantheon is mostly negative; she opposes her father-brother *il Demonio* as her arch enemy, denounces Thunder-Father as a rapist and the one who shattered the barrier protecting Lilliend from the Mists, and opposes the society Athena and Artemis gave their mortal followers because of its inherent unfairness and exploitation. Her clergy claim the only goddess for whom Ashar holds true affection is her mother, Brightwell – and she ignores Ashar whenever she can.

Icons and paintings of Ashar show her as a young woman dressed in chainmail, a



Athena

Titles: The Exalted, the Golden

Alignment: Lawful Neutral

Portfolio: Civilization, crafts, warfare, women's supremacy

Symbol: A Gorgon's head on a shield

Worshippers: Politicians, Monks, craftsmen, women-at-arms

Cleric alignments: LE, LG, LN

Domains: Artifice, Earth, Knowledge, Law, War

Subdomains: Memory, Metal, Tactics, Thought, Toil

Favoured weapon: Longspear

breastplate, gauntlets, greaves, and a helmet. Her skin, short-cut hair, eyes, teeth, and armour are all the same burnished gold in colour. Ashar is always depicted grinning and holding aloft her silver longsword, but there is a hint of pain and pity in her eyes to indicate her depths of compassion – and possibly the depths of emotional pain she herself suffers, as she stands alone against the forces of evil and the hatred of her own family.

Just like Ashar herself, her all-woman clergy is most popular among the common people. They are healers and midwives, they conduct weddings and burials, pray for the safety of those who cannot defend themselves, and when necessary draw steel to augment their prayers. And just as their luminous patron herself, they are generally unwelcome in the courts of the wealthy and powerful. The Lockstones were once the exception to the rule, and Lilliend's only known cathedral to Ashar still stands in Schlotstein, but it has been locked and unused since the Lockstone Rebellion.

Priestesses of Ashar tend to preach not from holy books in fixed temples, but from the heart wherever they are needed. Worship sessions are more about listening

to the problems of the gathered faithful and trying to help them in accordance with Ashar's commandments to 'be kind, be compassionate, and be brave' than by giving rote instruction and demanding unthinking obedience. Any barn or open field can be a holy place, although the clergy will happily build small, stout buildings more like miniature fortresses than temples anywhere the people ask them to do so.

Athema

Hailed in Lilliend as the goddess who teaches women the skills they need to stand at the top of society and who designed the very idea of civilization, Athena is most popular in the cities and larger towns of the domain. It is a point of pride for any settled community to have a temple or shrine to the Exalted, and having such a place of worship is indeed a requirement for being acknowledged as a settlement of any significance. Additionally, she is seen as the patron goddess of the domain's boarding school system – and of its warriors. As the tactician of the gods, Athena is credited with being the divine inspiration behind the strategy used to waylay King Arthur Weisücher III and his officer corps.

According to her priestesses, Athena pursues polite but distant relationships with all other gods and goddesses of Lilliend. They preach that Athena sits exalted over all other gods and goddesses like a righteous queen, sending out missives to convey her commands in order to maintain the proper order of things. When the clergy of other faiths protest that Athena is in no way the superior of their own patrons, Athena's priestesses smile knowingly and say nothing.

Imagery of Athena is very common in the domain's cities; she is depicted as a young



woman with dark, intricately curled hair, dressed in archaic armour and wielding both a longspear and a great shield with the head of a Gorgon affixed to it. While her features are not excruciatingly beautiful, her expression is one of careless confidence and superiority.

Athena's all-female clergy boasts one of the most rigorous training programs of all priesthoods in Lilliend; her priestesses are all graduates of one of the nation's boarding schools, and must follow a post-graduate program offered only by the temples of Athena afterward. Those found worthy of calling themselves priestess often become advisors to political leaders, ranging from the mayors of prosperous towns to the queen herself. Those who are not found worthy, however, are rarely if ever seen again by their families. While the clergy insist that this is because those who fail the exams for the priesthood prefer to take vows in one of Athena's nunneries, there are always spiteful whispers that those who fail to please the goddess are sacrificed to her in secret, underground ceremonies.

Brightwell

Acknowledged in Lilliend as one of the oldest gods, Brightwell is considered the sister and opposite of Haurau, who once embodied the material world and natural law. As such, in the minds of the people of Lilliend she embodies the ethereal world of the Mists, the supernatural, and to a lesser extent the immaterial qualities of dreams, thought, knowledge and emotion.

Haurau chose to dwell within the limits set by Thunder-Father and bring forth life, but Brightwell elected to remain in the unformed void of the Mists and sleep away eternity. Her beautiful dreams crystallized in the form of magic, but her nightmares took

Brightwell

Titles: Aunt Thirteen, Dancing Vixen, Dreaming Vixen, Fire-Tresses, Fox Woman, Mother of All Evil, Mother of All Good, the Misty Well, Vixen Who Dreams, Vixen Who Speaks, Vixen Who Walks

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Portfolio: Dreams, magic, the Mists, the moon, night, nightmares

Symbol: A sleeping vixen with fur all the colours of the rainbow, curled up with her tail over her nose

Worshippers: Alchemists, Loremasters, painters, poets, scholars, Sorcerers, teachers, Vixens, Witches, Wizards

Cleric alignments: CE, CG, CN, N

Domains: Chaos, Darkness, Knowledge, Madness, Magic, Rune

Subdomains: Arcane, Insanity, Language, Loss, Memory, Moon, Night, Nightmare, Thought

Favoured weapon: Swordcane

on a hideous half-life and became the monsters which lurk in the darkness.

As long as Thunder-Father kept the barriers between the two sisters firm, Brightwell's dreams and nightmares could not touch the material world. Now that the blue orb of the heavens is cracked, however, Brightwell's dreams and nightmares leak into the world, subjecting mortals to the depredations of monsters, but also giving them the gift of magic to combat those horrors – if they have the will and the wit to do so.

Brightwell is not a popular goddess in Lilliend; magic is held in low esteem, her Clerics are few and far between, and all the terrors of the night are considered to be her creations. Her worshippers prefer not to advertise their allegiance, seeing as most people consider Brightwell a source of danger to and disruption of the natural order. She is not actively hated, however; it



Dread Possibility: The Dark Dreams of Brightwell

In Lilliend, one particular sect of Brightwell, consisting of mostly Chaotic Evil and Chaotic Neutral faithful, is just as eager to analyze dreams as the others are, but their purpose is different. Rather than hear and discuss the dreams of the faithful to see what they might tell them so as to better their lives, the Dark Dreamers are searching these messages from beyond the veil of sleep for pieces of a terrible puzzle.

The Dark Dreamers believe that, as *il Demonio* warned his father in Lilliend's creation myth, Brightwell will one day take her revenge on Thunder-Father for what he did to her and her sister – and her faithful have a part in the plan she has set in motion. Sect-founder Alzabeth Becker discovered a fragment of prophecy in her dreams over a century ago; she frenziedly studied necromancy and affected a ghoulish transformation so she might extend her existence long enough to gather more.

Under Alzabeth's guidance, the Dark Dreamers have assembled a frightening message which suggests Brightwell is massing a host of nightmares to storm the mortal world – nightmares profound enough to kill Thunder-Father and erase the world as it is known today. If her cultists perform the right actions – evil rituals, murders, acts of devastation – in the right places at the right time, the Mother of All Evil will shatter the blue orb of the heavens and unleash her army.

Some of the cultists are nihilists who believe the world is innately corrupt and life is a foul joke; they embrace the oblivion they expect is coming. Others believe that as they assemble a more complete picture of the prophecy and their instructions, they will be told of the new world Brightwell will create on the corpse of the old. In that world, they expect to be elevated to a place at their goddess' right hand.

Regardless, whether there is a genuine prophecy in effect or the Dark Dreamers are merely a band of deluded believers, the danger they pose is very real. They could commit atrocities at any time, anywhere in the Wartorn Cluster, for no reason anyone outside the sect would understand – or be able to anticipate.

is generally understood that the Dreaming Vixen does not wish to take an active or even an indirect hand in mortal life, preferring to stay in her dreams. The only reason the world suffers from her negative aspects at all is that Thunder-Father failed to ward out the Mists. Even the raging conflict between her children *il Demonio* and Ashar would not exist if Thunder-Father had not raped her in her sleep.

Distant as she is, Brightwell apparently does not have strong connections to the other gods of Lilliend.

Her clergy claim younger goddesses like Artemis, Athena and Carolin do not interest her, or that she may not even have noticed their existence yet.

It is said she holds Thunder-Father in disdain, both for the course of events during which he raped her and killed Haurau, and also for his failure to uphold his vow to keep the material and supernatural worlds separate.

Brightwell hates her children Ashar and *il Demonio* equally; one of them violated her, both hurt her when they were born, and their endless conflict disturbs her sleep. Her clergy claim her hatred manifests in the form of neglect; the Mother of All Evil and All Good simply ignores her children's existence and refuses them all aid and comfort even if they travel out into the Mists to visit her.



On the rare occasion that she is depicted at all, Brightwell is most often cast in the image of a young and curvaceous human woman with pale skin and wavy, shoulder-length hair all the colours of fire. Her only garment is the Mist, which billows around her like a veil, turning from opaque to transparent moment by moment. Her expression is neutral, even distant, and she is almost always shown with her green eyes closed, symbolizing her wish to sleep forever.

The goddess' second most common form is that of a vixen with fur all the colours of the rainbow.

Her third form is a hybrid of both; a woman with hair all the colour of the rainbow, with the tail, ears and legs of a great vixen. This latter form is the subject of fearful whispers and speculation, given that it is connected to an ancient prophecy that one day, Brightwell will depart the Mists to walk in Lilliend in this very shape. Given that most of the prophecy has been lost to time, it is uncertain what the goddess will actually *do* when she finally

manifests. Depending on the worshipper you ask, you may hear speculations ranging from mass-murder to the creation of a new blue orb of the sky.

Brightwell's clergy is unique in Lilliend in that it allows both men and women to join; theirs is one institution where faith in the goddess trumps gender roles. The priests emulate their goddess' disdain for the other gods by remaining aloof from their priesthoods, and hide their identities by adopting the smocks and leggings of commoners as their holy robes. They also hide their holy symbols under their clothing, except when engaging in worshipful ritual at the ancient stone circles dedicated to their patron. They maintain an oral tradition, rather than write the goddess' teachings in a holy book, the better to hide their allegiance. While the oral tradition is not freely shared with outsiders, it is known that Brightwell's teachings include whole chapters on the subject of various types of arcane magic, alchemy, and methods of acquiring and refining knowledge – not all of them supernatural.

All in all, Brightwell's worship is widespread, but thin on the ground. Her only temples are ancient stone circles set out in the wilderness, and people are more likely to tell children who suffer nightmares to pray to her, than they are to beseech her themselves for insight into arcane magic, bring them knowledge, or protect them from the Mists.

The Dancing Vixen's faithful believe in the importance of dreams as omens and warnings, and many of their secretive ceremonies resemble alienist sessions, with members of the congregation recounting their dreams and the priests attempting to interpret them to the benefit of the individual and the congregation at large. Every

II Demonio

Titles: The Cruel, Father of his Own Sister, the Insidious, the Laughing Fiend, the Sick, the Treacherous, the Wicked

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Portfolio: Evil, cruelty, madness, murder, pestilence, poison, rape, selfishness, treachery

Symbol: A black sun, rising from the Mists

Worshippers: Alchemists, Anti-Paladins, Aristocrats, Assassins, Fighters, mad scientists, Necromancers, Rogues

Cleric alignments: CE, LE, N, NE

Domains: Charm, Darkness, Death, Evil, Trickery

Subdomains: Deception, Loss, Lust, Murder, Night, Thievery, Undead

Favoured weapon: Dagger



congregation keeps a *Book of Dreams*, in which the priests pen down the creation myth of Lilliend and the dreams they find either impossible to interpret or highly significant, believing these to be messages sent to them by Brightwell for her own reasons. Faithful of Brightwell may copy their community's *Book of Dreams* for their personal use, be it completely or in part, and people moving to new locations often elect to do so; when they arrive at their new home, they may give their version of the *Book* over to local priests of Brightwell to add to their *Book*, or if no local community exists yet, use it as the cornerstone of a new circle of faithful.

Known as the architect of all that is known as evil in the world, *il Demonio* is the uncontested patron of monsters, murder and exploitation in Lilliend. He is also one of three acknowledged male deities worshipped there, and is considered to be an object lesson of what happens when men become too ambitious and abuse their power.

Il Demonio

Although no one in their right mind would trust *il Demonio*, his True Neutral sect nevertheless has a strong presence in the capital of Luzander, as well as several of the other great cities on the *Letztafl*. Only in Schlotstein is it completely forbidden for people to worship him or build temples in his name.

Portraying their god as the patron of pragmatism, the True Neutral sect preaches that *il Demonio* is a champion not of malicious, but of *necessary* evil. Patient Clerics will talk long hours about the many ways a person needs to compromise with their own morals and ethics to survive in this imperfect world, and argue that evil is a regrettable necessity.

Without *il Demonio* to manage evil and keep it in check, they say, the world would be a far worse place as unthinking malice raged out of control and mortals would be unable to restrain their basest urges. Certainly, their message that a certain amount of wickedness is acceptable and even natural, so long as it serves the greater good, has caught on with a large section of Lilliend's nobility. There are furtive whispers that *il Demonio* is the house patron of the Lenkherr family.

Il Demonio's clergy claims their god has nothing but love for his family, and that he considers all the deities of Lilliend to be family.

Certainly, they say, he adores his parents who gave him life, even though they do not understand his actions or his ethos. He even loves his sister-daughter Ashar, although she is misguided in seeing him only as an enemy to fight, when he is actually necessary for her existence and the existence of good itself. Like a loving father, he waits for the day she grows mature enough to understand.

Regardless of *il Demonio's* feelings towards the rest of Lilliend's pantheon, his clergy are certainly very sociable. They are always eager to enter into long debates with the followers of other gods and goddesses, making a big show of being understanding and respectful and *oh*, so *eager to help* the person or persons they are talking to understand the necessity of *il Demonio* for society, nay, the *universe* to run properly and for people to live the way they want.

When not engaging in philosophical debate with nobles and priests of other gods, the followers of *il Demonio* happily – and secretly – brew and sell poisons, run small cabals of assassins, and commit any number of atrocities great and small. They are especially fond of masquerading as the



priests of other gods, particularly those of Ashar, and giving people advice calculated to do the greatest possible amount of harm. Ruining courtships, friendships, and marriages are some of their favourite things to do to pass the time.

In Lilliend, *il Demonio* is depicted as an androgynous being, the exact details of its figure hidden by a baggy, black robe that resembles a cloistered monk's. His pale face borders on the angelic, and his features closely resemble those of his parents' icons, but his eyes are pure black; sclera, irises, and pupils, all. The face of *il Demonio* is depicted as smiling to the point of simpering, his eyes wide and feigning innocence. There exist some images which are denounced by the clergy, showing the Laughing Fiend with a draconic tail, which drags out from under the hem of his robe.

Il Demonio's clergy is all-female, as the priesthood of the land's ruling goddesses is. This causes some confusion and grumbling to this day, as people object to a male deity emulating the goddesses seen as Lilliend's rightful rulers, but the diplomacy and charm

taught to his Clerics tend to silence most objections.

The deity's temples tend to be small, unassuming buildings, insignificant compared to the rest of the architecture surrounding them. It is rare for a temple of *il Demonio* to appear in anything less than a large town, but his priestesses make a point of travelling out to every thorp in Lilliend over a course of seven years – usually in disguise, the better to cause trouble and pain.

Worship services to *il Demonio* center around readings of select passages from his holy book, the *Fourfold*. Surprisingly to some, this mammoth book of lessons and advice contains many passages 'borrowed' from the oral tradition of Brightwell. There are many admonitions in the *Fourfold* on the subject of honouring one's mother, which strikes some who read them as amusing, given the subject of Lilliend's creation mythology – and others as disquieting and deeply sinister. It is not unknown for prospective converts to change their minds once they realize how deep the Laughing Fiend's obsession for the Dreaming Vixen seems to run...

Thunder-Father

Titles: Bringer of Gentle Rains, Father of Storms, Father of the Winds, Father of the World, the Gaoler, Killer of the World

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Portfolio: Fertility, men, protection, weather

Symbol: An old man in archaic, bronze armour with a long beard, holding a handful of lightning-bolts, standing in a blue sphere

Worshippers: Barbarians, Druids, farmers, Fighters, men, Rangers

Cleric alignments: CE, CG, CN

Domains: Air, Chaos, Charm, Destruction, Protection, Weather

Subdomains: Catastrophe, Cloud, Defense, Love, Lust, Seasons, Storms, Wards, Wind

Favoured weapon: Shortspear

Thunder-Father

Thunder-Father is one of the oldest gods of Lilliend, and there still exists a great amount of evidence that he was once king of the pantheon and the most respected of gods. Old titles no longer spoken, but still recorded on his temple walls, call him Guardian of the World and Father of Life, alluding to his essential role in fertilizing Haurau and keeping the natural and supernatural worlds separate.

As the creation myth relates, Thunder-Father failed in his duties because he carelessly killed mortal life as he sated his lusts, and because those



same lusts lead him to break the very barriers he was sworn to uphold. Today, his priests are some of the most accommodating of all the religious orders, as if they might undo the harm to their patron's reputation by rushing to attend even the most insignificant of problems and to help anyone who comes to them for aid. To their credit, the priests of the Father of Storms have at least never denied their god's failings.

Cathedrals to Thunder-Father once stood in each of the great cities on the *Letztafl*, and statues of the god stand at the head of many acres so that he may bring fertility to the crops. Alas, there is also much evidence of his fall from grace; the cathedral in Luzander, arguably the greatest of them all, was closed during the reign of Helena III and partially demolished to provide building materials for the city's expansion. The cathedral in Karnbrunnen collapsed during the same landslide that destroyed the ancestral Churnstone hall. The cathedral in Schlotstein holds services only irregularly and receives poor attendance. Only in Malkort is the temple in anything resembling regular use.

Thunder-Father's priests say their patron still loves the other gods, but his grief over the consequences of his actions and the betrayal he suffered holds him apart from them. Even after all the centuries that have passed, his greatest love still belongs to his dead mate Haurau – and so he adores each of the younger goddesses who fissioned off from her.

It is said that Thunder-Father still lusts for fiery Brightwell, but belated guilt over the way he mistreated her and fear of her power and wrath stop him from seeking her out, so that they might both move on from Haurau's death. His priests are taught to avoid the followers of Brightwell when possible, but also to give them every

possible hospitality and aid they might ask for. Some priests speculate this may be their god's clumsy attempt to win Brightwell's favour.

It is also said Thunder-Father adores his son and granddaughter, seeing in them the energy of his own youth, but he is appalled by the way they fight, and still saddened that his own son lied to him and caused the death of his one true love. Should *il Demonio* or Ashar ever seek him out as penitent and obedient children, he would welcome them; until they do, he will not stretch out his hand. Consequently, the priests of Thunder-Father tend to keep clergy of *il Demonio* and Ashar at arm's length, forbidding them access to their temples and shrines.

Artemis, Athena, and Carolin confuse Thunder-Father; he is uncertain whether to consider them his daughters to watch over, or aspects of his lover to woo, even after Carolin used him to sire her mate/son. Consequently, priests of Thunder-Father are instructed to leave their clergy well enough alone and not attempt to disrupt their control.

In Lilliend, Thunder-Father is portrayed as a tall, muscular man with a square-cut beard and short, curly hair. He wears only greaves, gauntlets, a breastplate and a helmet of an antiquated design, all forged from bronze and heavily decorated with primitive patterns. He wields a shortspear shaped like a lightning-bolt.

His priests claim it is sacrilege for any part of Thunder-Father's face to be shown, other than the strong chin, sensuous mouth and beard left bare by his helmet. His critics whisper that the once-mighty god is ashamed to show how haggard his face has become with grief and guilt, and how his tears have worn permanent tracks in his face. Certainly, his hair and beard are shot



through with grey and white, in spite of his immortality.

Thunder-Father's dominant sect in Lilliend is a mixed bag of Chaotic Good and Chaotic Neutral. In sharp contrast to all the other gods of the land, his clergy is all-male; it is forbidden by law for any woman to worship Thunder-Father outside his temples and shrines, and also forbidden for any woman to take up holy orders in his name. Most people scoff at the priests of the fallen god, and many claim that the orders of the Father of the Winds are now little more than a hiding-place for selfish boys desperate to avoid marriage and their duty to their families.



Dread Possibility: The Daughters of Doom

Maintaining rigorous secrecy and hiding their existence even from other followers of Thunder-Father, this highly illegal, all-woman cult operates out of the catacombs beneath their patron's ruined cathedral in Karnbrunnen.

Composed mostly of disillusioned commoners and serfs, but counting several nihilistic noblewomen among its number as well, the Chaotic Evil cultists believe that the destruction of Haurau and the shattering of the land were not accidental, but deliberate, and only the first step in a process necessary to purify creation.

The Daughters of Doom believe that Thunder-Father did not abandon Haurau and go in search of Brightwell because he was foolish and lustful, but because he saw that the goddess of the earth had become corrupt with age, and the life she brought forth was flawed from the start. In the mythology of the Daughters, *il Demonio* and Ashar are either lies, or else fragments of Haurau that exist only to bedevil her mortal children – just like Artemis, Athena, and Carolin. According to their myths, Brightwell is the one true love of Thunder-Father, and is poised to give birth to a new world free of exploitation, cruelty and flaw, but first Haurau's remains need to be swept out of the way.

Thunder-Father started the work by striking down his diseased mate, but her power was yet too great for her to die, as she could draw on the lives of all her children, and she shattered into many goddesses who continue to champion corruption and cruelty. Only by eliminating the current, flawed life infesting the world can Haurau be weakened enough that Thunder-Father can strike the final blow and end this foul world once and for all. Once that is done, he will lay down Brightwell in the place where Haurau once was and lie with her husband to wife. Brightwell will give birth to a new world and new life, which will be free of flaw in all things. The souls of the Daughters of Doom will reincarnate, perfect beings in a perfect world, but all others shall be cast into the Mists, lost forever.

Of course, the Daughters must assist Thunder-Father and Brightwell in their blessed work of ending the current world if they wish to be worthy. Daughters deliberately foster and assist creatures of the night, seeing them as Brightwell's tools for ending corrupt life; they murder travelers on the road; they call on their god's dark power to help them bring sickness and poison to the unsuspecting; at all times, they are looking for ways to foment mass death.

The only reason Lilliend has not suffered more from the Daughters' depredations is that their numbers are small, and they roam far and wide; as the Mists receded and other domains appeared, the Daughters of Doom considered it their sacred duty to spread the gospel and bring death in the lands beyond Lilliend's borders. Years can pass between gatherings of the faithful, where they chant prayers to Thunder-Father, bring live sacrifice of sentient beings and animals alike, and boast of their successes to their sisters.

While once the priests of Thunder-Father were advisors to kings and family heads, today they are most active among the commoners, offering blessings for the sowing of new crops, healing to workers, farmers and cattle, praying for gentle rains to nurture the land, when necessary casting

spells in attempts to soothe the fiercest storms, and when needed drawing their shortspears to defend those who flee to them in search of sanctuary.

The amount of respect Thunder-Father and his servants receive is minimal. Among nobles, it is understood that the only reason



the god has not been completely driven from the land is that he is still mighty and might retaliate, not to mention because he is part of tradition and worth preserving for that, if for no other reason.

Elven Pantheon

Carolin

While the human population of Lilliend believes Carolin is one of the goddesses born from the death of Haurau, the Elves deny this claim. In their mythology, Carolin was born from the Mists at the same time as Haurau, Brightwell and Thunder-Father, and is an equal to them – or so they insist on the rare occasion that they are willing to discuss their mother goddess with outsiders.

The truth is, the Elves feel deeply conflicted about their wild and mercurial goddess, who teaches the Elves that in order to survive, they should make all matters secondary to survival. Matters such as honour, mercy... hope. While no Lilliender Elf will deny that Carolin has their best interests at heart, the sheer ruthlessness of the goddess goes against all they have managed to preserve of an ancient tradition of nobility. And yet they dare not deny Carolin her due, for to do such would invite her wrath and might deprive the Elves of her concealing shadows.

According to her mythology both among humans and Elves, Carolin cares little for the other gods, preferring to ignore them when at all possible – with the sole exception of her son and lover, Coralin. While the Elves claim she once had a different mate who was murdered by Thunder-Father, obliging her to take their son for her new mate, and the humans insist that she deliberately conceived Coralin for that purpose, all agree their relationship has its disturbing aspects. Carolin herself

does not seem to care about this, and her clergy have standing orders to work together with those of Coralin as closely as possible.

What imagery of Carolin exists, depicts her as an Elfwoman of indeterminate age. She is limber and slender, yet grey of hair and eye. She is dressed in patches of moss and hunks of fur, as well as copious amounts of mud and woad. Her expression is one of vicious, even deranged joy, giving her a predatory aspect only reinforced by her tendency to wear the claws and teeth of her prey as jewelry. The only things about her that conforms to the Elves' love of finely-made and civilized equipment are her longbow and quiver full of arrows.

Carolin's clergy are a mixed lot in the grip of paradox: Elves who embrace the essential wildness of their goddess and accept her twisted character for the sake of protecting their people and giving them some peace of mind. Few of the Unfettered's clergy serve her with a glad heart, but those who swear to her *do* serve, and serve loyally.

The faithful of Carolin raise no shrines to her, preferring to consecrate forest clearings, and there are no set holy days or rituals. Chaos is Carolin's very essence, after all, and her followers hold ceremonies to please her whenever their hearts tell them it is time to do so. The rites of Carolin are wild, involving much dancing, the roasting of freshly-killed prey for the sake of the gathered faithful, and the consumption of a great deal of wine. If any Wizards are among the Elves gathered for these impromptu ceremonies, they are expected to cast spells for the entertainment of the others. Only one rule is set in stone; any creature not a full-blooded Elf who witnesses the rites of the Unfettered must be slain on the spot, and roasted and eaten as would any other animal...



Coralin

Regardless whether you ask Elves or humans, all agree that Coralin is the son of fey and wild— and her lover. Although humans tell many lewd stories of the Shining Elf freely indulging in this relationship, the Elves tell a different story; to them, Coralin is the long-suffering prince who must endure the whims of a powerful and capricious queen so that he may serve his people. To them, he is the deity most concerned with preserving their tradition and legacy in a land where all hands are turned against them, no matter the cost to his own dignity and peace of mind.

The Elves believe that Coralin shuns the company of all other gods and goddesses, but there is a secret story that he makes an exception for dreaming Brightwell. As the oldest surviving goddess, so whisper his priests among each other when they are absolutely certain that no clergy of Carolin is close enough to hear, she is the rightful queen of Lilliend's pantheon and a fitting bride for the Elven Prince. Brightwell's hand in marriage would be Coralin's key to a true kingship which would free him from Carolin's mad whims. Alas, Brightwell remains as distant as the moon stays from the sun, and so Coralin must continue to pursue her while taking care to hide his interest from his mad mother.

Artwork of Coralin is everywhere in the Elves' settlements; his statues stand at the

head of every acre, they grace the libraries, they watch over storerooms and schools, they stand watch over homes and small versions are worn as jewelry by young children and newlyweds. The Elves depict their Shining Prince as a handsome young Half-Elf, dressed in a white tabard under golden armour, his golden longsword always at his side. His face is as beautiful as could be and his hair is long and golden, but his grey eyes convey a mixture of ancient sorrow and dutiful determination.

Coralin's clergy are welcome in any Elven settlement, and even in some of the human villages that lie closest to Elven lands,

where Half-Elves are more numerous. They are healers and diplomats, teachers and confidantes, and their rituals are open and friendly affairs aimed as much at bracing up the morale of their community as the glorification of their god. While their

first duty is to the Elven people and the preservation of their culture, they also tend Half-Elves and can even be found helpful to humans who refrain from pursuing the Elves – during times of peace.

In times of war, the clergy of Coralin reluctantly sharpen their longsword, and woe upon any creature not a pureblooded Elf who gets in their way.

Ogier Pantheon

The Shadow and the Light

Unknown to both humans and Elves, the Ogier of Lilliend have their own spiritual

Carolin

Titles: The Unfettered

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Portfolio: The Elven people, the wilderness

Symbol: A trefoil leaf

Worshippers: Elves, Anti-Paladins, Assassins, Druids, Rogues, Wizards

Cleric alignments: CE, CG, CN

Domains: Chaos, Charm, Darkness, Magic, Plant

Subdomains: Arcane, Decay, Growth, Lust, Night

Favoured weapon: Longbow

The Shadow and the Light

Titles: The Shifting Balance, the Wavering Balance

Alignment: Neutral

Portfolio: Creation, destruction, balance, elements, magic

Symbol: A double spiral, half black, half bluish-white

Worshippers: Ogier, Kineticists, philosophers

Cleric alignments: CN, LN, N, NE, NG

Domains: Air, Artifice, Chaos, Darkness, Destruction, Earth, Evil, Fire, Good, Law, Magic, Plant, Sun, Water

Subdomains: Arcane, Catastrophe, Cloud, Construct, Day, Decay, Divine, Growth, Ice, Light, Loss, Metal, Night, Smoke, Wind

Favoured weapon: Katana / Nodachi

tradition. Their belief, however, is not in any deity, but in a dynamic opposition of cosmic forces. The Shadow and the Light represent the forces of creation and destruction, good and evil, forever at war yet also forever dependent on the other for existence. To the Ogier, these twin and entwined forces are what has given rise to creation by virtue of their eternal conflict – and in time, they will be responsible for the destruction of everything as well.

The Shadow and the Light require no worship, and Ogier have no spellcasting traditions that would allow them to draw divine spells from them, but they hold them in the highest respect, above any god or goddess worshipped in Lilliend. Any human, Half-Elf or Elf introduced to the faith and willing to commit themselves to it could, however, become a Cleric of the Shadow and the Light as normal.

The Dark Ones

Ancient deities believed dead or seen as elder demons by the people of Lilliend, the Dark Ones were the spiritual guardians and

scourges of peoples now lost in the Mists of time. Only the oldest branches of the Weisücher family currently retain knowledge of the rituals and mythologies associated with these primal and perilous patrons.

Harbrye

According to the myths still preserved by the Weisücher family, Harbrye is the original mother goddess of Lilliend. During spring and summer, she was the earth, her fertile womb yielding up all animals, all plants, all people and all magic. Her bounty did not come for free, however; blood sacrifice was needed to win her favour, and all the sacrifices mortals could bring her were not enough to maintain her favour forever. As autumn came, Harbrye's malice grew in her breast and her womb closed; when the land was in the grip of winter, Harbrye was the moon, and her cold eye was upon the land and all life that struggled upon it, hungry for its death.

Only through the annual sacrifice of her consort-son, Kurhan, was Harbrye's disposition sweetened again, allowing for the return of spring.

What imagery of Harbrye exists, shows her in one of two guises.

In spring and summer, Harbrye is portrayed as an obese giantess dressed in a crude loincloth, her skin and hair dark as night, her breasts and belly swollen with continuous pregnancies. Deosil spirals of blood are painted on her skin, symbolizing mortals' devotion to her, and she has a little smile on her face, indicating her favour.

In autumn and winter, Harbrye is portrayed as a Fey creature, easily as tall as her other guise, but far more dignified. This form is slender and pale as ice, except for her black and merciless eyes. Widdershins spirals of black tar are painted on her skin,



indicating the reversal of life and the threat of annihilation unless she is appeased – and quickly. While Harbrye is more beautiful in autumn and winter, she radiates a cold malice.

In ancient days, the ranks of Harbrye's priesthood were filled by village wise women and wise men. They were the healers, the teachers, the midwives, the crafters of items, the soothsayers and also the ones who performed the blood sacrifices to keep their greedy goddess 'sweet'. They raised no temples to her, but did desecrate altars to her name, whereupon they brought live animals and even humans to be torn open, bled to death and finally burned.

In the current age, only Weisücher women have the distinction of serving the Hungry Mother; while the goddess herself would not object to having men serve her as priests, the Weisücher matrons make sure to deny their male relatives access to the ancestral deity whose power remains constant throughout the year. Priestesses of Harbrye identify themselves through their unholy symbols and, especially when such symbols must be kept hidden, by wearing red gloves to symbolize their having brought the blood sacrifice to Harbrye.

Kurhan

To the ancient people of Lilliend, Kurhan was the god of the sun and the

Harbrye

Titles: The Hungry Mother, the Mother Dark

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Portfolio: Creation, destruction, fertility, the earth, magic, the moon

Symbol: A red spiral, turning widdershins

Worshippers: Spellcasters, farmers, midwives, rulers, smiths

Cleric alignments: CE, CN, NE

Domains: Animal, Chaos, Darkness, Earth, Evil, Fire, Magic, Plant

Subdomains: Arcane, Ashes, Caves, Decay, Divine, Feather, Fur, Growth, Metal, Moon, Night, Smoke

Favoured weapon: Dagger

seasons, who helped them grow food and also watched over them in battle with their neighbours. As the year waned, so did his strength; he was young and vital in spring, mighty and virile in summer, but as autumn arrived his life and power left him, and the land grew cold and deathly. When

winter was at its worst, Kurhan would go onto his mother and lover Harbrye to lie down with her one last time, ending their coupling by tearing out his own throat and bathing her in his own blood.

As Harbrye's womb quickened with Kurhan's seed, life returned to the land, and when the first day of spring arrived, Kurhan was born anew to lead and nurture the people.

Kurhan was and is portrayed by his faithful as a giant being, strong and straight

Kurhan

Titles: The Hunter Dark, the Many-Horned, the Reborn

Alignment: Lawful Evil

Portfolio: Creation, destruction, fertility, the earth, the hunt, kings, seasons

Symbol: A black stag's head with impressive antlers

Worshippers: Chieftains, hunters, warriors

Cleric alignments: LE, LN, NE

Domains: Animal, Charm, Evil, Law, Strength, Sun, War, Weather

Subdomains: Blood, Day, Feather, Ferocity, Fur, Light, Lust, Resolve, Seasons, Storms, Tactics

Favoured weapon: Shortspear



Dread Possibility: Revival

The Weisücher have maintained their dreadful spiritual traditions in spite of centuries of religious and military oppression at the hands of first the Elves, and thereafter their fellow human beings. Not all members of the family have been initiated in the faith, but enough have to keep it going – and growing. Although they used to select people they were reasonably certain will not be missed for live sacrifice, the Weisücher have been growing bolder since the Lenkherr took the throne. Maybe it is a symptom of resentment, maybe it is a sign that they feel they have little left to lose, but the Weisücher have begun abducting Lenkherr soldiers patrolling the countryside, and even minor nobles. In addition, they have started proselytizing; Clerics of the Dark Ones now offer prospective sacrifices the chance to swear binding oaths to their dreadful gods instead of dying on the altar. Those who agree are initiated on the spot, and required to bring a live sacrifice themselves, after which they are allowed to return home. Few dare speak to their neighbours of what they have been forced to do, and those who do are soon whisked back to the underground shrine to be killed – often at the hands of whoever they dared whisper the course of their adventures to. Those who keep their mouths shut are still not out of the woods. Inevitably a night will come when someone knocks on their door in the dead of night and orders them to take action on behalf of the faith. And though they might wish to forget afterward, another night will come, and another knock. And another. And another...

of limbs and back, with the head of a proud stag. During spring and summer, he would wear a cloak made of the furs of all the creatures he slew with his trusty shortspear to serve as the blood sacrifices of Harbrye, and he bore a golden crown upon his antlers. When autumn and winter ruled the land, Kurhan lost his youthful glamour and his crown, and he needed his spear to serve

him as a cane, but he retained an iron resolve and a terrible dignity.

In ancient days, the priests of Kurhan were the chieftains of primitive villages and the war-leaders of tribes moving out to raid, pillage and burn, but they were also the wise old farmers who taught younger men how to coax the best yield from the earth, and they were experienced hunters who passed on the tricks of their trade. In the current age, the men of the Weisücher family secretly honour Kurhan as a mighty fertility god, and pray to him to lead them in a holy war which will end with the hateful goddesses of the 'new people' dead or enslaved to his will.

Traditionally, the priests of Kurhan made live sacrifices of prisoners of war to their god, who they worshipped in the open air. Currently, the Weisücher tend to worship him in catacombs and cellars, where they bring travelers they have abducted from the roads to die in agony as they are disemboweled alive.

The Realm

Government

Power in Lilliend flows down from the top; a rigid pyramid structure that refuses change in the name of tradition and holds tradition to be more holy than divine writ or common sense.

While the current Queen divides her time between efforts to maintain the quality of the education system, attempts to improve the quality of life in her realm, and some fumbling stabs at diplomacy, the nobles who must enforce her will generally see little value in innovation on a national or international scale. Unless they feel absolutely compelled to make the Queen's plans a reality – say, because a platoon of loyal soldiers has 'coincidentally' decided to



The Lilliender Hero

This section presents information potentially useful in creating PCs native to Lilliend.

Races: Humans, Half-Elves, Elves, and Ogier are the dominant races of the land, with humans outnumbering all others by a significant margin, with the Elves suffering a siege mentality and the Ogier being in hiding from all others. Still, a rare rebellious Ogier youth could strike out for freedom and adventure, rather than lurk in hiding and shame, and an Elf might decide enough is enough and flee for greener pastures.

Classes: Antipaladin, Cavalier, Cleric, Fighter, Hunter, Monk (typically Nuns of Athena), Oracle, Paladin, Ranger, Rogue, Witch. Sorcerers are born on occasion, but are quickly murdered by their communities unless they learn to hide their gifts from an early age.

Recommended skills: Bluff, Climb, Craft, Diplomacy, Knowledge (history, nobility), Perform (dance, sing, wind instruments, wood instruments), Profession, Sense motive, Survival, Swim.

Recommended feats: Acrobatic steps, Acrobatics, Athletic, Combat reflexes, Dodge, Mounted combat, Nimble moves, Skill focus, Stand still, Weapon focus, Weapon specialization.

Lilliender male names (Human):

Alexander, Anfried, Anselfried, Anselmus, Bertrand, Maximilian, Tomas

Lilliender female names (Human):

Alexandra, Belfleur, Bonfleur, Camille, Mellime, Nimorte, Theadora

camp quite close to their estate – the nobles have gotten quite good at sabotaging initiatives for improvement without leaving any clear evidence of their involvement. To be blunt, there are not enough soldiers in Lilliend to enforce any of the Queen's visions for a better, brighter future, unless they were to start executing the nobility *en masse*, and that would probably lead to a new rebellion.

Economy

Lilliend has never been a contender on the international market, not even in its early history.

The land provides sufficient food and raw materials to sustain the local populace, with enough to spare so reserves may be maintained for lean years, but nothing it produces is exactly exotic – unless one counts the toxic mosses and berries of *L'Haut*. Even such items as are produced by the artists and craftsmen of the domain, many if not all of whom were educated in the latest techniques at the domain's boarding schools, are considered to hardly be noteworthy or even novel across the borders.

Trade is further hampered by the difficulty in moving large quantities of anything out of Lilliend and down the final slope to the rest of the Cluster. Only Lenkherr wines and spirits are considered special enough by epicureans outside the country to justify the huge expense required to safely move the stuff across the border.

All in all, trade with the outside world ends up as a survivable tie; there is negligible export, but also little need for vigorous import. Equines of various types are the most popular ware to be acquired abroad. For the most part Lilliend can tend to its own needs – apart from its need for an influx of men to keep up the population's numbers, which is satisfied by different means.

The local coin is hopelessly crude, its value measured by (recognized) metal and weight. The golden *Royal*, the silver *Dux*, and the copper *Frei* bear one stamp, that of the royal mint, and have no kind of edging to prevent the crimes of clipping, sweating, or other styles of forgery. As a result, there are any number of fake coins in circulation, their weight made up with tin or pot iron;



the royal mint's seal is hardly difficult to duplicate.

Diplomacy

Lilliend's relative isolation and xenophobic tendencies have left it lacking in allies across the border. The siege mentality most Lilliender citizens entertain, their belief that theirs is a land surrounded by enemies, is unfortunately not wholly incorrect. It is so easy to see how more positive contacts with neighbouring domains could increase the quality of life in Lilliend in short order – but also why that is never likely to happen.

Conquista is a nation which possesses truly modern technology, and whose people share Lilliend's admiration for higher education. Conquista could benefit from Lilliend's bountiful mines, and Lilliend could incorporate many innovations from Conquista.

Regrettably, the people of Conquista lack Lilliend's actual devotion to *acquiring* higher learning, and the Lillienders believe that Conquista is the ancient nation of heathens and blasphemers against which King Arthus Weisücher III rode out. As a result, Lilliend holds Conquista at arm's length so as not to incur the wrath of the gods, not to mention due to the scandalous prices demanded by Conquistan merchants for horses and donkeys, Lilliend's most popular import. Conquistan protests that the prices are high because horses and donkeys 'do not do well in Conquista' and must therefore be imported from lands even further abroad, tend to fall on deaf ears.

Masogan is a land of rampaging, chauvinistic barbarians, eager to invade, rape, pillage and enslave, or so believe the Lillienders. While for the most part this is perfectly true, there are parts of Masogan with which Lilliend is unfamiliar – and in which it is completely disinterested – after countless attempts by Masogani savages to

scale the final slope and conquer their land. Ironically, the odd tendency for men to die in Lilliend mirrors the curse of Masogan which strikes down women in childbirth, and the two nations have a potential for meeting each other's need.

Or they would have, if they would see each other as anything other than blasphemous enemies to be conquered and/or exterminated.

Vieuxlyons and Lilliend do not share a border, but renegades from Vieuxlyons have made the long voyage through Conquista for the sole purpose of invading Lilliend in the past. The black-uniformed gunmen did great harm without any provocation, and so Lilliend as a whole considers Vieuxlyons to be a nation in the grip of pure evil, to be denounced and if possible destroyed. Fortunately for the much smaller Vieuxlyons, Conquista lies squarely between it and Lilliend, and so the chance of an army marching down the final slope to crush it out of existence seems slight to nonexistent – at the current time.

Umbrash to the far northeast is a surprisingly steady mercantile partner to Lilliend, in the sense that it exports most of the horses and donkeys passed along by ways of Conquista. While the Lilliender nobility boasts that the distant horse-merchants are eager to curry favour with their 'obviously superior' nation, more keen-minded politicians suspect there is an ulterior motive to Umbrash's apparently friendly interest which remains unknown.

Sites of Interest

Karnbrunnen

Northernmost of Lilliend's "great cities", Karnbrunnen is the ancestral seat of the Churnstone family. The city sits at the very edge of *L'Haut*, with its onion-domed towers



seeming to peek at the next plateau up. Due to its proximity to the higher slopes, the city has suffered from more than one avalanche or landslide in its history, with the most recent one demolishing the ancestral seat of its ruling family. It is perhaps fortunate that it was already abandoned at the time.

While Karnbrunnen follows the general Lilliender design for cities – concentric circles which show newer architecture the further out one goes, with the gutted remains of old city walls separating the layers of development – its onion domes only appear in one other city, and it is one of few places where the local nobles at least attempted to keep the older parts of the city up to date.

The fact that Karnbrunnen has first access to the produce of the great Churnstone quarries certainly does not hurt.

I must grudgingly admit that the city's administrators have done a fairly good job. Buildings old and new are kept in good repair, stone is the building material of choice, and the affluent have their walls decorated with intricate carvings and paintings which display stories of national or familial significance to edify, entertain, and of course to boast their wealth, influence and good taste.

Regrettably, all the good intentions and effort to maintain and upgrade the buildings cannot change the fact that the streets of the inner city are too narrow to accommodate modern (*Ha!*) traffic. The absence of proper sewers in the inner circles is also a problem, which leads to regular outbreaks of disease during the height of summer. The only way circumstances could be improved at this point would be to knock down several historic buildings and start afresh. Unfortunately for the people of

Karnbrunnen, such would fly in the face of tradition as strong as law.

Even now, many generations after the Churnstones first ordered their servants to dig into Haurau's earth here, Karnbrunnen still oversees the nation's largest quarries. Having visited the area where stout working men and women dig into the earth to cut granite, marble and other building stone into blocks for transport and excavate rare but highly welcome pockets of jewels, I can say that the city is productive, likely to remain prosperous for a long time to come, and clearly assigns little value to the lives of its workers. Working conditions in the quarries are appalling, with many of the people forced down into the pits succumbing to dust-lung, blindness, or other maladies before they are cast aside by the quarries' administrators.

Another sign of the Churnstone supremacy over the city and its surrounding area is found in a popular local pastime: the declaration of poetry. The Churnstones were famous for producing great poets every few generations, and they even founded a school for the art in Karnbrunnen. Although this *Academ Rimant* had to close its doors when the boarding schools first opened theirs, the people of Karnbrunnen still boast that the spirit of poetry is alive and well in the city. Any teenager with delusions of artistry is free to declaim poetry in public, with citizens often pausing a moment to sample the fruits of their angst. If a poet displays true skill, they are often rewarded with donations of small coin.

The Churnstones still have controlling interests in both city and quarries, but everyone knows their power has waned. Most telling of all the signs is the fact that the Churnstones no longer inhabited their ancestral home, *Schlot Reimaustein* in the oldest part of the city, at the time of the



landslide that buried it. Even though other parts of the city that were damaged have long since been rebuilt, the castle was simply left in ruins. Such Churnstones as remain in the city now occupy a series of lavish villas in the outer ring. In fairness, I must note that no one has yet managed to explain the malady that wiped out the family's main branch, and the possibility that it still lingers in the stones of the ancestral castle weighs heavily on the minds of all Karnbrunnen's citizens. As a result, there is a very new, very tall, and very *thick* wall around the ruins of *Schlot Reimaustein*, which is checked for breaches on a weekly basis and added to on an annual one. As the wall grows, it blots out the sun for the surrounding buildings and slowly advances towards them, encouraging many families to relocate to newer parts of the city. In time, *Reimaustein* and its wall may come to occupy the whole of the city's oldest circle in grim solitude.

Where to stay in Karnbrunnen

The Open Arms (good quality rooms, common quality food) is a small, but clean inn right next to the city's north gate. The innkeeper opened the establishment in the expectation of custom coming down from *L'Haut* as the year turns to winter, when trappers, loggers, and other folk who spend most of their time in the heights come down to hide from the winter snows. Certainly Mrs. Rachante and her three daughters keep the place rigorously clean and the beds are very comfortable, but the dishes served and the contents of her beer cellar leave something to be desired.

One long-time customer whispered to me that the food was at its best when the first Mr. Rachante was still alive and in charge of the kitchens, but his firstborn was a girl, and so he has not been around for a long time.

The Sister's Devotion (poor quality rooms, good quality food) at the city's south gate has a finer kitchen and drinks selection, but its rooms are unpleasant. I discovered why when the innkeeper reacted with confusion to my question as to her weekly rates. As it turns out, her inn and her comely servants cater to soldiers moving through, and she is more used to renting her rooms out on an hourly basis. I am sure I do not need to paint you a picture.

The Royal Poem (good quality rooms, excellent quality food) in the old part of the city is a magnificent structure which boasts the finest qualities of both accommodations and dining and demands payment that reflects its quality in full. While it is by far the finest establishment of its kind in the city, I would not recommend it to anyone who does not have a purse bulging with gold and silver. If money is not an object, however, you should definitely go and try one of the 'themed' suites, which are decorated and equipped to imitate establishments from other lands, both real and unreal, ancient and modern. The servants who attend the guests of the themed suites even dress in period costume which reflects the suite!

Dangers in Karnbrunnen

Mindful of your instructions to 'plant the seed', my *Master*, I poked around in areas not much frequented by the citizens of Karnbrunnen. I was unable to gain access to *Schlot Reimaustein*, which seemed to me an excellent place, so I investigated some of the oldest, exhausted quarries. Regrettably, many of these had collapsed in on themselves when the workers removed the supports, so that they might be used in future projects, but I thought myself fortunate when I discovered there was a



mineshaft that had never been disassembled.

I will spare you the details of my cautious descent into the depths of Lilliend's underground, my *Master*. Most of my reconnaissance was quite tedious, mapping abandoned tunnels and carefully testing the passages ahead of me, ever mindful of the dangers of sudden collapse.

The part that was not tedious, and which I will now relate to you, was heart-stoppingly perilous.

I had entered the mine under cover of night and been at work long enough that the sun had already risen above. As you should know by now, I am no stranger to burning the candle at both ends, and so I decided to continue mapping until my watch told me I could venture above once more without needing to fear easy discovery by locals. I delved ever deeper into the earth and found – a chamber.

While its atmosphere was akin to that of a crypt, it had none of the trappings associated therewith. The room had clearly been excavated fairly recently, was roughly circular, and had niches carved into its walls, each large enough for an adult human body.

Which, predictably, they were filled with – or so I assumed at first. Women, all of them at least young adults, all dressed in the same livery of black on black, lay there in a position of rest, their hands crossed upon their chests. I was uncertain what to make of it. All of them appeared to be dead, their faces gaunt and sunken, their skin withered, but there were no grave markers, and they certainly did not seem to be related. At first, I thought I might have stumbled on the lair of some especially foul creature, or else the trophies of an incredibly industrious

serial killer, but I was soon disabused of this notion.

After placing a minor spell to warn me of approaching danger, I attempted to perform an autopsy on one of the corpses to determine the cause of death. Barely had I laid hands on the collar of the corpse of my choice *when it grabbed my wrists and sat up!* As it opened its eyes to look at me, and then its mouth to address me, I saw the telltale signs: a damned vampire! I had ambled into a *vampire nest!*

You know of my skill with combat spells and my careful preparation, my *Master*. I would have blasted the disgusting thing with lightning, had not its words given me pause.

"The sun," it said. "Is it still in the sky?"

Dread Possibility: The Churnstone Wells

The chamber Ciska discovered in the abandoned mine is but one of many which litter the underground near Karnbrunnen; Camille Churnstone, Darklady of Lilliend, uses the tunnels to store those of her vampire spawn which she does not decide to murder outright, when she has no need of their services. Locked in slumber until they are either called forth by Camille to perform a mission – mainly to murder men who have successfully fathered a daughter – or stirred from their sleep by an intruder, the spawn are locked in nightmares of starvation and despair.

If an intruder does wake them, the spawn have a brief grace period before Camille becomes aware of the fact that they are moving without her instructions and reaffirms her control of them, ranging between one and four hours. During this time, they are free to act on their own impulses, whatever these may be.

The number of chambers occupied by starved spawn is unknown even to Camille, and she has forgotten about some of them. If ever the Darklady feels like it, she can mobilize a small army of ravenous vampires to do her bidding.



When I nodded, it let go of me, got out of the niche and limped out into the tunnels. I followed at a careful distance, one hand on the hilt of my sword-cane, the other ready to sketch the gestures of one of my more potent battle-spells, but the creature never even looked my way. With slow, almost painful - but certain - steps, it advanced by the shortest available route to the mine's exit, and there stepped into the light of day without a moment's hesitation.

I am not often surprised, my *Master*, but I was this time. The vampire stood in the sunlight and laughed, *laughed* while the sun shone down upon her. Rather than catch fire, she seemed to change phase states, going from a solid abomination to a cloud of gently expanding, golden dust that sparkled in the light. Finally, there was nothing left of the creature - and I abandoned caution and returned to Karnbrunnen as quickly as my feet would carry me. I departed the city shortly thereafter, my *Master*; I had not expected a vampire lair in that mine, so I had not taken precautions to prevent their kind from tracking me down.

Malkort

Travelling south from Karnbrunnen, one soon meets the white-water flow of the *Wittwentraen* and its many 'daughters', which irrigate and nurture the farm country of Lilliend. Travel long enough through the fertile farmland on a straight line south from Karnbrunnen, and one inevitably comes upon the ancestral seat of the current - and as matters stand, only - royal family, the Lenkherr: Malkort.

It soon becomes apparent to the trained eye that Malkort is far older than Karnbrunnen, but whoever designed this city had a better head for the needs of business and the desires of the rich and powerful. Malkort's streets are wide, its buildings artistic in design, and it has a

sewer system that accommodates the whole city, as well as a secondary network of tunnels that allow for the mineral-rich waters of the *Bitterflut* to be pumped into the city's resorts and spas. As a whole, the city is well-suited to its current role as a hub for business, but it also reflects the essential Lenkherr character. Yes, the streets are wide and the buildings are beautiful, but there are many little alleys that provide shortcuts, and the gleaming façades have cleverly camouflaged spy-holes and crenellations that can provide excellent cover to snipers. Honest businesses and grand theaters stand next to brothels and ale-houses, and there are sections of the city where the guard never comes - by arrangement, and in return for hefty bribes paid on a regular basis.

Surrounded on all sides by thriving vineyards and lush orchards, Malkort is enriched by the trade in fruits and the spirits distilled therefrom in the city's great breweries, which are located in the innermost circles. On a fine summer's day, the various smells of the breweries hang heavy over the city's inner circles - both smells fair and smells foul. In recent years, as literacy has spread across the domain, enterprising merchants have founded great copying-houses and 'modern' spas in the city's outer rings. During working hours, there is a constant movement of raw materials into Malkort, and of finished products out of it, while the temple bells of the great cathedral of Thunder-Father ring out the hours.

It should come as no surprise that the Lenkherr family has its estates in the middle rings, and well away from the main thoroughfares that guide the commerce that has made them rich. The original seat of the Lenkherr, *Zinntanza*, still stands within bowshot of the cathedral of Thunder-Father and is freely accessible to anyone who is



willing to pay five gold coins for the privilege of touring the labyrinthine halls where the Night of Blood took place. No Lenkherr would live there now, however; Queen Alexandra is the head of the main branch, and she and her closest relatives now live in Luzander. None of the cousin branches has the right to occupy the main seat, and in any case the people of Malkort believe there is a curse on the entire building.

It should not surprise anyone, least of all you, my *Master*, that I checked for the truth of this belief while I toured *Zinnentanza*. The Lenkherr seat is nothing short of a palace, its hallways still lined with fine paintings and other pieces of art, the gilded furniture and velvet paintings kept spotless by servants who were not called to serve in Luzander. As far as I could tell, all traces of the Night of Blood have been competently erased, and the only pall that yet hangs over the building is that which the visitors bring there.

On the other hand, what lies beneath the building and behind its walls is foul enough without any curses. I managed to slip away from the group of curious visitors and the tour guide to which I had been assigned and accessed the network of secret passages that allowed the Lenkherr to turn the tables on the assassins that had been set on them by Helena Weisücher III. My time in that disused labyrinth was far more instructive than the time I spent being nattered at by my tour guide. There were armories, laboratories, torture rooms and what I can only assume were 'play rooms', where I found traces of orgies and festivities that verged from the banal to the abominable.

More interesting than the Lenkherr's secret pastimes, however, were doors I found to even deeper passages. Malkort's sewer system turned out to be a network of

wide tunnels, easily big enough to accommodate secret troop movements. The architects of this city truly were inspired by their Lenkherr masters, to allow for violence and depravity to move all unseen behind a smiling façade of peace and order.

Where to stay in Malkort

The Eye of the Storm (common quality rooms, good quality food) is Malkort's oldest inn, and is practically an outbuilding of the cathedral of Thunder-Father. Priests are in and out of the place at all hours, providing blessings for anyone desiring of such in return for small coin or a mug of ale, which the innkeeper brews in his own cellar beneath the building. The inn may not be the most comfortable in Malkort, but it distinguishes itself by having the reputation of being the very safest establishment. All those priests moving into and out of it at all hours probably discourages petty and more severe crime.

The Queen's Favour (bad quality rooms, bad quality food) was built near *Zinnentanza* in response to the crowning of the first Lenkherr Queen. While it is easy to see the building was once beautiful, it has consistently failed to live up to the hopes of its owners; with the main Lenkherr branch in Luzander, and none of the cousin branches allowed to move into *Zinnentanza*, the expected flow of custom from Lenkherr servants and petitioners failed to materialize, and the inn's profits are insufficient to the needs of upkeep. The only reasons I could give for voluntarily staying at the Queen's Favour for more than one day are a desperate yearning for indigestion, or a love of small vermin, as can be found living in the bedding.

The Delight of Princes (excellent quality rooms, good quality food) is one of the city's newer establishments, strategically positioned near both a spa favoured by the



Lenkherr family and a theater currently in vogue with the rich. Although the prices demanded for room and board are lavish, they reflect the quality of the suites and fare provided – as well as that of the

Dread Possibility: The Delight of Pain

The Delight of Princes is indeed one of the finest inns of Malkort, and it is popular with the rich and jaded nobles of the city. The innkeeper, Mellime Malvert (NE Expert 2 / Rogue 3 / Assassin 2) is always on the lookout for new ways to tempt and delight the best-paying clientele. For this purpose, she makes a habit of befriending all who seek to room at *the Delight*, finding out everything she can about them. Over ninety percent of all customers leave completely satisfied, but anyone who is both beautiful and is discovered to lack people who might miss or seek to avenge them are served sedatives with their wine, and are likely to wake up in the secret 'cattle pens' underneath the inn.

Here, the prisoners are kept until Mellime finds a customer or customers willing to pay for the use of her 'play room', where her prisoners are subjected to depravity and pain and finally murdered.

Never one to miss a trick for making money, Mellime has the broken bodies of her victims turned into a special dish.

beautiful and 'accommodating' servants available to serve as 'company' to paying customers. I would recommend the place warmly if not for the fact that I caught a disturbing rumour that some customers never come out again, and that their personal effects had turned up for sale in the marketplace.

Lady Ilzabeth's Hospitality (excellent quality rooms, excellent quality food) is an oddity. Instead of being an inn, this is the estate of the lady Ilzabeth Lenkherr, older sister to Queen Alexandra Lenkherr. The

Lady holds regular revels, during which time she opens the doors of her estate to anyone who wishes to wander in, partake and even spend the night (be it alone or with company), while she celebrates her impending invitation to move to Luzander and live in splendor in the Queen's court. As the invitation continues to fail to arrive, more and more people whisper how the regular debauch and growing despair are withering Lady Ilzabeth before her time. More furtive whispers suggest the invitation will never come, due to some crime Lady Ilzabeth committed first against her mother and later against her sister. Until the time that the Lady finally snaps or just gives up, however, her estate provides excellent hospitality.

Schlotstein

Venturing south from Malkort, the lush landscape gradually grows less hospitable to farms as the daughters of both *Wittwentraen* and *Bitterflut* converge into broad streams. Located on a broad wedge of land between these rivers is the grim city of Schlotstein. Connected to the rest of Lilliend only by two bridges, the city practically screams of its siege mentality long before one comes within hailing distance of the first guard station.

No matter whether one takes the Widow's Bridge or the Bitter Bridge, the traveler must pass three such stations before even coming to the city's outer wall. During my approach, I could see guards armed with longbows patrolling behind the crenellations, and I saw the silhouettes of siege engines primed to destroy the bridges, making it excessively difficult for invading armies to approach.

In Lilliend, Schlotstein is known variously as 'the traitor's city' and 'the city of a thousand towers'. The former name is of course due to the Lockstone Rebellion, but



the latter is a far older name that dates back to the Lockstone habit that each independent son or daughter should build – or at least oversee the construction of – their own tower, complete with the onion-shaped domes I also saw in Karnbrunnen. As a result, there is indeed a multitude of towers springing up left and right throughout the city, as many of them abandoned after the demise of the main branch as are inhabited by members of the cousin branches.

I found Schlotstein to be a bleak and inhospitable city, my *Master*. Its people walk tall and stand proud, but they never seem to smile in public, and conversation is muted, quickly cut off if a stranger is noticed. The grey buildings fit almost seamlessly together and are unadorned on the outside, with most windows remaining shuttered and barred throughout most of the year. The logic is acceptable; the homes of Schlotstein's people form walls that force invaders to use the main roads, allowing defenders to build up choke points and barricades without needing to fear their enemy will come upon them through back alleys. That said, nothing is built with beauty in mind, only with an eye to siege and invasion.

The roads of Schlotstein are wide, but they are so to accommodate troop movements. A secondary network of roads runs across the roofs of the squat, blocky buildings, and is beholden solely to archers in service to the Lockstone cousin branches that currently run the city. One would expect thieves and general layabouts to abuse this network, but I learned during my stay that the penalty for misusing the 'high road' is stiff; three corpses were swinging from the city's outer wall by their neck as I first approached the city, each with a sign reading simply 'Criminal Trespass' nailed to their chest.

The cathedral of Thunder-Father stands in the city's inner circle, its bells melted down for their metal and its doors sealed. The cathedral of Ashar, which is located in the third circle out, chimes the hours, but its bells are forged of iron and their tone is dark and harsh. Wherever you go in this city, you see armed and armoured troops: royal forces carrying the Lenkherr crest, and troops carrying the old Lockstone crest, backed up by Clerics of Ashar, both factions openly eyeing each other and just barely pretending that they are not looking for a reason to kill the other in cold blood.

The city's claim to wealth, its great forges, creates most of the urban noise. The ring of hammer on anvil and the creak of cartwheels as coal and ore are moved into the city, and finished weapons and tools are moved out, should create a lively atmosphere of industry, but alas only serve to underscore the baleful silence that hangs over the rest of Schlotstein. Even the carts that bring in food from the farms in the Lockstone sphere of influence and the patrols constantly moving in and out of the city as they go to patrol the final descent or return for rest and relaxation seem to be moving on tiptoe.

Every moment that I spent in Schlotstein, I felt a great tension lurking beneath the surface, as if violence might erupt at any moment. I discussed this with a merchant who had travelled here from Luzander, and she confirmed the sensation.

"The Lockstones and their servants," she said, "they are all as crazy as their dead lord. They haven't returned to normal just because the Rebellion was beaten down. I wouldn't risk coming here if they weren't the best smiths in the land."

Where to stay in Schlotstein

The Queen's Embrace (reasonable quality rooms, reasonable quality food) is



the city's newest and arguably most welcoming inn. Built after the Lockstone Rebellion, its proprietors wanted to open a safe haven for visiting merchants and dignitaries, where they could rest and eat 'without having to be confronted by Lockstone scum'. It soon became clear that this attitude would not fly, as locals noticeably detested the place and visitors felt threatened by their attitude, causing them to shun the inn and profits to drop sharply. Since the proprietors have dropped their militant attitude, changing their message to 'the Queen welcomes all her subjects', business has picked up somewhat, but profits have not yet risen to the point that the inn can improve the quality of its service beyond the merely acceptable.

The Howling Dog (poor quality rooms, excellent quality food) is a soldier's inn located near the Widow's Gate. Royal troops moving into the city make up the majority of its clientele; locals do not room there. The 'Dog might well have suffered like the Queen's Embrace if not for the fame of its food and drink. Even the staunchest anti-royalist will sit shoulder to shoulder with a horsewoman wearing the queen's colours for a chance at one of the 'Dog's famous banquets, complete with libations drawn from its cherrywood ale-casks.

The Backward Glance (good quality rooms, reasonable quality food) is an inn located in the oldest circles of the city. It is not notable for the quality of its room and board, but more for its strategic location near several government offices and army barracks. On a good evening, one might overhear muted conversations between civil servants relaxing after a long day's work, catch snatches of soldier gossip, or even the dark whispers of Lockstone loyalists growling about the insults to their people that they perceive every day.

During my stay, a group of royal soldiers dropped by for a round of drinks, celebrating the recent promotion of their group's commander to lieutenant. One of the soldiers, a young woman newly enlisted and fresh out of Luzander, got quite rascally drunk on the inn's ale and slapped the innkeeper's son on the backside, ordering him to, and I quote: "Run and get us another round, serf-boy!"

A hush fell over the common room at once, and the boy in question fixed such a glare on the soldiers as I had not seen any man give a woman in Lilliend.

Rather than object to his being smacked on the bottom, however, he said: "There are no serfs in Schlotstein."

The soldiers' lieutenant immediately tried to apologize for the behaviour of her underling, citing the quality of the Backward Glance's ale and her inexperience. For a moment, this seemed to work, with the tension ebbing – and then the young fool shot to her feet and started shouting how she was a warrior of the queen, and no 'damned filthy rebel' was going to tell her what she could and could not say 'in conquered lands'. She finished by slapping the boy in the face, and repeating her order of another round, finishing with a maliciously gleeful '*serf-boy!*'

I could see the soldiers' lieutenant turn pale, and for a moment she closed her eyes. Then she very demonstratively turned her back on the young fool and started talking to the rest of her troops in a loud tone of voice. Other customers present, merchants and government workers, likewise made a show of ignoring the bewildered drunkard and talking very loudly. In contrast, the locals rose as one and converged on the soldier in a mass. She cried out once and tried to draw her sword, but she was knocked to the ground, disarmed and gagged in short order. The



locals dragged her out into the night, pausing only to drop her sword on the table in front of the lieutenant, who winced – and did nothing.

Not ten minutes later, the local customers returned and went back to their meals as though nothing had happened. I found an excuse to go outside and look around. The soldier had been hung from a lamp post, with admirable neatness and in complete silence. Someone had pinned a piece of paper to her face on which was written, in large letters: **SED NUNC LIBER** – as you may well recall, the rallying cry of the Lockstone Rebellion.

It seems, my *Master*, that the spirit of insurrection is not quite as dead in the Lockstone lands as people would like to believe - or at least the Lockstone position that there are no serfs in their lands is not.

Dangers in Schlotstein

Having now acquired the 'seed' I needed for your purposes, my *Master*, I decided to investigate what I personally consider to be the most interesting party in the Lockstone Rebellion: Maximilian Lockstone himself.

As for so many failed families in this benighted land, the main estate of the Lockstones was sealed and forbidden for their cousin branches to occupy. Unlike those other families, the Lockstones never really occupied one central building; their custom that each scion should oversee the construction of their own tower means that there are numerous buildings throughout the city that have been closed off. Too many buildings, really, to allow for an equal amount of protection for all.

Shortly before my departure from Schlotstein, I found an opportunity to approach what is now called by some 'the Hyena's Tower', by others simply 'Maximilian's Tower', but by most 'the Tower of the Last King' – this in spite of the

fact that Maximilian Lockstone was never crowned and never named himself king of anything. Even burdened as I was, it proved easy enough to break the seals without leaving obvious traces, and I let myself in.

The interior of Maximilian's Tower proved to be cold, dusty and 'charged', somehow. It was simplicity itself for me to discover why the atmosphere felt so oppressive; there were spells spun throughout the building, made permanent by a powerful practitioner. A quick analysis proved that these were protective spells, meant to secure the building's construction and defend its occupants against magical assault from outside. There were a few magical tripwires as well, one of which had duly been triggered when I entered the building, but as it appeared to be set to alert someone inside the abandoned tower, I felt confident that I could go about my business without interference.

Locating a suitable chamber was easy enough; the tower's wine cellar (which, judging by the state of the barrels, had never seen much use) was ideally suited to the task. I laid out the body of that young fool who got herself hung outside the Backward Glance and produced the clay pot full of charnel soil, the scroll, and the required gem. I let myself slip into the necessary trance and performed the ritual as you have taught me – and with the usual level of skill and aplomb, you need not doubt. When I left the cellar, your 'seed of conquest' was briefed on its purpose and had declared its acquiescence with my commands. I decided to make a visit to the late Lord Lockstone's private quarters and see whether there were any remains of his arcane writings that I might put to use.

Alas, the instant I left the wine cellar I realized something had gone wrong; there was a dense fog rolling through the tower's corridors, a fog that resisted my best



attempts to dispel it, and which somehow snuffed out my divination spells as soon as I cast them. My first attempt to reach the front door and beat a quick retreat came to nothing, as I realized I had somehow gotten turned around and I was, after all, not alone in the tower. *Something* was moving through the fog, just outside the circle of light cast by my spells. Whatever it was, it was intelligent and fast, and it kept up with me as I tried to make my way through the fog.

I was just about ready to forego caution and try violence when I chanced upon a pair of double doors. Passing through them, I found myself in what I can only describe as a cozy combination of a library and personal study. Sensing no immediate danger therein and feeling the need for a moment to recover my sense of direction and devise a plan, I locked the doors behind me, shutting out the weird fog and my pursuer. Magical lights not of my creation immediately winked on, and a small fire erupted in the hearth. It was clear enough that Maximilian Lockstone had not only been a skilled practitioner, but also one who did not hesitate to use the Art to provide himself with creature comforts.

And why not? The magic serves the caster, not the other way around.

I spent some time investigating the bookcases in this comfortable room, and had to draw the conclusion that if the late Lord Lockstone had read even half of them, he had truly been a scholar worthy of my regard. A few of the most choice volumes found their way into my backpack before I even bothered to look at the desk. Here, I found neat folders of correspondence and bound folios of notes compiled by the late Maximilian.

Alas, neatly collected and organized as they were, they were damaged. The desk itself was riddled by woodworm, and

other vermin appeared to have gotten at the papers within through their tunnels.

I have transcribed such fragments as survived for your perusal, my Master. The first selection:

"... Beleregon reluctantly admitted that the First People were not the Elves, regardless of their claims, but the fire-kissed people who Weisücher. Their gods were twain, their names forgotten, but resemblance to Thunder-Father and not Haurau, but Brightwell. The Elves invaded during the Second Wave of Invasion consisted of the Lenkherr ancestors, who brought a recognizable form of Thunder-Father and attributed their victory over the Elves and their fire-haired slaves to him actually access to bronze armour and arms, as opposed to flint and Third Wave of Invasion b ... own ancestors, who brought iron and later steel, and the drive to build with stone and mine for ms and ore. Hints I have found unde Malkort and Luzander suggests my ancestors brought dualistic belief in good and evil, Ashar and il Demonio, but cannot explain why seamless integration of faiths whereas integration of nologies makes more sense. Mingling of the blood unavoidable, of course, with wa conquest, but why did the faiths merge inst ival of the strongest, demonisation of ers? wish to spea to Elves when next I visit them in anemere. Perhaps they may also explain why there are not even stories of ancient battles between of invasion. Almost as if history has ed over to hide ancient battles, even though there



are w evident stresses in our soci
ty."¹

The second selection:

"... udy of arcane magic is interesting, and has been helpful in some aspects of my research, but alas does not offer many hopes of real-world applications. People are simply too fearful of magic for me to offer to use it for the good of the people, and so I have not told Mother minor breakthrough in warding my rising tower. I shall continue to apply the fruits of my studies as the tower grows and my understanding grows apace. When complete, I expect my home shall be the most secure, magically speaking, in all of Schlotstein and perhaps in all of Lilliend. When next I visit Granemere, I hope to exchange impressions with my friend Beleregon, who was likewise struggling with the second permutation of..."

The third selection:

"Grandmother and my great-aunts have come to me with news. ~~Dire news. Terrible news. Awful news.~~ Sweet Ashar, I cannot find the words! How could anyone find the words?! My mother, my sisters, my cousins, all of them dead! ~~They are saying I have to~~ Sweet Ashar, how could you abandon them so?!"

"I must be calm. I must be in control. I must be calm. I must be in control. I must feel nothing. I must be ice. I must be stone.

Yes. I am the bedrock of my House, now. I am calm. I am in control. I am. I am. I am."

"... isk to my correspondence with my friend Beleregon. To make sure there is no more danger of overeager servants opening my letters to read them to me (as though I were borderline illiterate, like the typical inbred male scion), I have expanded my studies into the inding of minor servitor creatures. The spells were not available in any of the shops that cater to Art in my city, nor could or would any of the Clerics assist me, save those of il Demonio, who are unacceptable stroke of such good fortune that I find myself harbouring suspicions. News came to me of gypsies requesting permission to trade in the main marketplace, offering for good Lockstone steel. A tribe of gypsies who name themselves the Vistani. The name fills me with foreboding, but when I went to see them for mys selection of spell scrolls and minor items. Damn tempting. The very scroll I required among them. I fear a trap, but"

The fourth selection:

"... great strides in the Art, in spite of my earlier foreboding, and in spite of my other obligations. The estates are running smoothly, security is tight (or so report my generals – it still feels alien to say that they are mine, instead of Mother's), and the citizens seem content and prosperous. Further trade with the Vistani expanded my spellbook and learning. Even found unity to invite Beleregon here, to my study,

¹Lord Lockstone's conclusions mirror my own. While I know you do not wish me to spend overly long in Lilliend when other lands lie waiting, I did keep my eyes and ears open – and take archaeological soundings along my way. The *Waves of Invasion* Lord Lockstone writes of

are confirmed by the ages of the four 'great cities' and in carvings I discovered on ancient stone circles and other monuments. Amazingly, there is no official record of these *Waves*, nor even so much as a folktale. Instead, locals cling to their recorded history.



where we consulted with the Vistana Carola and all three of us learned much. I happily anticipate"

"... all three of us should have the same foreboding dreams as the convocation of noble families draws closer? The odds are ave attempted time and again to interpret the dream, but nothing works! I have even, for the first time since Mother's death, visited the cathedral of Ashar, but the priestesses were unable to help. One of them had the temerity to suggest this might be because of the distance I had allowed to grow between myself and the goddess felt the inclination to anger, but resisted it. After all, it is true. Ashar did nothing to protect my kin, so why no luck with Thunder-Father. Frankly, this Lenkherr god whose true ancient mythology, as uncovered by my studies, shows him traipsing through the world in many disguises for no better purpose than ducing any woman he cannot take him seriously, so no wonder his priests were no better help than Carola is back in Schlotstein. She believes she has found what I need; the Fourfold Oracle of Brightwe"

At this point, my *Master*, a ghost-pale spider ran across the page. I swiped at it and caught only fog; looking up from the page, I realized the mist had poured in under the door while I was engrossed in Maximilian's journal entries, and now I could barely see the desk I was sitting at!

I poured the papers into my pack, turned in the Lockstone Lord's chair and – froze.

Dancing upon the hearth were flames of purest silver, and pale ghosts moved in front of it, their voices coming to me as though from a great distance.

A human man, with classic Lockstone features, dressed in unadorned robes of black wool, a longsword hanging from his

belt. An Elfmaid, dressed in leathers and woad. A Vistana in her baubles and colours. They were boiling something over the flames, a tin full of flowers, soaked in tar-thick blood that they squeezed out of a mummified rodent of some sort.

"... Could have asked twice, if you hadn't wasted the first tabot and half the flowers on your experiments," the Vistana hissed.

"I had to be certain. I had to know," the man countered. *"They could have been laced with hallucinogens. I had to be certain. I had to know. I need true knowledge."*

"Both of you, stop fighting. It's ready. Max, you lead. You cast the first chant and we'll fall in after the second and fourth verses," the Elfmaid said.

I heard them chant, saw them cast a beautifully complex spell that seemed to burn itself into my memory. On the hearth, the flames blazed bright silver and the tin and its loathsome contents were consumed. The fire flared – no, light blazed out of it, well in excess of its size – no, there was a radiant being in the flames, a woman chained in light, her aspect so beautiful, so *perfect* that my eyes teared up in self-defense. I caught myself crying out with pain and terror, for she was simply too much, *too much!* I covered my face with my hands and wept, but her voice still tore its way past my defenses:

"The answer to your question is Yes. You must be wed, as your friend Magteld has counselled. You must be wed so the Silver may awaken, and in its own time the Ruby. Do this, or else this land is truly damned for eternity."

Light stabbed right through my hands and eyelids, and I heard the ghosts cry out at the same time I did. Darkness fell – relative darkness. I heard the crackle of the flames, the sizzling of flesh in the fire, and someone gasped with shock. Miraculously, it



turned out that I was not blind, for I could see the three ghosts and, beyond them, a voluptuous succubus, writhing on the hearth. She was wrapped in thick chains and she moved as though the fire pained her – but then she became aware of the three spellcasters and her face split in a wide, malicious grin.

“Two came one and one came three,” she said in a mocking, singsong voice, “and three fled where their enemies could not see. But come three four then out the door, flies one who was, was not, for evermore. When two come three anew and the old is done, then three committee shall become. And in their glory shall they be bound, while the one who made two one is the one stuck in the ground.”

She threw her head back, laughing – and became a red-haired woman. Beautiful, buxom, but still a mortal woman, lying in the fire, chained in writhing coils of Mist. Tears ran down her cheeks and even I felt a stab of pity for her naked distress.

“Oh, Anointed!” I heard her sob. “Oh, beloved Anointed, why? What have I done to deserve this fate? Why can't I rest? I would welcome even death at this point. Please. Release me. Please.”

The man started to move, to reach out to the woman on the hearth, but both the Elfmaid and the Vistana reached out and grabbed him by his arms to hold him back. To hold him fast, while the woman in the fire cried and writhed in the grip of a torment that seemed more spiritual than physical.

Then she spoke: *“I know someone is there. I must answer questions two, unasked.*

First, the question you do not want to ask. You will not be the one to redeem your homeland. But you are ... as an apprentice, preparing the forge for the day's labour. Others must come after you to do the job,

but without your best efforts they will fail. Awaken the Silver. Help your friend awaken the Ruby. The means will come to you, though you will not like it.

Second, the question whose answer will bring you sorrow. You will love again, love completely, and in that love will your heart and soul be redeemed, for you will be loved in turn. But in that love, you will also be damned.

Now let ... me go...!”

The silver fire flared one last time – and I was alone in the late Lord Lockstone's study. The fog was retreating into the corners of the room, leaving me in a circle of illumination cast by my own spell. That light revealed a shadow on the hearthstone, roughly the shape of a reclining woman.

I sensed a presence close to me in the room, and suddenly felt myself in the grip of terror. It was a stern presence, one that judged me, *knew* me, and found me wanting. Disapproval crawled along my skin like *fire*. I fled before it, running down stairs without knowing how I had ascended them in the first place, and flying down corridors as quickly as my legs and a judiciously-applied extract would carry me.

Fortune favoured me at least until I was out the door and back at my inn, where I retreated into my room, cast every defensive spell at my disposal and locked the door. Nothing came to challenge me that night, but I did not feel like taking chances.

Having completed my investigation of Schlotstein, I departed to visit the last of Lilliend's great cities before I made arrangements to travel on to other countries; I would go to investigate Luzander.

Luzander

As I have mentioned before, Luzander is supposedly the greatest city of Lilliend, and



its capital. Having hitched a ride on a merchant's wagon out of Schlotstein, I expected to be at least moderately impressed as we came within view of the supposed 'Jewel of Lilliend'.

Instead, I was bitterly disappointed. Luzander lies at the heart of thriving farmland, so one would expect it to be affluent, Instead, the local populace so rigidly adheres to local tradition that their city is utterly backward. By royal and temple law, the only building materials allowed in the city are wood and thatch, both slathered with tar; small amounts of stone and metal are allowed where strictly necessary (one needs to be tired of life to make a hearth and chimney out of wood), but not where they can easily be seen.

Local construction is markedly different from that in the other cities; single-story homes are the rule, typically with rooms added in the extension of the main building when family growth or increased wealth demand more space. Only members of the nobility and royalty have homes with as much as one or two more stories, and yet their homes' general shape is the same as any low-born oaf's, and their roofs are still covered in thatch – and if they are not meticulous about replacing the stuff on time, mold.

While homes in Karnbrunnen, Malkort and Schlotstein are sturdy and secure, Luzander is in constant danger of being wiped out if just one person is negligent in the tending of their hearth, and the whole place has an unpleasant smell after every rainstorm. The roads are unpaved, which means that even a moderate rainshower can reduce the city to a swamp, and the coming of winter turns the roads smooth and slick, causing many accidents for people and for carts. Only in size does Luzander surpass the other cities, and its need for building material has denuded the

landscape of trees for miles around, which at least has allowed the free peasants and serfs to cultivate large tracts of land. Even today, carts of lumber are constantly rumbling into the capital, some to be stored against need, but most for repairs and maintenance that are either urgent or overdue.

Luzander has no sewer system of any kind, again by 'virtue' of tradition and law. Officially, citizens are required to give their waste to the dung wagons that make a circuit of the city every evening and ferry the city's byproduct out to the farms, but many lack the patience and just empty their chamberpots in the street, without any regard for passersby or the fact that the city draws its water from wells dug into the soft earth of the alluvial plains – which their filth seeps into over time. I was glad to arrive in the city during autumn, with the weather turning cold; the smell was bad enough then that I shuddered at the thought of studying Luzander in the summer. It need not surprise you, my *Master*, that the summers are known to bring disease to the city. Disease and vermin. Lacking sewers to dally in, rats can be seen running across the streets in broad daylight, often chased by feral dogs or cats, or by urchins who seem just as feral as any abandoned pet hoping to earn a few coppers by harvesting rat tails.

I asked locals whether they were not afraid of disease ravaging their families, and why they did not at least consider installing sewers. Most if not all proudly pointed to the twin temples of Athena and Artemis, proclaiming that the goddesses kept the city safe, and the righteous would never fall to disease. Confronted with their glowing zeal, I chose not to press the issue. You and I both know how unreasonable strong believers can be, do we not, my *Master*?



Ah, but I fear I have given you offense... May the grim patrons of the Eternal Order find it in their dead hearts to forgive me, my *Master*. I know, after all, that you will not.

I have not been complimentary of the cities of Lilliend, I know. Karnbrunnen is in drastic need of civil overhaul and infested with mediocre poets; Malkort is a filthy place, full of 'entertainments' fit to turn the stomach; while Schlotstein's citizens barely talk to strangers, their city *grows* at them.

Nevertheless, I would judge each of them to be superior to Luzander. When walking through this collection of log cabins, I often had trouble determining whether I was in the affluent section of town or in its slums! I interviewed some of the locals, who proudly stated that the inner city has not changed since its initial construction, which I assume to have been before the invasion by the Elves several centuries ago, and any 'new ideas' had to be put into effect by adding a new outer ring to the whole city to give them room to exist in. Even the most brilliant monarch could not overhaul this festering log pile in the face of its inhabitants' willful backwardness, which they have the gall to call civic pride.

The royal palace of Luzander, center of power for all of Lilliend, is a sprawling complex at the very heart of the city with a whopping three floors, setting it head and shoulders over its neighbours and making it the easiest target imaginable for enemy siege. One ballista, a couple of haybales soaked in pitch and naphtha and a spark would serve to reduce this 'city' to a pile of char within a day, my *Master*, and I doubt anyone who does not live there would greatly miss it.

Even what should be the city's greatest charms, the park known as the Queen's Gardens and the public library built by order of Queen Alexandra herself, are but pinpricks of light in an ocean of murk.

Worse, it is easy to see how little enthusiasm the builders had for bringing about what should have been conveniences for all the citizens, or more likely how free they felt to sabotage their own work. The library is a shoddy structure unsuitable to proper research, its walls in need of constant shoring-up due to flaws in the foundation; the Queen's Gardens are laid out haphazardly, with what signs are available placed incorrectly. I interviewed several locals on the subject and received smug responses which indicated the people of Luzander did not need 'new' ideas, and that they fully expected these projects and other 'new-fangled nonsense' to eventually be forgotten by the Queen and her descendants in favour of 'good, old-fashioned values', whereupon they can be demolished and overgrown by the festering city.

I regret to report that I only saw the royal palace from the outside. Despite my best efforts, I was turned away at the gate, and as the guards patrol accompanied by packs of hunting hounds, I did not favour my chances of breaking and entering under cover of illusion spells.

This city was a disappointment in every way – to me. It sucks in the goodness of the land surrounding it in the form of food, timber, and finished products of all kinds, and all it breathes out are edicts passed on by the Queen and her courtiers, and the occasional regiment of Queen's soldiers recruited from the local populace. While the loyalty of these soldiers is beyond reproach, the same cannot be said for the rest of the citizenry. In public, they will extol the virtues of their monarch and boast about how Luzander is her seat of power. In private, local nobles and other dignitaries scheme and connive to make sure their privileges remain untouched, and to ensure the city remains in the grip of status quo. As



I have mentioned before, efforts at improvement are sabotaged both subtly and overtly.

I fully anticipated that having to winter in Luzander would be a miserable affair, but at least expected to be able to focus on compiling my notes and indulge in some alchemical and magical crafting while I waited for the snow and ice to melt. As soon as that happy time arrived, so I promised myself, I would make my way beyond Schlotstein to the final descent and follow one of the caravan paths to the lands east of Lilliend.

This land never pleased me, my *Master*, not with its hidden edges and brooding tensions, and seeing its corrupt and backwards heart had been the last straw. I was well and truly done with this place and ready for my next challenge.

Where to stay in Luzander

In keeping with omnipresent *tradition*, citizens are required to offer hospitality to any strangers they take a fancy to in Luzander. The concept of an inn is not unknown (how could it be, given that inns are readily available in the other cities and even in villages not a day's travel from the city), but it is considered to be grotesque, an attempt to taint the ancient traditions of hospitality with greed. Personally, I would recommend any traveler in need of shelter to forego finding a place to rent a room for a few days, and just accept the expense of renting a cottage in the city's outermost ring as I did. Such cottages are not impossibly expensive and are in ample supply – at least until the next generation is ready to move out of its parents' homes and seek their own, whereupon a new ring will be added to the city, as the land's forests take another heavy blow.

Athenaeon Boarding School for Young Ladies

Autumn had progressed far enough that winter was on the horizon when I received a surprise visitor to my cottage on the outskirts of Luzander one evening. A servant wearing the livery of the *Grafleur*, a minor noble family which has been jockeying for status ever since the Night of Blood and the ascension of the Lenkherr family, brought me an invitation to visit his mistress' estate.

Included in the invitation was an offer to attend a dinner of ten removes, followed by finest cigars and brandy, as well as tours of the estate's prized gardens, great library, and private museum.

Food and spirits hold little sway with me, my *Master*, as well you know, but the opportunity to perhaps study some genuine historical artefacts and books of scholarly merit proved irresistible. Not to mention, I was growing bored with waiting out winter in my cottage.

Having packed my belongings against the possibility of betrayal – or an extended stay – I took a coach arranged for by the Grafleur family to reach their estate, which the liveried servant told me was a day's ride outside Luzander. I settled into the surprisingly comfortable cushions and whiled away the time with one of the books I had *acquired* from Maximilian Lockstone's tower. At the same time, I maintained an open line of communication with my homunculus Firstborn, who was following us from the air, and surreptitiously kept one hand on a pistol hidden in my skirts. Hospitality may be sacred, but blind trust reaps its own reward.

The night passed comfortably enough, but dawn brought new annoyances. The coach lurched and halted abruptly amid unpleasant grinding noises. Not to mention,



it was listing heavily to one side. The liveried servant and the coachman opened the door and made many apologies, showing me the wheel that had broken free of the axle. I asked them how far it was yet to the Grafleur estate, only to be told that it was too far to walk.

Most fortunately, so they said, there was a different place nearby where I could wait while they sorted out the coach: one of the domain's prized boarding schools, to wit the *Athenaeon*.

No, my *Master*, I did *not* think it all just a remarkable coincidence. The fact that neither one of those two buffoons dared meet my eyes was hint enough that something was not as it seemed to be. Still, I had not found an opportunity to investigate one of Lilliend's boarding schools before then, so I decided to spring this measly excuse for a trap and enhance my knowledge while I did.

'Nearby' turned out to be an entirely relative term. It was dark and I had spent hours struggling uphill by the time the liveried servant had guided me to the boarding school in question. The Athenaeon was a tall building, clearly once the fortress of some less than sociable noble, which sat perched on the edge of a cliff that overlooked the white-water flow of one of the Widow's Daughters.

The dull rumble of that river had been a rather unpleasant companion on the road up the incline, my *Master*, especially as I was in the company of a man who I did not trust. My feelings of anxiety grew a little less when I saw the boarding school ahead – and then returned tenfold. I ignored the servant's unctuous inquiries as to whether I was not feeling well and looked the structure up and down. I remember vividly how much you like to scoff at my 'emotionalism', my *Master*, my 'impressionable character', but you must

admit that my sensitivity to the uncanny has been useful from time to time. Standing there in the dark, looking at a building which my eyes could only see as a dark silhouette outlined against the night sky, my *other* senses overlaid it with imagery I could perceive perfectly well. And wished I did not.

The walls appeared to be slathered with a pale slime of some sort, a viscous ooze that trickled down from the battlements, swirling and roiling as it went. In some places, it thickened enough to become opaque – and there it warped itself into the shape of screaming faces. I heard not a whisper, even as those faces flowed into the earth and were lost, but their eyes seemed to follow me and beg for a release I could not grant.

I managed to banish the grotesque imagery from my senses and advance. Above the rumble of the river, I heard the distant growl of thunderclouds as Lilliend's nocturnal rainstorms moved in to denude the land and bring life to both forest and acre but drive all righteous men and women indoors.

My guide hammered on the boarding school's doors for quite a long time before someone came to open them. Fat raindrops were already pelting the earth, and yet the servant made no attempt to enter; rather, he bowed to the woman who had answered the door and handed her a letter he drew from within his velvet jacket.

"If it please you, my lady," he said, "my mistress, the Lady Grafleur, sends her compliments."

Then he turned and dashed into the rain, heedless of the dark and the uncertain footing on the road that had delivered us here.



*Oh, yes. Nothing to worry
about here.*

The woman who had answered the door introduced herself as sister Mariette, a nun of Athena and one of the teachers here, at the Athenaeon. (Hardly unexpected.) She welcomed me in the name of her order, enquired politely what had brought me to her doorstep and expressed her sympathies.

"You must be our guest," she decided. "Come, the evening's meal has just been served. Partake and be welcome among us."

She guided me through passages that were poorly lit, with not a carpet nor even a layer of fresh rushes underfoot. When she noticed my looking at the floor, sister Mariette informed me that students scoured, swept and scrubbed the main corridors every day, in order to learn humility, receive exercise and serve the common good. The theory struck me as serviceable, but odd; it is not every school that makes highborn young ladies get on their knees and scrub the floor with hot water and lye.

Sister Mariette brought me to a vast room, which I had no doubt once seated the castle's lord and his band of ~~brigands~~ knights, but which had been converted into a clean, but rather sterile dining-hall for the school's staff and students. Hard benches and unadorned tables divided the room into manageable quadrants, with one bench and table set up on the platform from where the castle's lord once looked down upon the revels he had ordered. What decorations

may once have adorned the walls looked to have been scrubbed away, with only some faded and smoke-darkened paintings on the high ceiling remaining. The room was very quiet, with no conversation louder than mutters and whispers, all easily drowned out by the clink of cheap cutlery against earthenware bowls.

My entrance caused a muted buzz, but the students in their drab uniforms of grey dresses and sandals turned their attention back to their meal almost at once. Sister Mariette guided me to the high table, which was predictably the seating for the teachers.

Matron Grafleur, who professed to being a second cousin to the lady who had invited me, was the headmistress of the Athenaeon. She welcomed me in a charming enough manner, offering me the hospitality of the school for as long as I cared to stay, and inviting me to sit at her left hand and share the evening's meal.

I have dined in many locales, and recently I had the dubious pleasure of sampling Lilliend's kitchen, my *Master*. By the standards of even the rest of the nation, the food served at the Athenaeon was dreary. Chunks of coarse bread, a lentil soup with pine nuts and what were supposed to be hot peppers but were barely lukewarm, and a drink that might have been beer four or five doses of water ago. No meat, little flavour. I minded my manners and ate what was given to me, of course, but did notice that neither the staff nor the students showed much enthusiasm for their meal – and yet they ate every last drop and crumb as though they were starving. Or afraid there would not be another meal.

After dinner, matron Grafleur appointed her right-hand woman, sister Aster, to lead the students in a prayer-song to Athena, thanking the goddess for the bounty civilization had reaped out of Artemis' wild



earth. I must admit the sister had a fine voice, which she used to great effect. Her looks were aesthetically pleasing as well, and I suspected she might originally be from the Karnbrunnen region – or if she was not, then she might yet make her fortune if she abandoned her nun's habit and fled this unpleasant castle.

The matron claimed there were no guest rooms available, for the simple reason that the Athenaeum currently suffered a lack of fuel to stoke its fires. "A terrible thing," she said, "the negligence that our suppliers are showing. I suppose this is what comes from being so close to Schlotstein; those people have always been contrary. Do you know, the order of our blessed goddess has to actively go there and check the school records to see which young women qualify to attend boarding school? Most of the people there don't bother to claim the privilege! Now what kind of woman would not want such a golden opportunity for her daughter?"

Looking at the girls in their drab dresses, shuffling out of the dining-hall under the watchful eye of sister Bollager, the school's hatchet-faced disciplinarian, I carefully refrained from answering that question. I also refrained from complaining when the sisters asked whether I would mind sleeping in the students' dormitory, rather than share a room with one of them.

"Slightly less luxurious, I'm afraid," as matron Grafleur explained, "but the dormitories are currently warmer than our own rooms. I'm sure everything will be better soon, when the next shipment of wood arrives. The merchants can't ignore our needs for much longer; I've even sent a sister to Luzander to plead our case."

I cannot say whether the dormitories were any more comfortable than the teachers' suites, my *Master*. All I can say is that they were plenty uncomfortable. The

hall I was admitted to must once have been one of the castle's wine cellars. It was roomy, but cold and dank; I swear I could hear the roar of the river through one of the walls.

As in the dining-hall, the space here was subdivided by furniture; in this case, large cots with threadbare blankets and sheets. Although the size of the beds initially appeared to me as a token of generosity not in keeping with the rest of the arrangements, I soon understood this was not the case; the students exchanged their drab uniforms for equally drab sleepwear and doubled up in the beds, sharing body heat to make it through the night. To my immense chagrin, I myself was obliged to do the same. My bedmate was a little mouse of a girl with large eyes, the face of an angel, and a mop of tow-headed curls that were one giant tangle. She introduced herself as Veronique.

"I hope you do not mind, Miss," she whispered when the candles were blown out and we lay there in the dark. "But I am happy you are here. We have an odd number of girls in this hall, and it gets so cold at night."

I made a noncommittal noise. When a thin little hand crept into mine, I refrained from commenting and simply closed my eyes to sleep. No need to rock the boat, as it were; come the dawn, I would either find something of interest here or be on my way.

I woke in the middle of the night, alerted by a tug on the string around my wrist, which I had tied to the handle of my travel-bag. There was a brief scuff of sound and I thought I smelled something unpleasant, a sense of a presence but it went away.

I lay there in the dark, waiting, listening. Around me, there was only the noise of the girls' regular breathing as they slept. Quite close to me, there was the breathing of



Veronique, who had curled up against me in her sleep. When I was certain none of them were awake, I muttered a single Word of Power and made the accompanying gesture, but the only magic I sensed was what I had brought in with me.

I waited until I fell asleep again.

Dawn came, and with it, sister Bollager, braying at the girls to get up with all the volume and eloquence of an army drill sergeant. Apparently, guests were no better than lazy students, and the woman tried to chivy me along out of the dormitory and up to the scullions' closet, where the girls were to receive the equipment they needed for morning chores.

When I reminded the sister that I was not a student, and declared I had no intention of being put to work, I thought she might break some of her vows by using profanity at me. In the end, she stormed off, bellowing at her charges all the louder while I took my time getting dressed – and studying my spellbook. I also made use of the opportunity to study the dormitory in greater detail, now that it was empty of people. I particularly checked underneath the bed I had slept in for any traces of what might have attempted to rob me in the dead of night, but came up empty.

Sister Mariette came to collect me for breakfast before I could try tapping the walls in search of secret passages and the like. While we walked to the dining-hall, she expressed her regret that I would not be allowed to sit at the head table on this occasion, citing school protocol, but invited me to attend any classes that might have my interest, or else to tour the school. I opted for the latter and asked whether I might have a student guide – a request which was graciously allowed.

After a breakfast of cold porridge without sugar or butter, accompanied by a mug of weak and watery milk, I was given the full

freedom of the Athenaeum – with the exception of any unused and therefore locked rooms – under the guidance of the meek little Veronique.

The child crept along behind me like a pale shadow at first, but as I continued to pelt her with questions she gradually opened up. In the end, she chattered happily about everything she knew about the Athenaeum. She confirmed my suspicion that the castle had once been the keep of a lesser nobleman, whose line had died out when he was executed on the same day King Arthur Weisücher III was executed for the crime of being a sub-par king.

She also showed me all the 'secret places', as she called them; doors to the keep's dungeon and towers which were not as securely locked as sister Bollager had thought. I quite enjoyed the view and the cold, bracing wind at the tower's high crenellations, and was pleased to see at least some of the castle's original wall-paintings had survived down in the disused dungeon. Veronique also showed me the servants' passages, in disuse since the sisters had converted the castle into a boarding school. I assume there must once have been spy-holes, but these had been shut off, turning the passages into a lightless maze, which Veronique traversed with the aid of a stub of candle and an excellent memory.

"If you listen at the walls, you can hear all sorts of things," she told me, and then suffered a giggling fit. "You have to be careful where you come out, though, and not to make too much noise. The sisters would be very cross if they knew I came here between lessons."

After these clandestine outings, Veronique guided me to classrooms not currently in use, and introduced me to the school's garden and the library.



As gardens go, the Athenaeum's is more functional than aesthetic, my *Master*, harboring as it does a selection of plants useful for medicinal and culinary purposes, but little in the way of pleasant blooms. I did manage to replenish a few of my dwindling supplies of ingredients there, but otherwise found the experience too utilitarian to be interesting.

The library, however, was a delight. I fear I spent more time perusing its tall, mahogany shelves and the wealth of volumes there than I should have; by the time Veronique managed to tear me away, the time for evensong and supper had already come, with much of the castle still unexplored.

No matter, I told myself. I could leave tomorrow as easily as today, and now I knew of the treasure this keep held. For treasure it was and is, my *Master*, countless works of scholarly insight greeted me there, as well as a handful of books of genuine arcane power. While Veronique busied herself studying a book of maps, I made some stealthy copies and pilfered some especially promising volumes for later study. I could not for the life of me imagine how genuine *grimoires* had found their way here, to a state-sponsored school in this magic-fearing land, but I was glad of it at the time.

Amusingly enough, I fancy my removal of those volumes as something of a good deed. They were incredibly precious, but also advanced, and of a dark slant. Should any of the wilting blossoms imprisoned in this cold keep have chanced upon them, they might well have been struck blind or mad, if they even survived dabbling their pale fingers in these waters.

The more I think on it, the more I wonder who put those books there, where any innocent fool could stumble across them during a bored exploration of the

stacks. More puzzling still, they all appeared to be part of a series, or so I judge from the fact that they all bore the same sign on the front cover and flyleaf; an eye before a solar disc.

The evening meal was no better than it had been the prior night. A thin pea stew which hinted of bacon without containing any, accompanied by a wine clearly uncorked before its time, followed by more prayer-song to Athena and a return to the cold dormitory.

"Did you enjoy the school, Miss?" Veronique asked me in the dark, her hand creeping into mine again. "I I liked showing you around. Classes can be so Well. I mustn't be ungrateful. My Mama would be sad if I was ungrateful and was sent home. You see..."

Quite unasked, I was treated to a story about three generations of innkeepers striving to get a girl into the famous boarding schools, where she would get an Education and return to improve the

Dread Possibility: The Radiant Eye

Hailing from outside Lilliend, the symbol of the Radiant Eye is the mark of a secret society known as the Viejos Sagrados. At this time, Ciska does not yet have knowledge of them.

By various ways, the Viejos Sagrados are attempting to spread knowledge of many things, the magical arts among them, and one of those ways is to secretly 'seed' foreign libraries with instruction manuals and grimoires of spells. Many who stumble upon the books left by agents of the Viejos Sagrados are indeed struck blind, go mad or even die while attempting things beyond their power, but this is of little concern to the society.

family's fortunes, bursting with vital knowledge and new ideas.

"Except I don't see how I'm supposed to do that with what they've taught us so far,"



Veronique whispered. "History is wonderful, of course, and I'd love to learn more geography. The world is so much bigger than I ever thought, and I'd love to see... But I think my Mama and Grand-Mère meant I was to study numbers, only the sisters say the numbers teacher died five years ago, and there isn't a replacement yet. Do you like numbers, Miss?"

We actually wound up discussing mathematics - "numbers", to a simple innkeeper's daughter - well into the night, my *Master*. I am allowed to instruct a child in that subject; it is not magic, it does not say anything of your grand designs of conquest, and the girl was... Well. She was like parched earth, drinking in the clear waters of knowledge. It was a *delight* to instruct her; she asked intelligent questions and she retained what I taught her. I do not think I have ever met a young person so eager to learn, so determined to better herself.

I could almost have been fond of little Veronique.

Again, my sleep was disturbed. No tug on my string, but something else. I looked about, seeing nothing... but there was a scuff of sound, and a stench on the air. Only when I felt Veronique trembling against my side did I realize how cold it had gotten - cold far in excess even of a converted wine cellar in a draughty old keep.

There was a sound of whimpering in the air, whimpering and muted sobs.

The smell ... Sulphur and blood.

My vision doubled, and I saw slime pour down the walls, saw the faces screaming without sound, the eyes mutely begging me to do something. The little hairs on the back of my neck stood on end and I - acted impulsively. I sat up, declaimed the Words of a spell I use rarely, but always keep in

reserve. Light, the bright and golden light of day, blazed on the palm of my hand.

At the far end of the dormitory, I saw a feline shape standing with its front legs on top of one of the bunks, its head bowed over one of the occupants. It flinched when the lights came on, snarled at me with red hatred in its eyes and blood on its fangs. Its voice was hideous, as was its appearance.

Then something attacked my magic, snuffing it out and returning darkness to the hall. By the time I cast a lesser spell of light, the beast was gone, but around me all the girls were in an uproar, crying and wailing.

I got out of the bed, snatched up my sword cane and walked down the aisle, girls parting before me as though I were some dread figure of out of their most frightening legends. But for all of that, they fell in behind me, the screaming and sobbing turning to worried whispers. I stopped at the bed where I had seen the beast and looked down on the two girls who had slept there.

Technically, they still slept. But their pale faces and the bleeding wounds on their chests told me this was not proper sleep. Something had drained their blood.

Dawn came, but the whole Athenaeon was already awake and in an uproar long before then.

The sisters were not well-pleased to find a 'witch' in their company - no amount of correction could convince them to see me as anything other than some savage follower of Brightwell - but the discovery of the mauled students trumped their discomfort.

It certainly trumped the students' misgivings. They had become downright garrulous, compared to their muted chatter at meals so far, and I seemed to have become a minor celebrity, all the more for applying quick medical aid to the afflicted girls, who were now resting more naturally



in a separate room under the gentle care of sister Mariette.

Matron Grafleur questioned me at some length, sister Bollager glowering at me over her shoulder the whole time. I kept my wits about me, managed to deflect questions that threatened to probe too deeply into my origins, and spun the tale of a scholar on a grand quest for knowledge of the wider world. My presence at the Athenaeum, I reminded the sisters, was due to mischance

*Simple-minded peasants. An
arcanist of sufficient skill
could have pulled it off with
none of those little "wilting
blossoms" any the wiser.*

and the fickle weave of fortune, not by my own design. No tool nor spell I had in my possession could have drained the blood from those girls, not to mention the fact that I had dozens of witnesses that I had only gotten out of bed *after* the attack occurred.

Finally, the sisters admitted I was unlikely to be the culprit. Unfortunately, I found myself drafted into their planned effort to smoke the beast out, wherever it might lurk. I suppose I could have refused point blank and simply departed, but your instruction to learn as much about this benighted land as I could prevented me from doing so; I was confident that I could handle a single night-stalker, and there was always the possibility that it could be shackled to your purpose, my *Master*.

Therefore, I feel confident in deflecting most of the blame for what happened away from myself. I shan't be so crass as to say who is truly to blame.

In spite of my reservations and advice to the contrary, the sisters insisted on locking the students in one of the classrooms, and then moving through the castle in pairs, with myself partnered with the unpleasant sister Bollager, starting with the dormitory and moving outward from there.

Quite obviously, the sound advice offered by Dr. Rudolph Van Richten has not managed to pierce the misty divide between Lilliend and the Core. My own recommendation that we start by more closely examining the wounds on the girls who were attacked or questioning the other students as to whether they had ever noticed any nocturnal incursions were ignored in favour of 'prompt action'.

My feelings on the matter were not at all improved by learning that the sisters were not possessed of any kind of magical nor martial training. I felt slightly mollified by the fact that, once we arrived at the dormitory, they allowed me to take the lead in the investigation.

A broad sweep of minor divination spells brought nothing to light. No spells other than my own had been cast in the dormitory. A careful examination of the walls, however, brought to light a section that looked the same as all the rest, but rang hollow. Using my peerless skill in the location of hidden passages, I found a trigger that caused a section of wall to swing inward, revealing a corridor that looked rather different from the servants' passages that Veronique had shown me...

And then the lights went out for me.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a chamber without doors, only dimly lit through narrow windows high above. My equipment – sword cane, travel



bag, pistols – were all gone. In their stead, I had been gifted with a fine headache and a lump on the back of my head. I discovered I had been sharing the space with an ancient skeleton, which was chained to the wall. Being not so encumbered myself, I started looking for the way out.

I lacked the thick, velvet roll with all the little knives, rods and other tools of the lockpicker's trade, and whoever had hit me – indubitably one of those sisters, whatever their reason might have been – had managed to discover the little pockets sewn into my sleeves, which contained my emergency picks. I had no trouble finding the hidden door that could let me out of this wretched oubliette, but I did not have the means to open it, lest I hit it with my strongest blasting-spell – which would be unwise in such confined quarters!

Frustrated, I beat my fists against the door – and it opened, tumbling me into a dark passage. Startled, I rolled and sprang to my feet, only to see little Veronique standing there, holding her stub of candle and looking very pale.

"I snuck out," she told me. "When the sisters locked us in the classroom. There's a servants' passage that ... I snuck out. Some of the other girls went, too, but they wanted to know the way to the castle gate. I think ... I think they wanted to run away home. Their families will be so disappointed. But I ... I wanted to know what you were going to do. About the monster cat. So, I followed you all back to the dormitory. There's a spyhole. I saw them hit you and carry you into the tunnel. I'm sorry it took me so long, I didn't know these tunnels were here."

She had just saved me, and yet she was almost in tears because she had not found me sooner. I forgave her most graciously and suggested we follow the lead of her fellow students, taking our leave from this

fetid castle. I may have used stronger language than 'fetid'; it made her blush. And giggle.

To her credit, Veronique had managed to find me despite having to navigate tunnels she was completely unfamiliar with, following subtle cues like scuffmarks and bits of thread caught on the brickwork while dodging the sisters, who were presumably much more familiar with the tunnels. For that reason, I cannot find it in myself to truly blame her for getting us lost when she tried to find us the way out. Even the finest memory suffers from stress, and it was a stressful situation.

Again to her credit, she realized quite soon that we had gotten turned around, and she tried to guide us back along our steps.

Unfortunately, her candle burned out before we got to a point she could recognize, and I had not bothered to study my light-spell this morning. We wound up blindly groping our way through dark corridors, both of us straining our hearing for anything that might hint at a way out – or pursuit.

In the end, we stumbled onto the door entirely by accident.

I recall the rough grain of the oakwood, the thick iron bands, and the intense relief I felt when the thing opened at a push and light spilled into the corridor we had been feeling our way along. We hurried inside, which was my second big mistake of the day, and the door slammed shut behind us without either one of us touching it.

"This is," Veronique whimpered while she tried to hide behind me. "What *is* this?"

It was, simply put, a suite of luxurious rooms. Thick carpets on the floor, luxurious tapestries on the walls, furniture that would have fetched a pretty penny even at an auction in Dementlieu. Everburning torches in wall-sconces illuminated the scene, and



silver censers hanging from the ceiling spread clouds of scent to perfume the air. So far, it all sounds pleasant, does it not, my *Master*? It was not.

The predominant colour in these rooms was red. Red carpet. Red cushions on the furniture. Many of the tableaux depicted on the tapestries were in shades of red and shocking pink. I shan't bother you with the details, but Veronique was not the only one who tried not to look too closely at the pictures. Suffice it to say, they all involved women. The smell coming from the censers was ... earthy, rather than sweet, and cloying. It reminded me of peasants burning fungus-riddled dung they did not dare spread over the acres.

I might have tried to force the door open and try the tunnels again, if not for a familiar sensation. With Veronique clinging to my skirts like a frightened child – which she was, really – I traced the feeling through two more luxuriously crimson rooms into what I might generously call a study. Unlike the one I encountered in the Tower of the Last King, however, this study was all display and no content. The furniture was of the highest quality, but the books in the cabinet against the back wall were either untouched, or else specimens of Lilliend's odious romantic novel, or even worse: bundles of juvenile poetry. None of that mattered, however, when I saw my trusty travel-bag, holy symbol of the Eternal Order and sword cane lying on the desktop, next to a small pile of letters. There was some debris littered around my prized items; someone had tried to use magic to analyze my property, and they had struggled to break the seal on my travel-bag.

I took a brief moment to look at the topmost letter. As I recall, it read as follows:

Dear Cousin,

I beg you, have mercy on me! There is only one daughter left in my house; she has to be my heir. In compensation, I beg you accept this offering.

She is of no royal blood that I could discover, but she has looks, and her red hair is very fine. The girl's personality is toxic by all accounts, but she appears to have a sharp mind.

Again, I point out her hair, and remind you that she seems to favour redheads of late.

If this one is not compensation enough for her, tell her I will send more, many more.

Just please let me keep my last daughter. I can have no more children.

Please.

Yours,

Évalie Grafleur

So. I was to be a sacrificial lamb, 'toxic personality' and all? But not with my equipment restored to me, not when I had my wits about me and a dash of good luck to speed me along my way!

With a triumphant smirk, I slung my bag over my shoulder, took up my cane and wound my holy symbol's chain around the handle – and I felt the pulse of energy as a minor ward was triggered. Veronique did not need telling that it was past time to go, and we made our way back towards the door. I grabbed one of the everburning torches on our way, thinking we could use it to guide our steps outside. Veronique moved ahead while I was judging the correct angle at which to hold the torch so my travel-bag would not slip off my shoulder – and I heard her gasp and start to scream.

I say 'start', because her voice was almost immediately cut off.

No doubt you will sneer and roll your eyes to hear that I ran after her at once, my



Master, but the girl was useful to me. Without her, it would take me far longer to navigate the passages and make my way outside. Oh, I did not doubt that I could turn those worthless sisters into mince if I could see them coming, but I did not feel ready to do it at that time.

And so it came to pass that I ran into the anteroom of the red suite, just in time to see sister Daisy sink her teeth into Veronique's chest. The sister looked considerably less drab than the last time I had seen her, all decked out in red velvet, edged with red lace, with rubies sparkling at her ears, fingers and throat.

Bloodsuckers. They can be so frightfully cliché'd.

The sister lifted her face to give me a disinterested look, then lowered it again to continue her feast, grunting and snorting like a wild boar, digging for food. Veronique hung in her grip like a puppet with its strings cut, her eyes seeking mine, full of wild terror – and then there was a brief look of shock in them, followed by relief as the life faded from their depths.

Sister Daisy made a wild noise of denial and dropped the still-warm corpse, hissed at me with her vampire's fangs bared while I edged back, bloodied sword cane held up between us.

"That was *mine!*" the sister growled, her eyes Hell-bright and her hands curved into claws. "She was to be *mine!*"

"She served me," I countered.

"Therefore, you were trying to steal what was mine, and I was within my rights to terminate it."

That seemed to annoy her; she yowled and leapt at me like a great cat. I ducked out of the way and stabbed her, she tried to bat my blade aside – and suddenly screamed and leaped back, clutching at her smoking wound as the pain caused by ensorcelled steel got through to her.

"In the name of the final end, *BE GONE!*" I thundered, holding up my holy symbol so it caught the illumination from the everburning torches, and gleams of light danced across the vampire's face.

For a moment, she cowered; then she grinned hideously, Veronique's blood still on her teeth.

"That takes more than words, you filthy little peasant," she taunted me. "It takes *faith!*"

I freely admit my faith in the Eternal Order's grim patrons is not as great as yours, my *Master*. I am, however, much quicker on the draw when it comes to wielding combat-spells, and with my travel-bag in my possession I had access to my spell components once again. While the filthy undead was still laughing at me, I peppered her with a barrage of force-missiles. And while she was still screaming at the pain, I turned and ran.

My thought was to find a place where I could put my back against a solid wall and rake the undead with battle-spells until she was weak enough that I dared close in with my sword cane. Instead, I found myself running from one room to another, always with another doorway opening up ahead, making the place unsuitable for what I had in mind. I needed a place with only one access, or the filthy beast would circle around as a wisp of fog or a rat or something.

Onward I ran, the screams and curses of the vampire behind me – and darkness racing to catch me up. The everburning torches were going out as the vampire



passed them. I found I did not want to fight this beast in the dark, not with my second sight showing me that the walls in this suite ran with more screaming slime, more girls' faces telling me without words to run, *run!*

Terror gnawed at my heels, and almost cast me to my doom. Abruptly, I burst into a room with natural light. What purpose it originally may have served, I do not know, but the back wall had been shattered, allowing the cold, crisp air of autumn in, and affording me a glorious view of the Widow's Daughter that flowed past the Athenaeum. I turned, triumphantly outlined by sunlight, to face the vampire in its aura of darkness. Our eyes met, and I felt an influence claw at my will; I beat it aside with hardly any effort.

"Step into the light, vampire," I taunted the beast while I mentally rehearsed the strongest spell available to me. "I will end your suffering."

She snarled at that – and affected a startling transformation. From the ghastly pallor of the undead, her skin turned pink; her fangs receded; her eyes ceased glowing *and she did indeed step into the light without any sign of pain or fear!*

The shock of it disrupted my concentration. Seeing that the creature's wound, inflicted by my trusty sword cane, had started to bleed like a proper mortal wound completely flummoxed me. I had heard of magic capable of restoring the dead to life, of course, and I had heard of spells that allow clever undead to mimic the living. But I had never *seen* them being cast right in front of me, and with such quick ease!

"I," she said, "will end yours."

I started to gabble out the Words that would fill the air in front of me with fire. She beat me to the punch, casting a spell that hit me like a charging bull ... and hurled me out into empty air. As I hurtled downward, I

Dread Possibility: Our Children Pay For The Future

Most if not all boarding schools in Lilliend serve as feeding grounds for the first of the Lilliender vampires: Camille Churnstone. Sometimes generations pass without a single disappearance at any boarding school. Other times, girls disappear on a weekly basis from several schools at once.

It all depends on how hungry Camille is, or whether she has taken a fancy to one of the girls and is feeding to enhance her powers and appeal. Regardless of what happens, as soon as a girl is admitted to a Lilliender boarding school, she is in very real danger of becoming Camille's meal or her thrall.

Worse yet, many people, especially those in a position of power, *know* this is so, and yet they still keep sending girls to the boarding schools. The last time people started to balk at sending their daughters and granddaughters to Camille's larders, never knowing whether they might get them back in one piece, was in the wake of the Lockstone Rebellion – and that resulted in the long drought, which only ended when the Lenkherrs took the throne and the 'supply route' to the boarding schools was normalised.

Faced with the threat of another drought, one which could last even longer and potentially decimate all of Lilliend, people continue to sacrifice their daughters to the beast.

saw the vampire – the creature, whatever she was – peer after me. I heard her hateful laugh.

Then I hit the freezing cold water of the Widow's Daughter, and the current had me. All was pain, all was confusion, and I did not have any attention to spare for the beast that had defeated me by exploiting my surprise.



Parting Thoughts

The bloodsucker underestimated me.

I am bruised and battered, bloodied from where my body was dashed against rocks both sharp and blunt, but I survive.

I found myself washed up on the bank of the river. The moon was just peeking over the horizon. In the distance, I could barely make out the many towers of Schlotstein.

My Firstborn was guarding me, and was keeping watch over my travel-bag, my cane ... and a letter written in your hand, my *Master*. I compliment you on somehow getting it to me, past the misty divide, and I wonder as to which method you might have used to pull off this feat.

While I vehemently disagree with your criticism that I had put myself forward too much during this initial investigation, not to mention your slanderous claim that I had made a dog's dinner of my duties, I do agree with your command to leave Lilliend post-haste.

Night is upon this foul land, with its many unseen edges, and the beast is no doubt sniffing along the river, hoping to find my corpse.

Schlotstein is nigh, therefore so is the great slope that leads down and out of Lilliend. I will sneak past the Lockstone and Lenkherr patrols under cover of darkness and the spells remaining to me. The land of Conquista comes next on my tour of this Cluster; I find it hard to see how *the* place could be worse than this one.

When you come through the Mists, ready to invade, I recommend you move forcefully, my *Master*. Forcefully and quickly. Shatter the dams that control the Widow's Daughters and the Bitter Daughters, let the waters bring death and destruction to herald your coming.

Next, find a way to ally yourself with the Lockstones. Rouse them to battle once

again. The people of Lilliend still live with the memories of the first Lockstone Rebellion. If you set them at the throat of this benighted land, all who have fight in them will rise up to do battle – and you will know them, will be able to target them.

While the fools fight, insinuate yourself into their precious cities, the monuments of the history they cuddle like a stuffed toy against the night. Make them rot and die from the inside out, let panic and war rip this land asunder. When the 'noble' families fail once again to protect them, I guarantee that the common people will embrace any leader who offers salvation.

With all the magic you can bring to bear, my Master, you can easily be that leader. You can be their hero – until you decide that role has served its purpose.

Regards,
Ciska

Attached Notes: DM' s Appendix

Warped History

False and true history in Lilliend are hopelessly muddled, reflecting the flawed memory of the Darklady around whose mad selfishness the land grew.

Although both Maximilian Lockstone and Ciska have found archaeological evidence that there have been several waves of invasion, starting with the Elves, followed by the Lenkherr, and finally the ancestral Lock- and Churnstones, there is no historical record that reflects these events.

That the Lockstones and Churnstones were once one people is fairly evident from their resemblance to one another, but memory of the fact is mostly forgotten – in no small part because Camille Churnstone



hates the Lockstones for trying to change the land.

Visitors to Lilliend may unearth the same evidence the characters of this Gazetteer have done. If they reveal it to the public, they may be met with any reaction ranging from scornful denial to wide-eyed wonder – but they will almost certainly reap the wrath of a Darklady who does not want her people to compare the past to the present or consider the future, but to maintain the stasis she is used to.

New Magic

Land-based powers

If a fiend should choose to perform a Power ritual while within Lilliend and is successful in its efforts, it would gain the *Killing thirst*-power. Once a day, a fiend with this ability can cause all creatures living and undead within its reality wrinkle to suffer the effect of the spell *Cup of dust*.

Spells

Artificial Hibernation

Render a slave comatose so it does not use up resources.

Necromancy [Evil]

Level: Alchemist 5, Cleric 5,
Sorcerer/Wizard 5

Components: V, S, M*

Casting time: 10 minutes

Range: Touch

Target: One undead spawn of the caster's own making

Duration: Until dispelled

Saving throw: Fort. negates

Spell resistance: No

Sometimes an undead master has a need for a batch of new slaves but does not wish to give up control over existing thralls. *Artificial Hibernation* allows them to have

their cake and eat it, too – metaphorically speaking.

By braising the brain and heart of a full-grown humanoid creature of the sire's own base type into a stew, and feeding it to a thrall while chanting the lengthy spell, the master can force their slave to enter a state of hibernation from which it cannot wake itself. The thrall appears to be simply dead and is helpless while it remains in this state (although it still registers as undead to any magic used to investigate it), but no longer counts against its master's maximum number of Hit Dice of undead servants it can have under its control – unless it is woken again.

Not only the master can rouse the enspelled thrall from its slumber; any creature that chances upon and touches it can break the spell. Many a thrall displays unusual gratitude to anyone who wakes it, even before giving in to its hunger; the sleep inflicted upon them by *Artificial Hibernation* is full of terrible nightmares.

Ring of Ebon Dark

Aura: Moderate evocation CL 7th

Slot: Ring

Price: 11.000 gp

Weight: -

This jointed ring of black, glittering stone grants the wearer the power to cast *Dancing darkness* 3/day, *Darkness* 2/day, and *Deeper darkness* once a day.

Alternatively, the wearer can use the ring's powers to directly counteract and nullify the effects of *dancing lights*, *light* and *daylight* by respectively using a charge of *dancing darkness*, *darkness*, or *deeper darkness*, no save given.

Construction requirements: Forge Ring; *dancing darkness*; *darkness*; *deeper darkness*; *dispel magic*.



Artefacts

Two items, secrets so carefully guarded that Ciska only unearthed one hint of their existence during a year of investigating Lilliend, lie hidden somewhere in the land.

The Lenkherr Ruby

Although this ruby, which is the size of the last joint on a grown man's thumb, is now named for the Lenkherr family, legend indicates it was once the property of the Weisücher, who considered it to be a drop of Harbrye's blood, fallen upon the earth after the first birth of Kurhan. It radiates powerful Divination magic if quickened, but when dormant appears to be a normal – albeit extremely valuable – stone. The stone also reacts to spells of Detect Undead and similar effects, as it appears to be haunted.

The same family legends claim the first Lenkherr either stole the Ruby or won it off of the Weisücher family in a bet whose terms have been lost to history. Regardless, the Lenkherr were the stewards of the Ruby at the time that Lilliend was drawn into the Mists along with its dread Lady, and they were aware of its power.

If awakened by a gift of heart's blood, which must be given freely by two members of the four great families of Lilliend, the Ruby grants to its owner the gift of knowledge once a day: knowledge of the full name, current appearance and current location of the land's greatest enemy.

Olivia Lenkherr awakened the Ruby on the field of battle when she met Maximilian Lockstone – but history does not record that Maximilian had already suffered mortal wounds and was dying in agony, nor that he asked Olivia to strike him down so that she might use his heart's blood to quicken the Ruby. In the name of their friendship and in order to know the truth of things, Olivia did the deed and then slit her own

palm over the stone. The Ruby was quickened, and Olivia became aware of the existence of Camille Churnstone – and the fact that she had been masquerading as a high-ranking servant of Helena Weisücher.

Wounded in mind and body, Olivia was taken into the care of the nuns of Athena – who poisoned her due to Camille's machinations. Unfortunately for her, Olivia had taken precautions, and the Ruby had already been delivered to her daughter, along with instructions to combine it with the Lockstone Silver.

The Lenkherr Ruby is currently set on the pommel of the royal sword of Lilliend, and in the possession of Queen Alexandra Lenkherr. It is also haunted by the ghost of Olivia Lenkherr. Sick with grief over the fact that she fought against her old friend, when what the Ruby taught her meant she should have battled at his side, Olivia is unable to relinquish her ties to the mortal world and lingers in the stone, awaiting the day that someone will wield it to defeat the true enemy of Lilliend and set the people free. Ten times, thieves have attempted to steal the stone from the sword. Ten times, Olivia has driven them away in madness or cast them into death. And as long as she haunts the Lenkherr Ruby, it will not go dormant...

The Lockstone Silver

This masterwork silver longsword, which has no other name than 'the Silver', travelled into Lilliend along with the ancestral Lockstones and Churnstones, when their turn to invade the land had come. When the Churnstones split off to settle at the edge of *L'Haut*, the ancestral blade remained at the very edge of the final descent, 'to defend against the evil that might follow'. Although neither Churnstone nor Lockstone family lore records what evil this might be, the Lockstones treasured the sword as the true symbol of their family and



duty towards the people, more than any flag or other symbol of authority. Only Maximilian Lockstone, the first Wizard to be born into the family in generations, discovered the true qualities of the sword – and he hid his findings from all save Olivia Lenkherr, and that at the day of his death.

If awakened by a gift of heart's blood, which must be drawn from two members of the four great families of Lilliend, the Silver becomes a +2 holy silver longsword. If wielded against the greatest enemy of Lilliend, it will suppress that enemy's supernatural, spell-like, and extraordinary abilities so long as its bearer has a clear line of sight on that enemy.

Olivia Lenkherr arranged for the Silver to be hidden among the possessions of her own family before she was murdered by nuns of Athena due to Camille's machinations, and left instructions for her daughter. Currently, the Silver masquerades as the royal sword of Lilliend, and is in the possession of Queen Alexandra Lenkherr. It remains 'awake' and ready to slay the true enemy of Lilliend because the ghost of its last Lockstone master, Maximilian, still dwells in the land.

Bound to his tower home even now, the lord of Lockstone retains his grip on the world of mortals so the blade will not fall asleep before it can slay the land's greatest enemy.

Unfortunately, this may not last much longer; Maximilian is tormented by his memories of quickening the blade. As Maximilian had conceived his first child with his bride, Camille had sent an assassin to dispatch him. She did not know – could not know – whether the child was to be a boy or a girl, but

Dread Possibility: Queen of the Sword

Queen Alexandra Lenkherr (female human Aristocrat 8) is not the only person in the government of Lilliend to know of the true darkness that festers at the heart of her nation.

But she *is* the only person who can, with complete certainty, say where Camille Churnstone is at any given time, and who she looks like. As a consequence, the Queen of Lilliend can, with little difficulty, compile a full and accurate list of all of Camille's crimes by combining her knowledge of the Darklady's movements and reports of disappearances and deaths.

In addition, Queen Alexandra suspects she is also the only one who has the means to put an end to the Darklady's reign; the royal sword she carries with her would cut off most of Camille's unnatural advantages just by being near her. The problem is, Alexandra cannot find in herself the courage needed to challenge the monster; too much could go wrong, and Alexandra knows that the vampire's revenge against all of Lilliend would be catastrophic.

Far from being a typical self-indulgent Lenkherr monarch, Alexandra's days and nights are filled with terrible feelings of guilt as she watches her land devoured from within by corrupt nobles, its youth preyed upon by a selfish predator, and she is too afraid to lift her hand and do anything. As time marches on, Alexandra fears that her window of opportunity is closing; if she grows too old to wield the royal sword, someone else would have to take her place, and she is horrified by the notion of charging one of her daughters with the knowledge and guilt that have made her life a living hell ever since her dying mother entrusted her with the blade.

If only someone could support her, reassure her that they could back her up if she were to challenge the true enemy of Lilliend, be a shield against the vampire's spells and block off her ways of escaping... If only.



frankly did not care, so long as she could be rid of the only man in Lilliend to hold political power.

Maximilian was better able to defend himself than most men would have been in his position, and he managed to severely wound the vampire who attacked him in his study with magic. The undead fled – and chanced upon the heavily pregnant Canelle Lockstone-Lenkherr. Before Maximilian could catch and dispatch the assassin, she had already disemboweled poor Canelle – and Maximilian understood the full meaning of the oracle's warning that he would have to wed to awaken the Silver, and that love would destroy him as well as save him. As the empty days and nights pass, the lord of Lockstone relives his memory of bathing the Silver in the mingled blood of his bride and his unborn child, and how it came alive in his hands, as well as the horrors of the war that followed. If the pain ever becomes too much for him to bear, Maximilian is free to depart for the afterlife any time he chooses – and the Silver will fall dormant and need to be quickened all over again.

New Monsters :

Lilliender Vampire

This slender, black-liveried beauty lifts her head from the blood-stained chest of the child you came seeking, and smiles at you, baring her fangs. As she starts to sway in your direction, her form shimmers and shifts into that of a great cat, its eyes Hell-bright.

Lilliender Vampires are a strain of vampiric undead which arose in the land of Lilliend with Camille Churnstone's rise to power. They are undead humanoid creatures that feed on the blood of the living, inflicting wounds on the chest of their victims with their sharp eye-teeth, and sucking blood therefrom.

All Lilliender Vampires are female, not only because of Camille's preferences, but due to an inability to process the blood of males (see **Weaknesses**). While most representatives of this vampiric strain still dwell in Lilliend, slaves to its Darklady, a few have managed to escape beyond the domain's borders – and thus the control of the Darklady – and into the wider world, where they can 'breed' in quiet corners.

Creating a Lilliender Vampire

"Lilliender Vampire" is an acquired template that can be added to any living female humanoid with 5 or more Hit Dice (referred to hereafter as the base creature). The Lilliender Vampire uses the base creature's stats and abilities except as noted here.

CR: Same as the base creature +2

AL: Any Evil.

Type: The creature's type changes to undead (augmented). Do not recalculate class Hit Dice, BAB, or saves.

Senses: A Lilliender Vampire gains Darkvision 60 ft. If the base creature already has Darkvision, increase its range by 60 ft.

Hit Dice: Change all racial Hit Dice to d10s. Class Hit Dice are unaffected. As undead, Lilliender Vampires use their Charisma modifier to determine bonus hit points instead of Constitution.

Defensive abilities: A Lilliender Vampire gains channel resistance +4, SR 10, DR 10/magic and silver, and resistance to cold and electricity 10, in addition to all the defensive abilities granted by the undead type. A Lilliender Vampire also gains fast healing 5/round. If reduced to 0 hit points in combat, a Lilliender Vampire falls dormant until its fast healing restores it to positive hit points; it is helpless until that time.

Weaknesses: Lilliender Vampires display a strong allergic reaction to the



blood of male creatures and avoid feeding on it whenever possible. If they drain the blood or the life force of a male creature unto the victim's death (respectively by blood drain and the energy drain associated with its slam attack), the Lilliender Vampire is herself destroyed the next round, disintegrating into dust. In addition, they cannot tolerate the scent of roses or wild thyme and will not enter an area laced with it. Similarly, they recoil from mirrors or strongly presented holy symbols; these do not do the creature any actual harm, but merely force it to stay at least 5 feet away from the offending item, and they cannot make touch or melee attacks against the one wielding them. Holding the Lilliender Vampire at bay requires a standard action every round.

Lilliender Vampires cannot enter a private home or dwelling without invitation of the inhabitant(s), or the express permission from a local ruler or Darklord. Sunlight is a lethal bane to them; the first round of exposure to sunlight staggers them; the second consecutive round destroys them unless they manage to escape or shield themselves against the light. Driving a wooden stake through a helpless Lilliender Vampire's heart renders the monster dormant; it will not be able to rise, even if summoned by its sire, until the stake is removed. To truly destroy the creature, however, its head must be severed from the neck and the mouth stuffed full of bread, which has been consecrated by a Cleric of any alignment. When killed in this manner, the Lilliender Vampire's body immediately becomes subject to the decay its undead state had held at bay and is destroyed.

Speed: Increase the base creature's speed by 20 ft.

Melee: The Lilliender Vampire gains a slam attack if the base creature did not

have one. Damage for the slam attack depends on the Lilliender Vampire's size, and also bestows energy drain damage. The slam (but no other natural attack) is treated as a magic weapon for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Special attacks:

Blood Drain (Su): A Lilliender Vampire can suck blood from a grappled or otherwise helpless victim. If the Lilliender Vampire establishes or maintains a pin, it can drain blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage. The vampire heals 5 hit points or gains 5 temporary hit points (up to a maximum number equal to its normal full hit points) each round it drains blood.

Create Spawn (Su): A Lilliender Vampire can create spawn out of female humanoids with at least 5 Hit Dice it kills with blood drain or energy drain. Males and females with less than 5 Hit Dice simply perish and remain dead. The creature rises from death as a Lilliender Vampire in 1d4 days and is under the command the creature that created it until the time that its sire is destroyed. A Lilliender Vampire may have no more quickened enslaved spawn than twice its own Hit Dice, with any spawn which exceed this limit becoming free, but clever sires use magic or alchemical poisons to render any spawn they do not immediately require in an artificial state of hibernation, keeping them in reserve.

Energy Drain (Su): A creature hit by a Lilliender Vampire's slam attack gains two negative levels. This ability only triggers once per round, regardless of the number of attacks a Lilliender Vampire makes.

Special qualities:

Change Shape (Su): A Lilliender Vampire can assume the form of a normal or half-fiend cat, cougar (as leopard) or lioness.



Shadowless (Ex): A Lilliender Vampire casts neither shadow nor reflection in any of her forms.

Spider Climb (Ex): A Lilliender Vampire can climb sheer surfaces as though under the effect of a *spider climb* spell.

Ability scores: Str +6, Dex +6, Wis +2, Cha +8. As an undead creature, the Lilliender Vampire has no Constitution score.

Skills: Lilliender Vampires gain a +8 racial bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Perception, Sense Motive and Stealth checks. They are savvy manipulators who are forever alert to threats.

Feats: Lilliender Vampires who qualify for these feats gain Dodge, Hypnotism, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Spring Attack and Toughness as bonus feats. If they do not qualify for any of these feats at creation but later manage to meet the prerequisites, they gain access to the feat(s) in question.

Who's Doomed : Camille Churnstone, Darklady of Lilliend

Female human Lilliender Vampire Sorcerer
15 (Maestro bloodline)

CR 17

Size Medium

Init +1; Senses Darkvision 60 ft.;
Perception +10

Defence

AC 18 (+3 Dex., +1 Dodge, +4 mage
armour)

HD 15d6+135+15; hp 198

Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +11

Offense

Speed 50 ft

Melee +10/+5 Dagger of wounding;
1d4+3+bleed; 19-20/x2 +8/+3 Slam;
1d4+1+2 negative levels; x2 +8/+3
Unarmed strike; 1d3+1; x2

Ranged +12/+7 Dagger of wounding;
1d4+3+bleed; 19/20/x2; 10 ft.

Statistics Str 13, Dex 16, Con -, Int 10, Wis
15, Cha 29

Base atk +7/+2; **CMB** +8; **CMD** +21

Feats Brew Greater Potion*, Brew Potion,
Dodge, Empower Spell, Eschew
Materials, Forge Ring, Hypnotism **,
Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative,
Improved Unarmed Strike, Lightning
reflexes, Mobility, Persuasive, Run,
Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Enchantment),
Spell Focus (Necromancy), Spring
Attack, Toughness

*This feat is taken from the 3.5 supplement
'Dark Tales and Disturbing Legends'.

**This feat is taken from Ryan Naylor's
Ravenloft-Pathfinder conversion guide,
Domains of Dread.

Skills Bluff +25, Craft (alchemy) +13,
Diplomacy +22, Fly +11, Heal +12,
Intimidate +25, Knowledge (arcana)
+8, Knowledge (local) +5, Perception
+10, Perform (poetry) +18, Sense
Motive +10, Spellcraft +8, Stealth +11

Traits Anatomist; Heart of Poetry

Special qualities Beguiling voice 12/day DC
19; Blood drain; Cantrips; Change
shape; Close the borders; Create
spawn; Darklord's curse; Energy drain;
Fascinate 3/day DC 26; Fast healing 5;
Inspire 1/day; Perfect voice;
Shadowless; Sinkhole of evil; Skilled;
Spiderclimb

Languages Lelender*

Equipment 1d4 Alchemist's fire; alchemist's
lab; crystal ball; +2 dagger of



wounding; hand of glory; 1d4 potions of flesh to stone; 1d4 potions of gaseous form; 1d4 potions of touch of the doppelganger; ring of ebon darkness; ring of freedom of movement; ring of mimic mortal (18th level); ring of protection from acid; ring of protection from fire; ring of protection from lightning; ring of protection from sonic; signet ring (Churnstone); 1d4 smokesticks; tanglefoot bag; thunderstone; unholy water.

Magic Spells/day: 9/8/8/8/8/7/5

Save DC: 19 + spell level, 20 + spell level for all Enchantment and Necromancy spells, marked by the + -sign.

Spells known:

- 7: Control weather, Power word blind +, Prismatic spray
- 6: Circle of death +, Flesh to stone, Forceful hand, Mass suggestion +
- 5: Artificial hibernation**** +, Beast shape III, Dominate person +, Shadow evocation, Teleport
- 4: Charm monster +, Mimic mortal*, Shout, Stoneskin, Touch of the doppelganger**
- 3: Fireball, Gaseous form, Protection from energy, Slow, Suggestion +
- 2: Blindness/Deafness +, Disguise other***, Flaming sphere, Haunting mists***, Hideous laughter +, Knock
- 1: Disguise self, Ear-piercing scream***, Expeditious retreat, Mage armour, Ventriloquism, Vocal alteration
- 0: Arcane mark, Bleed, Daze +, Detect magic, Ghost sound, Light, Mage hand, Mending, Read magic

* This spell is taken from Ryan Naylor's Ravenloft-Pathfinder conversion guide, Domains of Dread.

** This spell is taken from the 3.5 Ravenloft supplement, 'Dark Tales and Disturbing Legends'.

*** This spell is taken from Ultimate Magic.

**** This is a new spell, provided in this Gazetteer.

Background

Once, in a land far distant and barely recognizable as the precursor of the Lilliend that exists in the Demiplane of Dread, there was a family known as Churnstone. This family belonged to the lesser nobility of its Lilliend, a nation forged by generations of invasion, war, and finally through peace and diplomacy, which drew its wealth from the great marble quarries on its territory. In one generation, the family was blessed with twin daughters: Camille and Amaranth.

Amaranth was vivacious and outgoing, a people-person, levelheaded but joyful.

Camille, on the other hand, was lazy and listless. She cared about sleep, writing gloomy poetry for her own entertainment, and only one person besides herself: her beautiful sister, who looked most like her.

Camille's parents were very surprised when their withdrawn poet displayed a new fire, right after Amaranth's engagement, to a handsome young man from a family of the high nobility, was announced. Camille screamed, she cried herself sick, she whined, she nagged, she argued endlessly, all to the effect that the engagement should be cancelled, and Amaranth should stay at her side. None of it succeeded, and Camille's heart was broken when Amaranth firmly told her that the engagement was *her* will and she would brook no further interference from her sister.

Camille had always possessed sorcerous ability, but she had simply accepted it and let it lie fallow. Now did she strain her powers to the utmost in a last-ditch attempt

to turn the tide. She spent her not inconsiderable allowance on arcane texts, hoping for new magic and wisdom - and in one of these tomes, she found horror and abomination in the form of the Rite of Living Death.

The ritual promised her immortality, unaging beauty, great power - and the ability to claim anyone she wanted for her lover. All she would have to do was ritually end her mortal life and lie in state for three days. Camille gathered the components she needed and slit her wrists in the family chapel at the right time. Life flowed out of her, death flowed in... and was driven out in turn when undeath replaced it.

But Camille had miscalculated; her body was found, and her grieving relatives laid her not in state, but sealed her remains in an airtight tomb to hide the shame of her suicide and prevent it from influencing the upcoming nuptials. Camille lay dormant, her undead body hibernating until it once again felt the touch of living air. The day came - a good century after the fateful day of her suicide, when the distant descendants of her sister were forced to leave their family home due to debt and the family crypt was being opened so its occupants could be moved to humbler resting-places.

Camille tried to drain the workers who had disturbed her, but the taste of their blood was foul on her tongue, obliging her to kill these men by hand and spell, instead.

After this first battle, Camille investigated what had happened during her dormancy. The sure knowledge that her beloved Amaranth was long dead and beyond her reach drove her nearly to insanity, but she held out a twisted hope; from the workers' paperwork, she learned that Amaranth had descendants. Surely one of them could be trained to replace her beloved sister.

Camille's influence on her family passed down the generations of the Churnstones.

From time to time, she would kidnap promising candidates, drag them to her lair in the family crypt and try to train them to be perfect replicas of her Amaranth. When they failed, either in life or as vampires, she would spitefully murder them.

She would grudgingly allow Churnstone women to marry, but then murdered their husbands as soon as they were pregnant, obliging them to return to their birth family. When these troubled mothers gave birth to daughters, Camille rejoiced. When they gave birth to sons, Camille abducted them and threw them to their death in Lilliend's deep ravines. Always, she haunted her family, fed on them, waited for her perfect lover and "punished" those who failed to please her.

Finally, Camille's depredations had left her with only one living relative: Melusinde Churnstone, a virtuous young woman who managed to find a man brave enough to look past the terrifying stories of ill fortune that had come to haunt the Churnstones and who had fallen in love with her. Camille knew, intellectually, that she should let events play out as they would. Emotionally, she latched onto the child growing in Melusinde's womb. Here was her last chance, or so claimed her black heart.

The day of the birth came, and Melusinde and her husband rejoiced in the birth... of their first son.

Camille's madness, never far beneath the surface, erupted. When it finally abated, she lay in the abattoir she had made of her last living relatives' home, and she realized that she had singlehandedly erased every last trace of Amaranth upon the earth.

The blood turned to mist, and mist turned to Mist, which enveloped Camille. When it faded away, she found herself the Darklady of a new Lilliend - which also contained a whole Churnstone family, as well as Lockstones, Lenkherr and



Weisücher. The insane vampire has never understood what happened, but she did not truly care. She knows instinctively that she is the supreme power of the land, and that she has a chance to find her one true love. As the history of her new land indicates that the Churnstones have intermarried with other great families and even with commoners over the centuries, her pool of potential candidates has simply expanded.

Current Sketch

Camille staves off a descent into full, bestial madness only through her obsession. She is preying on the boarding schools of the domain, looking for girls who are suitable candidates to replace her beloved Amaranth. In the guise of teachers and even students, she sifts through the wide selection of prey, judging girls by appearance, disposition, and behaviour. In the role of tutor or comrade, she can subtly adjust candidates' behaviour to more closely reflect poor, dead Amaranth. Many times now, Camille has believed that she has found a suitable replacement for her lost sister, and has turned the girl into her vampiric companion - only for the resulting slave to disappoint her as its personality changes.

Camille kills all girls who fail to be her perfect beloved in a brutal rage. The spawn she allows to continue existing are never candidates to be her "one true love", but simply the victims of her hunger and tools she keeps against an uncertain future. Most of these, she subjects to the effects of *artificial hibernation*, and stores in the Churnstone Wells, as though they were toys she does not want to play with at the moment. As a result, she does not receive her spawn's loyalty or affection – only the obedience she can enforce through her status as their sire or through intimidation.

Although Camille continues to care for no one but herself and her idealised lover, she maintains a rigid control over the rulers of the land; through her magic, she controls the weather in the domain, and she is blackmailing the Queen and anyone else who knows about her into complying with her wishes by threatening to keep away the rains that give life to the crops, animals, and people. So long as the authorities continue to send young girls out to the schools where Camille lurks and hunts and keep the secret of her existence, she allows the people to survive. If they should ever try to thwart her...

In addition to enforcing the continued function of the boarding schools, Camille uses her power over the Lilliender government to enforce stasis. Social change confuses and angers her; she gleefully champions the supremacy of woman over man, encourages nobles to sabotage efforts to alter or improve the great cities, and stamps on efforts to abolish the serf system that keeps so many people locked in servitude. That the Lockstones once defied her wishes in this regard sparked her undying hatred of the family, which only grew worse when Maximilian Lockstone was chosen to be the head of his house in spite of his gender.

Camille also exerts her control through a program of assassination whose insanity boggles the mind. The Darklady of Lilliend *knows* that men as well as women are needed to maintain the numbers of her prey and conceive new candidates for her "love", but she still wakes up her vampiric spawn and sends them to murder any man whose wife has given birth to a daughter. In her mind, such men have served their sole purpose in life and must not be allowed to influence any girl who might one day become a candidate for her 'affections'. She ignores the fact that most of her vampiric



assassins use the opportunity to gorge on male blood and destroy themselves, just to be free of her.

Combat

Camille does not often fight - not out of fear or pragmatism, but out of indolence; combat brings with it the risk of pain and requires her to spend energy she would rather channel in different directions. So long as she is not assaulted, she prefers to let her spawn or other lackeys handle the bleeding, dying, and killing.

In addition, Camille is physically weak for a vampire, and her combat technique is shoddy, putting her at a disadvantage against armed opponents, as opposed to frightened young girls already half in thrall to her spells and hypnotism. As soon as she takes even the slightest injury, she puts as much distance between herself and her opponents as she can, using *beast shape III*, *gaseous form*, or *teleport* to break away, or else using a combination of *disguise self* and *disguise other* to have her enemies chase a lackey or an innocent victim while she escapes.

If given the opportunity, Camille will happily rake her enemies with evocation or *circle of death* from a (to her) safe distance, delighting in the various options given to her by empowered applications of *shadow evocation*. If enemies flee, she pursues them, confident that she has the upper hand. If enemies manage to survive the first few rounds of combat in spite of her best spells and start to close on her, she flees again - and seeks the opportunity to attack from the shadows later. Given the time, Camille can coerce the authorities of Lilliend to arrest and detain enemies on trumped-up charges. If she wants to take a more personal revenge, she uses *disguise self* or *touch of the doppelganger* in combination with *mimic mortal* to get close to her

enemies in some innocuous form, like a servant at an inn, and laces their food and drink with potions of *beast shape III*, *flesh to stone*, *slow*, or *touch of the doppelganger*.

(Camille carries and especially treasures two magic rings not forged by her own hand; a *ring of Mimic Mortal* more powerful than any she is as yet capable of creating, and a *ring of Ebon Dark* (see New magic items). The *ring of Mimic Mortal* is of optimum level, and allows Camille to walk in full sunlight in addition to the other benefits it grants. It, as well as the *ring of Ebon Dark*, is supposedly a gift from the Darklady of West-Lund, to the far east. In reality, both Darkladies are well-aware that the two rings are payment for Camille passing on information about any refugees from Lund who make their way into Lilliend. Camille has forged her own *rings of Mimic Mortal* over the years, but none are capable of shielding her from the sun and she rarely wears them. More often, she bestows them on her more trusted thralls.)

Lair

Camille has numerous lairs in the domain's boarding schools, but her first and most important is located in the ruins of the Churnstone family home. The Churnstone crypt is a murder hole, full of traps that only she could navigate without setting them off. Here, Camille keeps the bodies of those failed lovers who came closest to her ideal, preserved through *flesh to stone*. Every time Camille visits her home, she views each face and burns every detail of her previous failures into her mind - and vows that the next lover will be the one.

Closing the Borders

If Camille wants to close the borders, a thunderstorm erupts over Lilliend. Driving rains obscure all sight, thunder eclipses all



hearing and the winds drive those who would escape back into the land without their noticing. Camille rarely uses this power, but knows that she need only use it long enough to fool people into returning to her territory; the authorities know full well what the reason for such storms is, and will make quiet arrangements to have these people captured so Camille can pick them up or murder them at her leisure.

Darklord's Curse

Camille is forever seeking a perfect lover, a replacement for her long-lost twin sister in appearance and manner -- but her memory of Amaranth is flawed, grows ever more distorted with the passage of time, and she cannot refresh it. She used to have pictures of her twin sister, but these rotted long ago. Even learning the spell *mimic mortal*, which allows her to see herself in the mirror, is useless due to her tendency to change identities using *touch of the doppelganger*. More than half-mad, Camille is forever seeking a perfect reflection of herself -- a self which she keeps changing to hide from potential enemies and in order to fit in at the schools where she seeks her next 'one true love'.

Author's closing note

In an ideal world, this would not need saying, but it's not an ideal world.

Those familiar with the concept have probably already noticed that Camille was inspired in part by 'Carmilla', the ur-example of the 'lesbian vampire'-trope.

For the record, I want it to be absolutely clear that to me, Camille's sexual orientation has never in any way, shape or form been the root cause of her evil. Camille started out as an extremely selfish narcissist, who became unhinged when her desires were thwarted and made hideous choices. Her madness was only worsened when she found herself forced to take on new identities and change her shape; by the time she realized she had lost track of the 'self' she had once loved above all other things, it was too late.

In some ways, sexuality is irrelevant to Camille's brand of evil. Like Strahd von Zarovich, she is singlemindedly chasing her ideal lover. Unlike Strahd, Camille believes that only a perfect reflection of herself - as she once believed her twin sister to be - is worthy of being that love. Had Camille and Amaranth been born as boys, Camille would have chased men. Had one twin been male and the other female, Camille might not even have fixated on Amaranth, and there would be no Lilliend.



SWEENEY TODD, THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

An adventure in Gothic London

By M. T. Kelly

*Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd
His skin was pale and his eye was odd
He shaved the faces of gentlemen Who
never thereafter were heard of again
He trod a path that few have trod
Did Sweeney Todd
The demon barber of Fleet Street*

*He kept a shop in London Town
Of fancy clients and good renown
And what if none of their souls were saved?
They went to their maker impeccably
shaved
By Sweeney
By Sweeney Todd
The demon barber of Fleet Street*

*Swing your razor wide, Sweeney! Hold it
to the skies!
Freely flows the blood of those who
moralize!*

The keepers of Fogg's Asylum in Bedlam have all heard this dark tune sung by the strange white-haired man in the cell at the end of the hall. The inmates know it just as well. Sometimes they sing it with him.

Depending on the day, the keepers may whistle along or try to shut them up. None ever sing along. They are too chilled by it.

The Tale of Sweeney Todd

Some tales are too terrible to be told in anything but whispers, even in the city that spawned Jack the Ripper, but the details of this story can be found if one can figure out where to look. It is a tale both so scandalous and so horrible as to be too disturbing for even the most perverse London audience of the time period. Shows and published stories based on it have found audience outside of London but none of them know the truth of it. It's moral might be 'Before embarking on a quest for revenge, first, dig two graves' but Sweeney Todd would have had to dig dozens.

In 1831, a corrupt Judge named Turpin of depraved appetites became sexually obsessed with the wife of a Fleet Street barber named Benjamin Barker. When his attempts to lure her into his embrace



proved fruitless, he approached the barber directly, offering to pay him for his wife's favors. He prudently brought along two powerfully built henchmen and the Beadle, Bamford, who was his right hand, in case the barber reacted violently, which he in fact did. Barker warned the Judge to never darken his door again lest he get a shave far too close. The Judge and Beadle weren't the kind to back off, however. It was fairly simple for them to have the barber accused of some relatively minor offense that would get him shipped off to Australia as was the practice. This left his wife, Lucy, alone with their one-year old daughter, Johanna, to provide for. The woman did her best to find honorable work but a woman alone in London was always suspected of being hunting a husband and since only women hired women for anything besides prostitution, they avoided hiring their own competition for men's affections, especially when there was a Beadle and a Judge making sure every prospective employer knew of the scandalous circumstances of her husband.

As her situation grew more and more desperate, The Judge and Beadle finally made their move. The Beadle called on her politely one day, saying that the Judge was feeling contrite about her as he blamed himself for her dreadful plight. She was invited to come to the Judge's house that night to discuss what he might do to alleviate her troubles.

When she arrived that night, however, she found herself in the middle of a depraved masked ball filled with people she didn't know. She wandered through the house asking, "Oh where is Judge Turpin?" to anyone who would speak to her. Finally, she made the mistake of drinking something someone handed her. The Judge and Beadle descended on her in her drugged condition and raped her multiple times

before taking her back in ruined condition to her home and leaving her addled on the street for all of her neighbors to see. She was found by her neighbor, Mrs. Nellie Lovett, who was a piemaker. If her prospects were bleak before, they were destroyed now. Mrs. Lovett tried to counsel her in this but just after breakfast, Judge Turpin's police arrived with a warrant to seize the baby Johanna, as Mrs. Lucy Barker had been declared an unfit parent due to loose morals. The Judge had volunteered himself as the child's guardian in the meantime. If anyone saw Mrs. Lovett steal away with Mr. Barker's old collection of sterling silver straight razors, no one said anything.

Unable to live with the shame of everything that had happened, Lucy Barker ran down the street to the apothecary and used her last pennies to buy some arsenic which she immediately swallowed. Sadly, it wasn't enough to kill her, but it was enough to cause permanent brain damage. Judge Turpin had taken the child to use as leverage over her mother and expected Mrs. Barker to come begging him for her back, offering him whatever he wanted for her. When he learned of Mrs. Barker's attempted suicide, he gave her up for dead. Since his adoption of the baby was a matter of public record, he had to keep her for a while, lest there be a scandal. Against his own expectations, he actually took to the child, and became an adequate parent to her. Everyone who knew what had happened considered this a strange stroke of luck for the child. Members of the local church took in the poisoned Lucy Barker, but were unable to do anything for her. Between the trauma, the shame, and the poison, all she could do was lie in bed. They tried to get her put into a hospital, but the courts had her committed to Bedlam, instead. As was also common practice in those days, when



she proved otherwise incurable and space needed in the asylum, she was simply put out onto the street. Mrs. Barker became one of the lost people of London, living off whatever she could she could scrounge from the garbage, beg from passersby, or earn by prostitution. It didn't help that she couldn't even remember her own name.

In 1846, a young sailor, Anthony Hope, was standing watch on the good ship Bountiful when he spotted a poor castaway pitching and tossing on a raft and, being a good Christian, gave the alarm. The Bountiful pulled the castaway aboard with young Anthony taking the lead. When the castaway was finally able to speak and asked to identify himself, he gave his name as Sweeney Todd.

When the ship docked in London a few weeks later, Anthony and Mr. Todd disembarked together as friends. Anthony was very pleased to be back in the great city of London, but Todd was noticeably melancholy. The first thing that happened to them was that a crazed Beggar Woman sexually solicited them, appearing to recognize Todd for a moment before Todd shooed her away. For some reason, this induced Todd to relate some of his troubled past to Anthony. Without naming names, he revealed that he had been a naive barber, banished by a crooked judge who lusted after Todd's wife.

Leaving Anthony, Todd made his way to Fleet Street where he entered a meat pie shop, the owner of which, the slatternly widow, Mrs. Lovett, fussed over him like a mother hen, while lamenting the scarcity of meat and customers. When Todd asked after her empty upstairs apartment, she revealed that its former tenant, Benjamin Barker, was transported on false charges by Judge Turpin, who, along with his servant, Beadle Bamford, then lured Barker's wife Lucy to the Judge's home and raped her.

Todd's reaction to this story revealed to her that he himself was Benjamin Barker. Promising to keep his secret, Lovett explained that Lucy poisoned herself and that their then-infant daughter, Johanna, had become a ward of the Judge. Todd swore revenge on the Judge and Beadle, and Mrs. Lovett presented Todd with his old collection of sterling silver straight razors, which persuaded Todd to take up his old profession.

Elsewhere, Anthony spied a beautiful girl singing at her window, and immediately became enamored with her. The same Beggar Woman from the dock came upon him and begged him for more coin. In return for his kindness, the woman answered his questions. She told him that the house belonged to Judge Turpin and the girl's name was Johanna. She also warned him to stay away if he knew what was good for him, lest he incur the Judge's wrath. He was beyond her warnings, however, and bought a songbird in a cage from a passing street vendor, approaching the girl to present it to her. She seemed as taken with him as was he with her. Sadly, their moment was interrupted by the Judge's bellowing. When Anthony tried to reason with him, the Judge ordered the Beadle to 'dispose of him'. When the young sailor tried to reason with the Beadle, the Beadle pulled the songbird from the cage that Anthony was still holding and broke its neck. Getting the message, and still unaware that Johanna was his friend Todd's daughter, Anthony pledged to return for Johanna, no matter how many times the Judge and Beadle chased him away.

Meanwhile, in the crowded London marketplace, Todd and Lovett came across flamboyant Italian barber, Adolfo Pirelli, and his simple-minded young assistant, Tobias Ragg, pitching a dramatic cure-all for hair loss. Todd exposed the elixir as a sham,



challenged Pirelli to a shaving competition, and easily won. He then invited the impressed Beadle Bamford to his shop for a free shave whenever he should choose.

At the same time, Judge Turpin struggled with his growing lust for the rapidly maturing Johanna. He tried to beat it down by flagellating himself into a frenzy but succeeded only in further exciting himself. He instead resolved to marry her himself, no matter what her feelings on the matter may be.

Meanwhile, Todd awaited the Beadle's arrival with mounting impatience, despite Mrs. Lovett's attempts to soothe him. When Anthony arrived and told Todd of his plan to ask Johanna to elope with him, Todd, eager to reunite with his daughter, agreed to let them use his barbershop as a safehouse. As Anthony left, Pirelli and Tobias entered. Mrs. Lovett took Toby downstairs for a pie, leaving the two men alone to talk business. Alone with Todd, Pirelli dropped his Italian accent and persona and revealed that he was Daniel O'Higgins, Benjamin Barker's former assistant, and knew Todd's true identity. When O'Higgins attempted to blackmail his former employer, however, Todd injured and hid him, later slitting his throat. Meanwhile, as Johanna and Anthony planned their elopement, the Beadle recommended Todd's services to the Judge, so that he could better win Johanna's affections.

Panicked at first on learning of Pirelli's murder, Mrs. Lovett swiped his leftover coin purse and asked Todd how he planned to dispose of the body. When the Judge suddenly entered, she made a quick exit and Todd quickly sat him for a shave, lulling him with a relaxing conversation about pretty women. Before Todd could kill the Judge, however, Anthony re-entered and blurted out his elopement plan to Todd, accidentally informing the Judge, who

immediately flew into a rage, swore to have Johanna locked away, stormed out, and vowed never to return. Todd drove Anthony away in a fit of fury and resolved to Mrs. Lovett that he would murder all his future customers, since all people deserve to die: the rich to be punished for their corruption, and the poor to be relieved of their misery. When Mrs. Lovett slyly suggested that they use the flesh of Todd's victims in her meat pies, Todd joyously agreed.

Several weeks later, Mrs. Lovett's pie shop had become a thriving business, and Toby was now working there as a waiter. She had even acquired a slightly singed harmonium from a burned-out chapel. Todd and Mrs. Lovett also acquired a specially-designed mechanical barber's chair that allowed Todd to kill his clients and drop their bodies directly through a chute into the pie shop's basement bakehouse. Todd was not so frenzied as to kill anyone who walked through his door, however. Some he would shave once or twice and let go before killing them, the better to build his reputation. He would also never kill in front of witnesses, so when a customer brought in family members to wait while he was shaved, Todd would never be able to bring himself to harm them. These customers would become a loyal customer base that would return again and again. This was especially true of those who brought in their children, for whom Todd would keep lollypops to give them. This didn't keep him from finding at least one or two to kill a day. As he casually slit his customers' necks, Todd despaired of ever seeing his daughter again. The only person who could see what Todd and Mrs. Lovett were doing was the old Beggar Woman who tried valiantly to warn all the passersby but couldn't make herself understood.

Meanwhile Anthony prowled the streets of London, looking for the place where



Johanna was imprisoned. When he finally discovered her locked away in a madhouse by the Judge, he raced back to Todd's shop and begged Todd for help to free Johanna. Revitalized, Todd devised a plan to rescue her by having Anthony pose as a wigmaker intent on purchasing inmates' hair. After Todd taught Anthony everything he knew about wig-making and sent him off, he sent a secret letter to notify the Judge of Anthony's plot, hoping to lure the Judge back to his shop.

Meanwhile, in the pie shop, Toby told Mrs. Lovett of his uneasiness with Todd and his own desire to protect her. When he recognized Pirelli's coin purse in Mrs. Lovett's hands, she distracted him by showing him the bakehouse, instructing him how to work the meat grinder and the oven, before locking him in and going to find Todd. Upstairs, though, she encountered the Beadle at her harmonium. He had been asked by Lovett's neighbors to investigate the strange smoke and stench from the pie shop's chimney. Mrs. Lovett stalled the Beadle with "Parlor Songs" until Todd returned to offer the Beadle his promised "free shave". Mrs. Lovett then loudly played her harmonium to cover the Beadle's screams from above as Todd dispatched him. In the basement, Toby discovered human remains in a pie, just as the Beadle's fresh corpse came tumbling through the chute. Maddened and traumatized, he descended into the sewers of London to hide while Mrs. Lovett informed Todd that Toby had discovered their secret, and they resolved to kill him.

Elsewhere, Anthony arrived at the asylum to rescue Johanna, but could not bring himself to shoot Jonas Fogg, the asylum owner. Johanna grabbed Anthony's pistol and murdered Fogg herself, freeing the whole of the asylum by this action. The freed inmates poured out into the streets,

prophesying the end of the world, while Todd and Mrs. Lovett hunted for Toby in their basement, and Anthony and Johanna fled for their lives. The two (with Johanna now disguised as a sailor) arrived to find Todd's shop empty. Anthony left to seek a coach after he and Johanna reaffirmed their love. Left alone, Johanna heard the Beggar Woman outside calling for the Beadle and hid in the barbershop. The Beggar Woman entered and seemed to recognize the room. She sang a lullaby to an imaginary baby as Johanna quietly looked on until the enraged Todd burst in and demanded she explain herself. The madwoman tried to tell him about the evil woman downstairs and seemed to recognize him again, but the frantic Todd, hearing the judge approaching, lethally cut her and sent her down the chute just a moment before the Judge burst in. Todd assured the Judge that Johanna was repentant, and the Judge asked for a quick splash of cologne. Once he had the Judge in his chair, Todd soothed him with another conversation on women, but this time he alluded to their "fellow tastes, in women at least". The Judge recognized him as "Benjamin Barker!" just before Todd slashed his throat and sent him hurtling down the chute. The disguised Johanna finally rose, horrified, from her hiding place, surprising the man she didn't know was her father. Todd moved to kill her too, but before he could, Mrs. Lovett shrieked from the bakehouse below, providing a distraction for Johanna to escape. Downstairs, Mrs. Lovett was struggling with the dying Judge, who clawed at her. She then attempted to drag the Beggar Woman's body into the oven, but Todd arrived and looked at the madwoman's lifeless face clearly for the first time: the Beggar Woman was his wife Lucy. Todd was shocked and accused Lovett of lying to him. Lovett frantically explained



that indeed, Lucy did poison herself - but she lived, though the attempt left her insane. Lovett confessed that she loved Todd and always had. Todd then feigned forgiveness, dancing manically with Lovett until he pushed her into the raging fires of the oven, burning her alive. Full of despair, Todd embraced the dead Lucy. Toby, now quite mad and white-haired from shock, crawled up from the sewer babbling nursery rhymes to himself and, picking up Todd's fallen razor, cut Todd's throat. At that same moment, Anthony, Johanna, and some constables broke into the bakehouse just in time to see Todd fall dead and Toby drop the razor, heedless of the others, while absentmindedly turning the meat grinder.

The Investigation

With the Judge dead, there was no greater authority to order an investigation shut down. The above story was verified according to the testimony of Anthony Hope, Johanna Barker, Tobias Ragg, various older residents of Fleet Street, verified court records, and papers found in Judge Turpin's house. Anthony Hope, Johanna Barker, and Tobias Ragg were all found not guilty of any crimes committed due to the circumstances under which they were living at the time. This happened largely thanks to a lawyer who had been a political rival of Judge Turpin for some years and had taken up their cases pro bono.

The Survivors

Once the investigation was finally over, Johanna and Anthony lost little time leaving the city. They had seen more of London than they wished to. The one stop they did make was at Judge Turpin's house to gather her few belongings, free her pet songbirds, and smash their cages in the house's fireplace. They caught the first coach to

Plymouth and never looked back. They didn't even stop to get married before they reached Plymouth. Tobias Ragg was only barely able to tell his story on the stand and would constantly drift back into nursery rhymes. Only the patience and clever questions of the attorney drew out all the terrible things he'd seen in the bakehouse. By the end of the trial, the entire court was in agreement that the asylums at Bedlam were the best place for him. Those asylums became much more livable after the corruption was exposed by the investigation and certain ladies groups got involved in improving conditions there.

London and Sweeney

Todd

The difference between this and other penny dreadful stories is that this one is both true and far reaching. Mrs. Lovett served her meat pies to dozens, possibly hundreds, of people and Sweeney Todd's victims also numbered in the dozens. Each of these people had family and/or neighbors, which brought this particular horror home for a great number of Londoners. The London press told this story but didn't harp on it the way they would become famous for doing with the Jack the Ripper case a generation later. Whenever this tale rears its ugly head, it tends to raise a lot of low feelings in London. As such, Londoners who know the tale can be very unwilling to discuss it.

Forbidden Lore

Sweeney Todd/Benjamin Barker, Mrs. Nellie Lovett, Judge Turpin, and Mrs. Lucy Barker have all become haunts. They are unusual in that they are bound not just to the place where they died but to certain objects that were important to them in life



and they can all cast *geas*. The Red Death has doomed them to reenact their terrible tale while possessing other people, perhaps innocent, perhaps not, and forcing or drawing in other people, again perhaps innocent, perhaps not, to play the other roles. The haunts are also bound together, so when one gains a host, passersby are drawn to the other haunts until those haunts have possessed hosts and the cycle can be repeated. Things can get very complicated if those hosting the haunts or under their *geas* have family. The only ones that might be able to break the curse are Anthony and Johanna Hope or possibly their descendants. Since 1846, this terrible cycle has been repeated twice, once in 1863, and once again in 1886.

1849

The building on Fleet Street which housed the pie shop and barber shop were fairly universally shunned during the years after all the deaths there until, in 1849, a gang of thieves and murderers broke into the pie shop to avoid the police. They found their way down to the bakehouse and were set upon and possessed by the four haunts. The thieves had just robbed a house and murdered the owner by mistake. The entire police force was out hunting them, when each of the four haunts and hosts were surrounded by the police in their current locations. Each of them committed 'suicide' binding the haunts to their current locations. (see below)

The Cycle

Once all four of the haunts have hosts, the cycle begins. The four haunts remember only up to the murder of Signor Pirelli, the Judge commanding Johanna to marry him, and the Beadle recommending Todd's services to the Judge. People of a character

similar to that of Anthony Hope, Johanna Barker, Beadle Bamford, and Tobias Ragg are found by the haunts (see below) and are forced by *geas* into playing the roles of the three survivors and the Beadle. The ensemble then relives the terrible ordeal all over again, claiming any number of victims along the way. It can take months as did the original time. 1863 was the first time the cycle was completed entirely. Only if all four hosts of the haunts are killed is the cycle stopped, if only for a week, when the four haunts rise again back where they were. Somehow, the objects all find their way back, too. (This is what happened in 1849.) If one of the haunts completes its task, the cycle completes and all the hosts and those under *geas* are released, while the haunts rise again a week later. (This is what happened in 1863 and 1886.)

The Haunts

With the exception of Lucy Barker's haunt, any person who enters one of the haunts' fixed domains is immediately attacked by the haunt. The haunt will attack the person until the haunt is destroyed, the person escapes or is possessed, or the haunt forces or tricks the person into grabbing one of the objects to which it is bound. Once the person has one of them in their hand, the haunt is in complete possession of the host. If the potential host is someone as good and pure as Anthony Hope, Johanna, or Lucy Barker, has no hands, or is the wrong gender, they're attacked until they're driven away, feeding the reputation that the place is haunted. If any of the haunts' hosts are killed by circumstances outside the cycle, the haunt which has lost its host is still bound to the objects and possesses the first person who touches the object and, if they aren't an



acceptable host, forces them to take the object to the nearest person who is.

Sweeney Todd/Benjamin Barker

The Demon Barber of Fleet Street is now bound to his barber shop and his fancy razors. When the police cornered the haunt's first host in Sweeney Todd's barber shop in 1849, the haunt used Todd's fancy razor to slit its host's throat, binding itself to both the shop and the razors, and rising again there a week later. There is still a large blood stain on the floor from that night. When Todd gains a host, he will then shout out, 'AT LAST! MY RIGHT ARM IS COMPLETE AGAIN!' Meanwhile, Tobias Ragg, still in Jonas Fogg's Asylum in Bedlam, sings the first verse of the song that he's known for. He doesn't need this to happen for him to sing it, but when this happens and triggers it, no keeper can shut him up no matter what they do. He'll spit it out through bloody teeth if he has to. This only happens when Todd gains a host. If the others find hosts first, Tobias won't know anything about it.

Once Todd has a host again, he will launch himself back into his work. His task is to kill the Judge and Beadle to avenge his wife and to reunite with his daughter, or in this case to kill the hosts of the Judge and Beadle and find whatever girl is under *geas* to play the role of Johanna. If it succeeds in doing this, it will dissipate and release its host, rising again as a haunt a week later.

His first move will be to go out onto the streets with his razors, suds cup, and brush, and give free shaves to any man who will have them. Regardless of the age of the host or the state of their hands, they will be able to shave a cheek with all the dexterity of Sweeney Todd. Todd will walk the streets until he finds a man enough like Anthony Hope that Todd can cast his *geas* upon him

and that person will relive Todd's memories of Anthony Hope throughout the cycle.

Todd will try to restart his business on Fleet Street under the name of his host, but if customers are too afraid to come there, he will set up in another location until he has a customer base loyal enough to follow him there. Todd is nothing if not patient, as he was in life, though his patience can be easily tried.

If Todd, in his host, sees the host containing the Judge on the street, he will recognize the Judge but the Judge will not recognize him, and only if the Judge is extremely isolated, which almost never happens in London, will Todd try to make his move. If he sees the host containing Mrs. Lovett on the street, the two will immediately recognize each other and begin to discuss quietly how they will 'get rid of' Signor Pirelli and agree to meet later on Fleet Street. If he sees the host containing Lucy Barker on the street, he will recognize her only as the old Beggar Woman and if she begs him for money or propositions him for sex, he will drive her away with harsh words.

Mrs. Nellie Lovett

Mrs. Lovett's haunt is now bound to her pie shop and her kitchen utensils. When the police cornered the haunt's first host in her pie shop in 1849, The haunt used Mrs. Lovett's meat ax to slit its host's throat while it was also holding her rolling pin, binding itself to both the shop and the utensils, rising again there a week later.

Once Mrs. Lovett has a host again, she will launch herself back into her work. Her task is to rebuild her pie business under the name of her new host and gain the affections of Sweeney Todd/Benjamin Barker, or this case the person playing host to his haunt. If it succeeds in doing this, it



will dissipate and release its host, rising again as a haunt a week later.

Her first move will be to make pies as best she can. After the cycle, only the corpses are ever removed from the shop and bakehouse. Everyone's afraid to touch anything else, so there are old ingredients still where the original Mrs. Lovett stored them. Though, as all corpses were removed, there's no meat to put in them except perhaps the leftover meat in the forgotten pies on the table, which no insect or rodent will go near, nor mold grow on. She is not above doing this, of course, and once she has her first batch finished, she goes out onto the street to sell them. Given the ingredients, it shouldn't surprise anyone that these are the worst pies in London. Anyone who bites into one and doesn't immediately spit it out must make a save vs. poison or suffer extreme stomach cramps. Once Mrs. Lovett is driven back penniless from the streets, she will fall back into the state she was in before Barker/Todd came back from Australia, trying to sell her pies with so little in them to anyone foolish enough to try them, hoping to gather enough money to get better ingredients. She will do this until she and Todd find each other again, at which time they will launch themselves into the same cannibalistic scheme they were both so famous for. Once this has begun, Mrs. Lovett will go out onto the streets to find a young man similar to Tobias Ragg upon whom she will cast her *geas*. Once the two of them return to the pie shop, Todd has usually claimed his first victim, and Mrs. Lovett sets Toby to cleaning up the shop while she goes down into the bakehouse to begin butchering the 'meat' and making pies. Before long, she's serving the best pies in London, or so the customers will say.

If Mrs. Lovett, in her host, sees the host containing Todd on the street, the two will

immediately recognize each other and begin to discuss quietly how they will 'get rid of' Signor Pirelli and agree to meet later on Fleet Street. If she sees the host containing the Judge on the street, she will curtsy to him and do her best to get away from his company. If she sees the host containing Lucy Barker on the street, she will recognize her only as the old Beggar Woman and if she begs Mrs. Lovett for money, she will drive her away with harsh words.

Judge Turpin

Judge Turpin's haunt is now bound to his office and library in his house on Kearney Lane and to his fancy cane. When the police cornered the haunt's first host there in 1849, the haunt used the cane to defend itself until one of the police shattered the host's skull with his nightstick, causing the host to be bound to both the office and cane, rising again there a week later.

Once the Judge has a host again, his first thought will be of Johanna. He'll be consumed with desire for her, in spite of his consultation of his bible and his attempt to whip the lust out of himself with his own belt. Once his frenzy has passed, he'll resolve to marry Johanna 'for her own good' and finally launch himself back into his work. His task is to find Johanna, or in this case the girl who is under her *geas*, force her to marry him, and if she refuses, have her committed to the Fogg asylum until she agrees. If it succeeds in doing this, it will dissipate and release its host, rising again as a haunt a week later.

His first move will be to check Johanna's room in the house. If there is a girl already under the *geas*, she may well be there. If there is not or she hasn't found her way there yet, the Judge will go out onto the streets with his cane. He will walk the streets until he finds the girl currently under the Johanna *geas*, or until he finds a man



enough like Beadle Bamford (usually a cop) that the Judge can cast his *geas* upon him, from that point onward, that person will relive The Judge's memories of Beadle Bamford throughout the cycle. If the Judge finds a Beadle Bamford replacement before he finds Johanna, he will order the Beadle to search for her, while he returns to the house on Kearney Lane. Once he's there, he'll begin reading his collection of Victorian erotica.

If he meets any of the other haunts in hosts on the street, he will recognize none of them.

If he sees any of the people under *geas*, he will only recognize Johanna, whom he will scold and order home causing her to scurry there.

Mrs. Lucy Barker

Mrs. Lucy Barker's haunt is now bound to a shadowy street corner that beggars are known to frequent, and to her shawl which she used to cover her head. When the police cornered the haunt's first host there in 1859, the haunt tried to flee, and the shawl caught on a passing carriage, breaking its host's neck and binding the haunt to both the corner and the shawl, where it rose again a week later. One of the police threw the shawl away when they took away the body and it's lain beneath a tree ever since. Somehow, it always finds its way back. When any woman who is as pure and virtuous as Lucy or Johanna Barker gets too close to it, they are immediately attacked by Mrs. Lucy Barker's haunt. The haunt will attack the person until the haunt is destroyed, the person escapes or is possessed, or the haunt forces or tricks the person into grabbing the shawl. Once the host has it in her hand, Mrs. Lucy Barker is in complete possession of the host. She will then cry out, 'ALMS, ALMS FOR A MISERABLE WOMAN.' If the potential host is

a woman who is not as good and pure as Lucy or Johanna Barker (or perhaps has no hands) or is a man, it is attacked until driven away, feeding the reputation that the place is haunted.

There's another object beneath the tree. It's a reticule Lucy Barker originally owned and gave to her daughter Johanna when she was a baby. Johanna kept it her whole life as her only memento of her mother until that terrible night on Fleet Street when both of her parents died. When she accidentally dropped it in that basement abattoir and didn't notice until later, both she and Anthony were both too horrified to return there to look for it. So, it lay there until 1849, when the haunts of Benjamin and Lucy Barker and Judge Turpin all gained hosts and grabbed it at the same time. The reticule now carries a *geas* of all three of their memories of Johanna.

Once Lucy Barker has a host again, the first thing she will do is go out looking for a girl like Johanna. She will solicit anyone she meets with her cry of 'Alms, alms for a miserable woman'. Once she finds a girl who is exceptionally kind to her, she will give the reticule to the girl, immediately placing her under the *geas*. The first thing the girl will do is realize that she is *not* in the Judge's House and quickly start home. Once this happens, the old Beggar Woman loses her focus. She is the most incoherent of all the haunts. None of them remember every part of what happened in 1846, but Lucy Barker still can't even remember her name. The poor woman's brain damage has followed her even into death. The haunt will still only remember certain people and places. She will remember Judge Turpin, Beadle Bamford, Johanna, and Mrs. Lovett, the Judge's house and the pie shop, but she won't remember what her own relationship is to any of them. She never knew Tobias Ragg so she'll never recognize him. When



she sees Sweeney Todd, she remembers... something, but can't quite think of what it is. If she enters Todd's barber shop, she will flashback to her life as a young mother and even sing lullabies to the empty crib. If Benjamin and Lucy Barker were ever going to recognize each other, they would probably do it there. If someone besides Mrs. Lovett, either inside the cycle or outside it, were to figure out who the both of them are, and were to attempt to inform them both, the best place to do it would definitely be the barber shop, though Mrs. Lovett, if she knew, would do her best to prevent it. Lucy Barker will only remember her purpose as a haunt once Todd and Mrs. Lovett have begun their murder/meat pie business again, at which time, her purpose will become to expose the terrible things happening on Fleet Street. If the haunt succeeds in doing this, it will dissipate and release its host, rising again as a haunt a week later. Unfortunately for the host, the haunt will also sexually solicit every single man she meets, which, depending on the host and the men in question, may mean that some of them say yes. Luckily, the shawl doesn't smell too good and tends to drive away prospective customers, but the behavior can mark the host as a loose woman for the rest of her life, assuming she survives.

Fleet Street

In Fleet Street stands an empty two-story building which no Londoner will go near, believing it haunted. Many don't know how true that is. On the lower level is an abandoned pie shop in which may be seen a slightly singed harmonium, just inside the door, and a long table surrounded by benches, which has the remains of half-eaten meat pies and mugs with various volumes of forgotten ale in them. Strangely,

all this decaying food attracts neither insect nor rodent and grows no mold. At the far end of the shop stands a counter with various mixing bowls, plates, more decaying pies, a petrified lump of dough, a rolling pin, and a meat ax. In the deepest corner is a metal door to the basement where Mrs. Lovett had her bakehouse. Down the steps is an unlit stone basement with a huge oven big enough for a fully-grown person to stand in, which is connected to a chimney. There's also a second set of steps that lead down to large lift-able grates that open into the London sewers, and a large table for butchery upon which sits an enormous meat grinder. On the upper level of the building is an abandoned barber shop in which may be found a lavabo, a fancy chair, a mug for suds, a leather strop, an apron, a towel, a pail, and a mop. If one were to thoroughly search the room, a crib with a framed picture of a woman and a baby in it would also be found, as would a leather case, within which may be found a set of straight razors with chased silver handles and blood crusted blades. There's also a large blood stain on the floor.

Kearney's Lane

In this quiet residential street stands another shunned place related to the one on Fleet Street. A fairly large two-story house stands abandoned and avoided by all who know of it. If explored, the first level has a sitting room, a man's bedroom with a closet full of suits and judicial robes, a kitchen with no food (but fully stocked with cooking equipment), a bathroom, a dining room, and a library with a collection of books fairly evenly divided between law books and Victorian erotica. All the rooms are furnished. The second level contains a girl's bedroom and bathroom and a few storage rooms. Perhaps the most peculiar thing one might find on closer inspection



are several large birdcages smashed and thrown into the fireplace.

Johanna and Anthony Hope

Now in their late 50s and early 60s, respectively, Johanna and Anthony have led a fairly happy life together since 1846. They still have nightmares about the Asylum and what they learned afterwards, but they're there for each other every night to comfort one another. They've even gone back a few times to pray over the graves of Benjamin and Lucy Barker, which Johanna ironically used her inheritance from the Judge to pay for. They've never told their children or grandchildren about what happened. The two both agreed that it was more than they needed to know. They want more than anything to put the horrors of London behind them. They've done their best to discourage both their children and grandchildren from going to London and have been mostly successful, but children are always curious about the forbidden. Their schoolmates and neighbors often hear stories of opportunities in London for both employment and marriage and are torn between their own ambitions and the fearful stories their parents/grandparents tell them. Johanna and Anthony are on in years but still spry enough to travel and if any of their children or grandchildren were to find themselves in trouble in London, Johanna and Anthony would be very capable and willing, even desperate, to race to their rescue.

Those under *geas*

While the haunts will choose the first person who reminds them of their friends/servants for their *geasan*, people who knew the hosts prior to the *geas* may notice changes in their behavior. It depends on what relationships they maintain from their original lives. If people under *geas* are

killed by circumstances outside the cycle, the corresponding haunt immediately knows and goes out to find another person to put the *geas* on as the cycle continues.

Beadle Bamford

Those under the Judge's *geas* believe themselves to be Beadle Bamford, who did and does the main job of carrying out the Judge's orders. He is quite easily flattered, but can also be quite cruel. He'll take sick pleasure in giving a beating or in seeing the Judge rape a woman. He definitely shares his master's depraved appetites. He is also pompous in his position and deeply loyal to the Judge.

Johanna

The girl under the old Beggar Woman's *geas* will believe herself to be Turpin's ward, Johanna. She is a spritely girl, full of innocence, constantly yearning for freedom. She fears and dreads the one she believes to be Judge Turpin, but loves Anthony deeply.

Anthony Hope

The man or boy under Todd's *geas* will believe himself to be Anthony Hope, the sailor who rescued Todd/Barker at sea and became his friend. He will trust the man he believes to be Todd implicitly and will love the girl he believes to be Johanna deeply. He will go so far as to lay down his life for them and fearlessly, but is a gentle soul, and will balk at killing someone else.

Tobias Ragg

The one under Mrs. Lovett's *geas* will believe himself to be her employee, Tobias (Toby) Ragg. He will have a childlike air about him regardless of age. He will believe that Mrs. Lovett's host rescued him from the cruel Barber, Adolfo Pirelli, and sees her as his surrogate mother. He has similar



feelings initially for Todd, but has no idea what the two are up to. As he slowly finds out, he'll try to blame it all on Todd and act to get Mrs. Lovett away from him, at which time she will take advantage of his innocence to keep him occupied until she can get Todd to do away with him

The Song

If PCs can cultivate a relationship with people or even inmates at Fogg's asylum, they may gain access to these particular clues. Different verses are sung at different points in the cycle.

This verse is sung after Sweeney Todd's host claims its first victim:

*His hands were quick, his fingers strong
It stung a little but not for long
And those who thought him a simple clod
Were soon reconsidering under the sod
Consigned there with a friendly prod
From Sweeney Todd
The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*

*See your razor gleam, Sweeney. Feel
how well it fits
As it floats across the throats of hypocrites*

This one is sung after Todd and Mrs. Lovett begin putting Todd's victims in pies:

*His voice was soft, his manner mild.
He seldom laughed but he often smiled.
He'd seen how civilized men behaved.
He never forgot, and he never forgave.
Not Sweeney...
Not Sweeney Todd...
The Demon barber of Fleet Street*

*Lift your razor high! Sweeney! Hear it
singing! Yes!
Stick it in the rosy skin of righteousness!*

The following is sung after Todd kills the 'Beadle':

*The engine roared, the motor hissed,
And who could see how the road would
twist?
In Sweeney's ledger the entries matched:
A beadle arrived, and a beadle dispatched
To satisfy the hungry god
of Sweeney Todd,
The Demon Barber of Fleet. ..Street.*



The rest of the verses are sung if Sweeney Todd's host is killed or the cycle completes and Todd's host is released:

*His needs are few, his room is bare:
He hardly uses his fancy chair
The more he bleeds, the more he lives
He never forgets, and he never forgives
Perhaps today you gave a nod
To Sweeney Todd
The demon barber of Fleet Street*

*Sweeney wishes the world away
Sweeney's weeping for yesterday
Hugging the blade, waiting the years
Hearing the music that nobody hears
Sweeney waits in the parlor hall
Sweeney leans of the offices wall
No one can help, nothing can hide you--
Isn't that Sweeney there beside you?*

*Sweeney wishes the world away
Sweeney's weeping for yesterday
Is Sweeney! There he is, it's Sweeney!
Sweeney! Sweeney! There! There! There!
There! There! There! There! There!*

*Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd!
He served a dark and a hungry god!
To seek revenge may lead to hell
But everyone does it, though seldom as
well
As Sweeney
As Sweeney Todd
The Demon Barber of Fleet . . . Street!*

Author's Note:

Inspired by the famous musical. This adventure can be very complex for a GM with all the NPCs to keep track of, but a theatrical GM might also use all of the other Sondheim songs if they so choose. It all depends on how ambitious the GM is. To those who try, Break a leg.



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